

Huey is right on time...

Huey never lets us get away with it that easy. With the majority of lambing in full swing on the East Coast, Huey decides to chuck in a little weather bomb to remind us he is still in charge. Forecasts were for torrential rain and widespread flooding; however, it looks like most areas have dodged a bullet, with the heaviest falls at the top of East Cape and in the eastern Bay of Plenty. Farmers in Gisborne and Tolaga Bay have sighed with relief as they are still cleaning up from the June damage. Forest managers have turned their phones back on!

Cracking that Weaning Weight

Northland - Blue sky days and a bit of wind has dried the region out. With the mild temperatures and lack of real wet cold stuff lamb survival has been exceptional to date. The region is still tight for feed but with ground temperatures lifting the region is turning a corner. There is strong demand for store cattle as farmers look to get their spring numbers right. Banks are still encouraging dairy farmers to pay down debt, particularly those who have struggled to contain their cost structure in recent years.

Wairarapa - Plenty of daffodils and a few sprayed-out paddocks is a good sign spring is upon us and the contractors are keen to burn some diesel! Feed covers are still tight in the region and with another large rainfall event ground conditions are still pretty wet. A few traders who were chasing the \$ signs and pushing animals to heavy weights have lightened off. The bulk of lambing is just stating to kick into gear with the 1st of April a pretty common tugging date.

Back-flip on N leaching in the Horizons region?

How N is allocated in catchments is always a contentious topic. Recently the Horizons Regional Council approved a three-staged approach to freshwater management in the region, which could result in the proposed One Plan changes averting a predicted \$105 million a year hit to the Tararua economy. The changes include a recalibration of nitrogen leaching tables in the One Plan. Last year the environment court told the council it must refuse consent to farmers unable to restrict nitrogen leaching to totals in the One Plan's Table 14.2. These N leaching figures were set using an old version of Overseer which understated N leaching compared to the new version. Fish & Game and the environmental defence society will be all over this - watch this space!

Roundup and burnt toast dangerous for your health!

Monsanto have been ordered to pay \$289 million in world's first Roundup cancer trial. A California jury on Friday found Monsanto liable in a lawsuit filed by a man who alleged the company's glyphosate-based weed-killers, including Roundup, caused his cancer and ordered the company to pay \$289 million in damages.

Milk price drop - not so big

The only surprise with Fonterra's August milksolids payout review is that it didn't go lower. With most indicators suggesting \$6.50 was the number, the announcement of \$6.75 is actually better than expected. A typical lower North Island farm that produces 140,000 kg MS will have \$19,000 less revenue to January and \$42,000 less income by June 2019.

AT A GLANCE (NI)	-2 weeks	-1 week	This Week	Trend	Change
Store Lambs 2017	\$4.40-\$4.80	\$4.30-\$4.60	\$4.20-\$4.50	↓	-10c
Export Lamb	\$8.30	\$8.40 - \$8.50	\$8.50 - \$8.60	↑	+10c
18 M Store Steer	\$3.10-\$3.30	\$3.20-\$3.30	\$3.20-\$3.30	=	
P2 Steer (295 kg)	\$5.75	\$5.85	\$6.00	↑	+15c
Bull (295 kg)	\$5.40	\$5.40	\$5.50	↑	+10c
Local Trade Beef (220 kg)	\$5.80	\$5.95	\$6.05	↑	+10c
Strong Wool Indicator	302	323	323	=	
90-day Bill Rate	1.90%	1.91%	1.91%	=	
US Bull Price (c/lb US)	198	198	202	↑	+4c
\$NZ/£UK	0.5179	0.5182	0.5106	↓	-1.5%
NZ/\$US	0.6597	0.6643	0.6647	=	

Cracking that Weaning Weight!

In writing this article we acknowledge the following: Beef + Lamb NZ's "400 Plus: A Guide to Improved Lamb Growth Rates", and Information from Tom Fraser and Trevor Cook.

