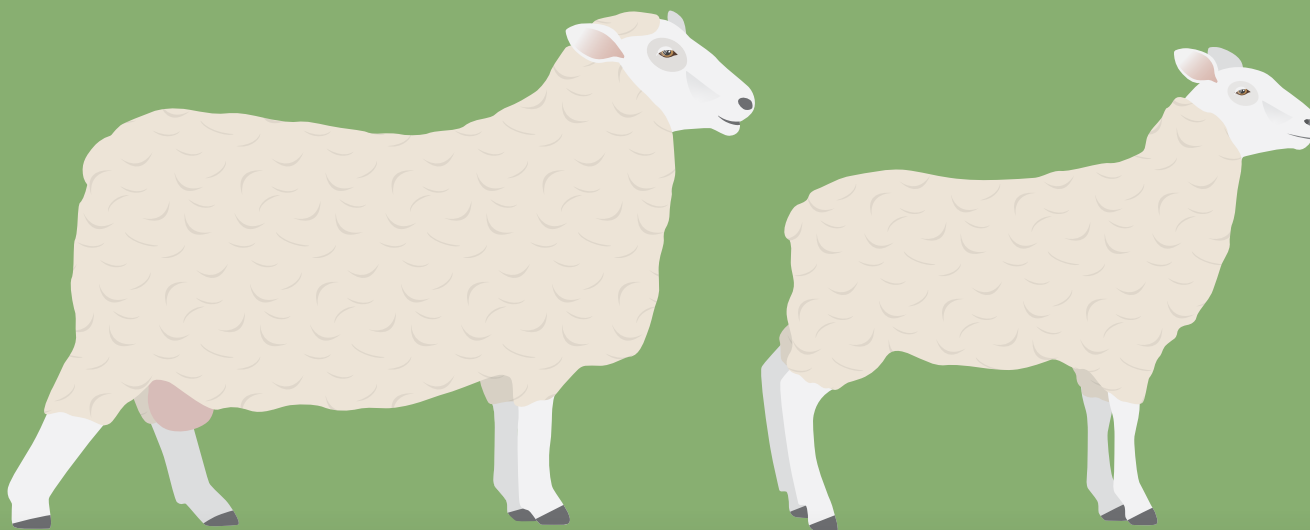




FACTSHEET

Facial eczema – breeding matters

Key messages

- Facial eczema (FE) tolerance can be bred into your flock or herd. You can buy rams and bulls that improve tolerance.
- Breeding for FE tolerance provides long term protection and gains add up every year.
- FE-tolerant animals still need management, but they handle FE seasons better than those that are not tolerant.
- Currently using proven testing such as RamGuard™ for sheep and trusted breeding companies for cattle is the most effective tool for ensuring tolerance.
- Choosing the right breeder is one of the most important decisions you make.

Why breeding for FE tolerance matters

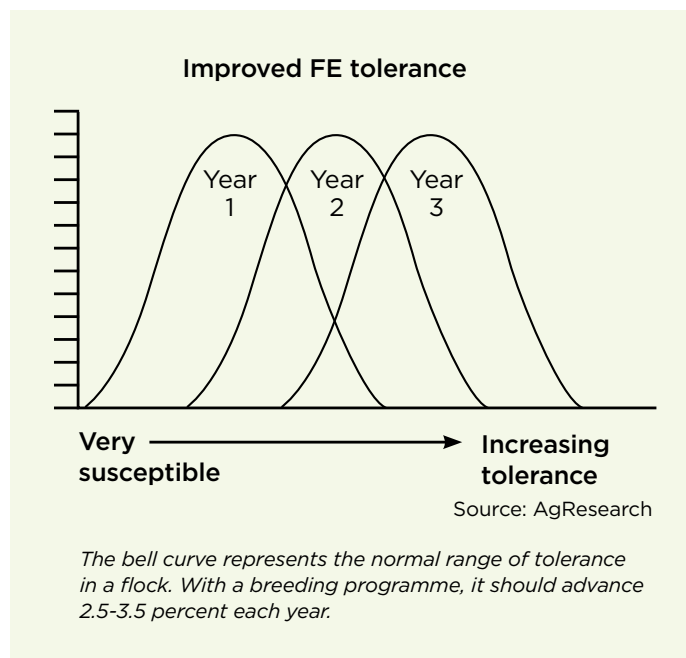
- A long-term strategy.
- Breeding for FE tolerance is the only prevention tool that improves every generation.
- Tolerance in your flock or herd stays there, unless non-tolerant animals are introduced. Having FE tolerance in your flock or herd reduces pressure on pasture management, zinc use and annual prevention measures.