The easiest time to grow a lamb is from birth to weaning and this article will focus on this critical period. Small gains in lamb weaning weight can have a large effect on the bottom line and your farm system.



Improving Lamb Weaning Weights - What's the Prize?

There are many advantages to improving lamb weaning weights, and with the current sheepmeat prices there is some serious money on the table this year.

\$ In the Bank

- More marketing options - More prime off mum (POM) at a higher schedule. Lambs POM inherently have a higher dressing out %.
- Between 30kg -35kg LW every kilogram increase in weaning weight results in around 10-15% increase in lambs killed POM.
- Increased weight of lambs sold store at weaning. Ability to bring store sales forward if store prices dropping.
- More lambs in that marketable 27kg-33kg LW store bracket .
- Advancement in post weaning sales resulting in an earlier mean sale date, often at higher prices..
- Creates opportunities for a lamb trade .

Farm System

- Fewer lambs on farm post weaning.
- Reduced lamb days reduces parasite challenge across the flock. Less drench/work.
- Savings in feed consumed after weaning.
- Reduces pressure on pastures, and provides feed options post weaning for other stock.
- More flexibility in drought .
- Less reliance on expensive forages post weaning.
- Feed crops/herbs etc can be directed into replacement ewe lambs.
- Feed crops/herbs used to shift the sale point and weight of a smaller % of trade lambs.
- Feed crops/herbs used to lift tail-end ewes pre mating:
 - Lift a ewe 1 BCS before Mating = 43c/kgDM return
 - 5 year average summer lamb margin \$17/hd or \$0.13c/kgDM (Note doesn't take into account ridiculous margins made this year on summer lambs!).

Better hogget & 2th mating results

- Less work to get ewe lambs up to mating weights. More hoggets put to the ram at heavier weights.
- Heavier hoggets at mating = less pressure late winter/ early spring to play catch-up and less risk of a light 2th.
- Heavier 2ths with well grown-out frames results in better performance from the 2ths and flow-on effect to the MA ewes.

Let's put some numbers around it

For this exercise we have developed a base Farmax model:

- 400 Ha - Growing 6500kg/Dm/ha/Yr
- 2000 MA & 2ths Lambing at 140%; 600 ewe hgts mated - 85% Lambing
- Weaning at 90 Days - Lambs sold store at weaning. Lamb weaning weight 27kg LW in the base model.
- 120 Yearling bulls purchased August to November
- 120 Bulls killed October to January @ 323kg CW

The table below looks at the impact of weaning weight on profitability if all the lambs were simply sold store at weaning. The store price used is \$3.00 kg LW. Lifting weaning weight +3 kg from 27kg to 30 kg LW resulted in \$23,130 more profit or \$11.60 per ewe.

	Lamb Weaning Weights						Advantage from Base	Per Ewe
	Base 27kg	28kg	29kg	30kg	31kg			
Sheep Sales - Purchases	\$262,235	\$269,945	\$277,655	\$285,365	\$293,075	1kg WW	\$7,710	\$3.9
Wool	\$43,192	\$43,192	\$43,192	\$43,192	\$43,192	2kg WW	\$15,420	\$7.7
Total	\$305,427	\$313,137	\$320,847	\$328,557	\$336,267	3kg WW	\$23,130	\$11.6
Difference		\$7,710	\$15,420	\$23,130	\$30,840	4kg WW	\$30,840	\$15.4

Flow-on Impacts – Optimise Farmax Model

For this exercise we took the base Farmax model above and looked at 3 different weaning weights. We then changed the policy from selling all lambs store and moved to killing as many lambs POM at weaning and killed as many lambs through the autumn as the model would allow. All trade lambs were gone by the end of May. All Farmax models were based on the **same quantity of feed** and **optimised** so they were all 'feasible'. The cattle policy stayed the same. Lamb schedule and store prices were based on long term averages.

The table to the **right** shows the immediate benefits "in the bank", with more lambs killed prime off mum and lambs that can be killed heavier through the autumn with a higher average price. What is hard to put a value on is the impact on the farm system and the added flexibility. The improvement in hogget mating weights (43kg – 48kg) and 2th weights (62kg – 66kg) would have an immediate impact on the flock reproduction and a long term impact on the ongoing performance of the flock.

	Weaning Weight kg LW		
	28	30	32
Lambing %	140	140	140
Lambs Killed POM from MA & 2th	245	464	698
Lambs Killed POM % (>34kg LW)	10%	18%	27%
Lambs Killed Prime %	66%	90%	92%
Average Lamb Price	\$92	\$98	\$101
Av Prime Lamb Weight kg CCW	17.1	17.9	18.3
Trade Lambs on End of Month:			
Jan	2301	2113	1899
Feb	2176	1942	1833
March	1646	1531	1537
April	937	666	418
Weight of Ewe Lambs (kgLW) 1st May	43	46	48
Weight of 2ths (kgLW) 1st April	62	64	66
Gross Farm Revenue/Ha	\$1,140	\$1,180	\$1,205
Economic Farm Surplus/Ha	\$478	\$519	\$546

What are the Top 10% achieving?

There is a lot of 'pub talk' when it comes to weaning weights. You have to ask the hard questions, was this a 85-90 day weaning weight or 100-day? Were the replacements included, or was this just a sample of the sale lambs at weaning? If you had a 30kg weaning weight why are your ewe lambs only 37kg LW at 1st May? It's very hard to get hold of a good data base of weaning weights as very few farmers record them. The table below gives a rough snapshot of some good operators around the Wairarapa and what weaning weights they are achieving. Some of the farms have a number of years of weight data.

Wairarapa	Effective Ha	Lambing %	Weaning Weights kg LW		
Summer Dry Hill Country	476	162%	30.3	28.5	
Summer Dry Hill Country	622	149%	32		
Summer Dry Medium Hills With Large Area of Flats/Herbs	1450	143%	34.8	34.2	32
Summer Safe Hill Country	620	147%	31.6	30.3	29.8
Summer Dry Hill Country	435	157%	32.8		
Easy Hill Summer Dry	450	151%	31.5		
		Av	32.2		

What is a realistic weaning weight target?

	Singles	Twins
Birth weight	5kg	4kg
Weight gain to weaning (100 days)	350g/day	250g/day
Weaning weight	40kg	29kg

- Assuming 150% lambing (100 twins and 50 singles) this gives a target weaning weight of **32.7kg**.

- At 125% lambing (75 twins and 50 singles) this gives a target weaning weight of **33.4kg**.
- If you are not achieving this you have an opportunity!

How to achieve a good weaning weight

There are two main boxes you need to tick to achieve this ideal weaning weight:

- Maximise ewe lactation
- Maximise feed quality for lambs from week six onwards.

Ewe Body Condition – “Skinny Ewes Wean Skinny Lambs”

Ewe body condition has a big influence on milk & colostrum production and resulting lamb weaning weights. Ewe body condition at lambing also provides a buffer against variable pasture conditions. The importance of ewe BCS at lambing has been covered in a number of AgLetter articles so this article will not cover it.

Ewe Lactation

A ewe’s lactation peaks 2-4 weeks after they lamb and tails off after that. The higher you get that peak, the longer the tail will be, and the bigger the total volume of milk produced. After peak lactation, the amount of milk produced reduces by 19-26 grams per day, and better nutrition will not really affect this rate of decline. You only get one chance here and it is all around ewe condition and quantity of feed.

If ewes are underfed in the first 4 weeks of lactation there won’t be a “peak”, just a tail. The amount of feed in front of both the ewe and lamb can make a difference so keep shuffling those paddocks that are tight or adjusting the stocking rate if possible.

Twins vs Singles. Getting the lactation bit right for twins is much more important than for singles. A single lamb from a ewe getting fed 75% of optimum is still getting fed more than a twin lamb from a ewe getting fed at 100% of optimum.