No trade-offs with production

Research indicates FE tolerance can be improved while maintaining strong performance for growth, fertility, fecundity and productivity when balanced breeding objectives are used.

Fast progress

- FE tolerance is about 40% heritable, meaning selection of tested sires can achieve rapid genetic gain.
- This makes breeding a powerful lever for change. Focused selection delivers steady gains.

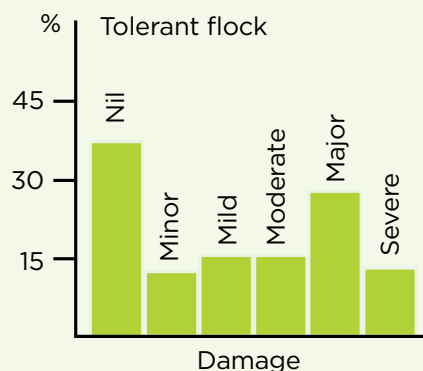
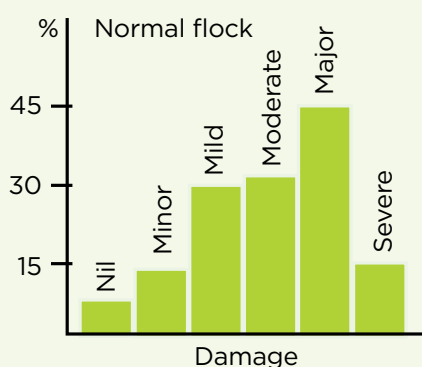




Performance during an FE challenge

- Tolerant animals typically grow better, maintain condition, fertility and fecundity, and cope with sporidesmin without major setbacks.
- Even tolerant animals may show mild FE signs in tough seasons. But recovery is quicker and stock losses are lower.
- The level of protection depends on:
 - how much FE testing has been done.
 - how long breeders have focused on it as a breeding goal.
 - how long the commercial farmer has had FE tolerant genetics in their flock.

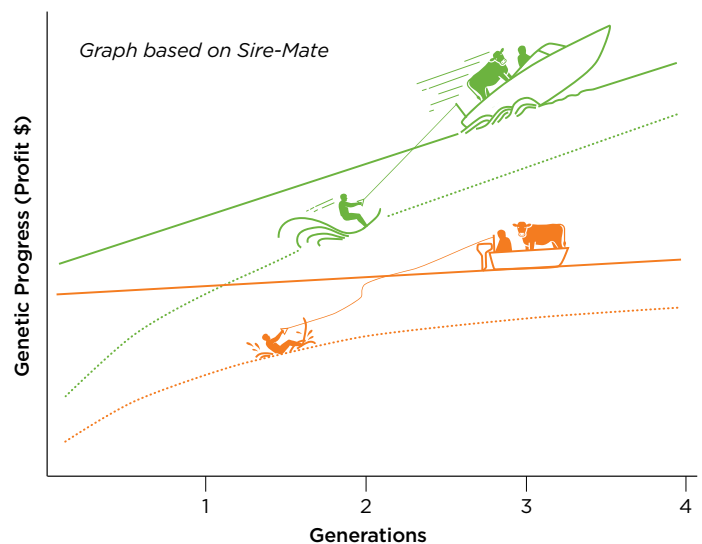
Two flocks under challenge



Buying animals with FE tolerance

- Choose breeders or breeding companies who actively test.
 - Active FE selection requires controlled sporidesmin dosing and genetic analysis.
- Natural exposure during outbreaks is not reliable because FE challenge varies from year to year.
- Avoid backsliding in your genetic gains – you can start to lose tolerance by buying untested rams.