Lamb Transition – Milk to Grass

Pasture makes up a significant amount of a lamb’s diet by week six. If your mean lambing date is two weeks after the start of lambing, by week 8, pasture quality becomes the most important factor. For an April 1st tupping date this equates to mid-October.

The Lamb

- Changes from 1 stomach to 4 stomachs at 4 to 5 weeks of age
- By docking lambs are ruminants getting a milk top-up
- 80% of diet from docking to weaning is grass
- Speed of rumen growth is due to energy intake - milk and quality grass
- 20kg lamb has twice the protein requirements of a 40kg lamb - milk is an important source of that protein
- Most of the milk supply has gone by 8 weeks, so high quality grass is vital to high lamb LWG
- Short growing ryegrass is as good as clover

Pasture quality more important for multiples

Lambs will start eating grass from two weeks old and are fully adjusted by three weeks. Milk still makes up the bulk of their diet however. A twin-bearing ewe will produce 30%-50% more milk than a single but as this is shared between two lambs, so twin lambs only receive on average two-thirds the milk of a single. To make up for this lower milk consumption, twin lambs are forced to start eating pasture at an earlier age than singles. It’s important that multiples are on the best quality pastures.

Pasture Quality, Pasture Quality, Pasture Quality!

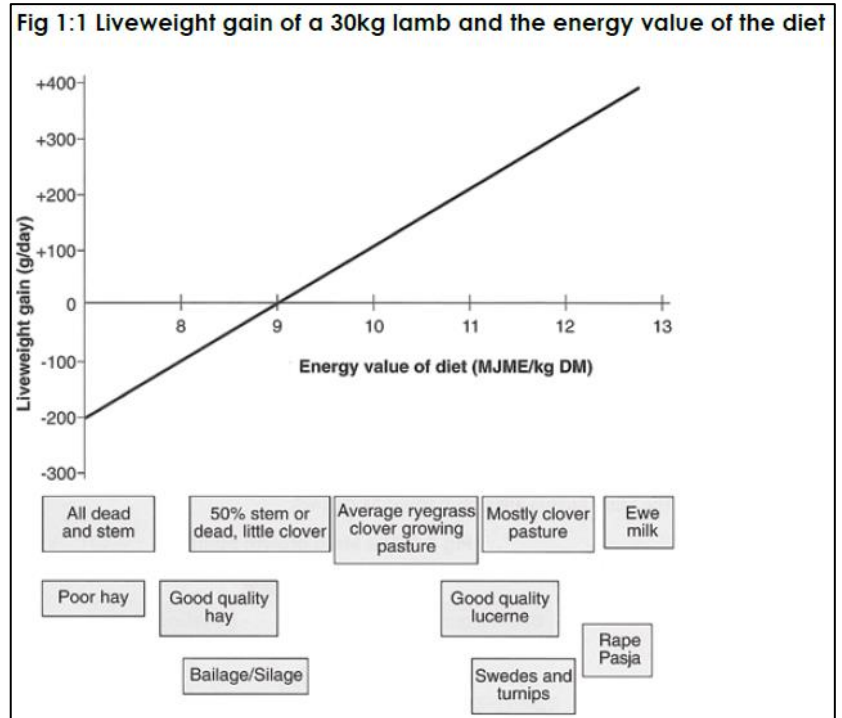
The graph to the right depicts the liveweight gain of lambs on feeds of varying ME. What this highlights is:

- Ewe's milk will grow a lamb fast. This emphasises the need for a peak lactation. You need a high peak and long tail.
- Clover-based diets provide great lamb feed.
- It is easy to understand the exceptional weaning weights from ewes and lambs on chicory/plantain/clover, etc.

Cleaning up paddocks

It's important to clean up paddocks in the winter so pastures are high quality and growing for spring - mud and 'hoof & toof' are your friends here. Don't underestimate the impact of thatch, poor quality pastures on lamb growth rates. A graphic example of

this was on a farm that docked two twin paddocks side by side of similar size and contour. One of the paddocks had been cleaned up in the winter rotation and the other had been missed before set stocking. The difference in both the lamb weights and ewe weights at pre-wean drenching was noticeable and this flowed through to weaning.