The most important decision isn't which ram you buy – it's whose driveway you drive up. Choose a breeder whose breeding goals match yours.



Sheep

A history of innovation

- FE tolerance in sheep has progressed further than any other livestock species in NZ.
- Early work started after severe FE outbreaks in the 1970s in South Auckland.
- Ruakura scientists (Neale Towers, Chris Morris) and Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry farm advisor Colin Southey worked with breeders such as the ARDG (formerly Auckland Romney Development Group) to begin testing for FE tolerance in the 1980s.
- This work was the foundation for today's RamGuard™ programme.

Breeding for FE tolerance

- Actively breeding for FE tolerance in sheep requires RamGuard™ – a Bioeconomy Science Institute service.
- RamGuard™ uses carefully controlled sporidesmin doses to measure how well rams tolerate the toxin. This is the gold standard method for breeding sheep with genetic FE tolerance.

Why RamGuard™ matters

- Gold standard for assessing FE tolerance
- Removes guesswork
- Works even in low-challenge FE years
- Produces steady genetic progress.

Questions to ask your ram breeder

- Can I see your RamGuard™ certificate?
 - All breeders whose animals undergo RamGuard™ testing are issued with a certificate.
- What sporidesmin dose do you test at?
 - Nontolerant flocks often start at 0.2mg/kg of sporidesmin and then as they get more tolerance this dose rate is increased.
- How many years have you been testing?
 - The longer the better. Anyone that has been testing for more than 10 years should have a good level of tolerance in their flocks.
- Can I see your genetic trend graph?
 - This will provide an indication of the rate of improvement.
- Are all sale rams sired by tested, tolerant rams?
 - Be aware of diluting the genetics if rams are described as tolerant but not sired by FE tested sires.

Watch this video “Questions to ask your ram breeder about FE” for tips on what to look for: [youtube.com/shorts/g4_Z8_4XwSs](https://www.youtube.com/shorts/g4_Z8_4XwSs)



Finding proven rams: Using nProve

- nProve is New Zealand's national genetic evaluation platform for sheep.
- Watch this introductory video to learn how it works youtube.com/watch?v=5_yZzletOYM
- Most RAMGUARD™ users are listed on nProve.

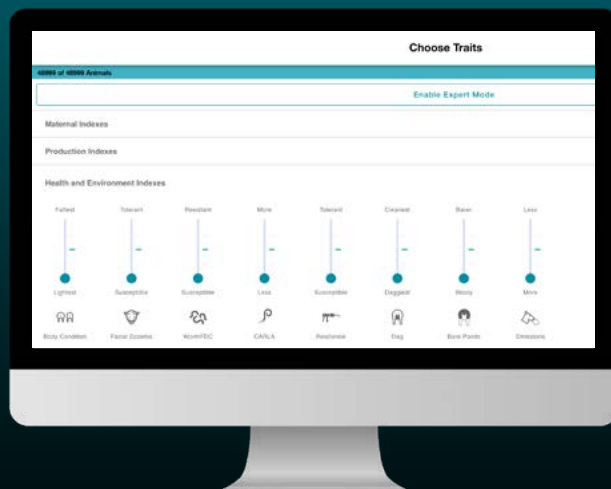
How nProve helps

- Let's you filter by breed, traits and FE tolerance
- Shows whether a flock is recorded (within-flock evaluation) or benchmarked (compared nationally)
- Free and simple to use: Visit nprove.nz to start your search.

nProve helps you build a ram team that performs well – even in tough FE seasons.



nprove.nz



Cattle

Breeding for FE tolerance

- Both dairy and beef breeds can get FE.
- Long-term breeding is an important option for herds in any FE-prone area.
- Both LIC and CRV offer FE-tolerant sires.

Find out more at:

CRV: crv4all.co.nz/nz/service/facial-eczema

LIC: lic.co.nz/products-and-services/artificial-breeding/focus-teams/facial-eczema-team

Resources

This resource is part of the [Farmer Facial Eczema Toolkit](#) on the B+L NZ Knowledge Hub. Head there to find out more.

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