Tips for Managing Pasture Quality

Top up with cattle

Make sure you have the option to top up paddocks with cattle to control pasture quality. You might only make a small margin buying cattle in the spring but what value they can add to the bottom line by improving weaning weights in lambs can be huge.

Deferred Grazing

Boxing paddocks of ewes and lambs up and taking a paddock or two out allows grazing to be concentrated and therefore pasture quality retained on the balance of the farm.

Chemical Topping

This technique is used more on summer safe country where paddocks are dropped out and pressure is kept on the rest of the property. The main function of the exercise is to prevent the low producing annual and native grass species present in the sward from going to seed. It also lets light into the sward, allowing the higher quality and higher ME plants, such as clover, to expand in the area (Clover 11% to 19% in trials).

Using high value forages

Shuffling ewes and lambs onto high value forages such as Plantain/Clover/Chicory has a big impact on lamb weaning weights. The use of ram harnesses to get ewes into 10 day lambing groups can help with shedding ewes and lambs of an even age onto high quality forages.

Early weaning

As a lamb ages, it moves into competition with its ewe for available pasture intake and quality feed. Early weaning of lambs can be a tool to reduce competition and improve lamb growth rates, especially on high quality feeds.



Creep grazing to improve weaning weights

Creep grazing employs a gate through which lambs, but not ewes, can pass to get first choice of fresh feed in the next-door paddock. <https://beeflambnz.com/knowledge-hub/PDF/creep-grazing-lambs>

Bikie story

A Harley Biker is riding by the zoo in Washington DC when he sees a little girl leaning into the lion's cage. Suddenly, the lion grabs her by the collar of her jacket and tries to pull her inside to slaughter her under the eyes of her screaming parents.

The biker jumps off his Harley, runs to the cage and hits the lion square on the nose with a powerful punch. Whimpering from the pain the lion jumps back letting go of the girl, and the biker brings the girl to her terrified parents, who thank him endlessly.

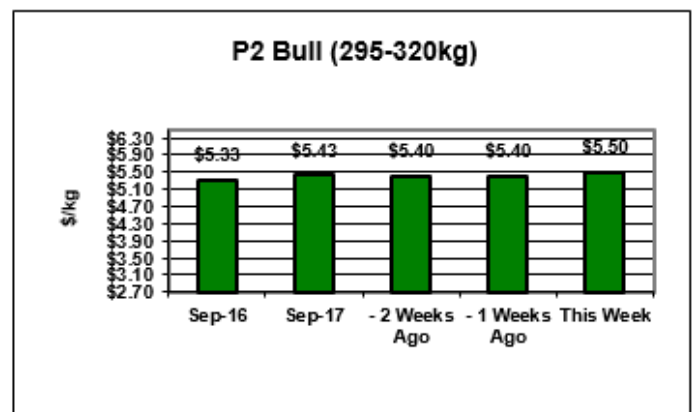
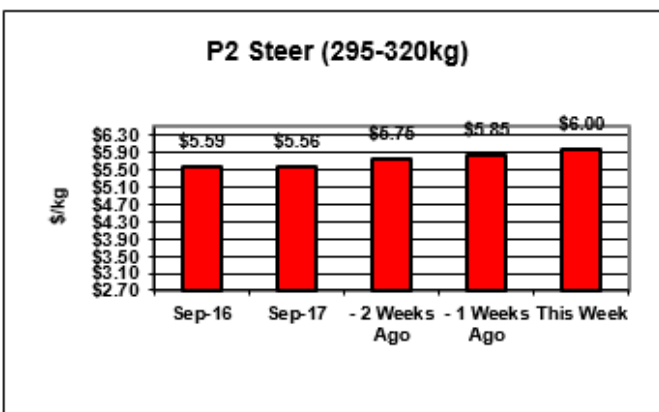
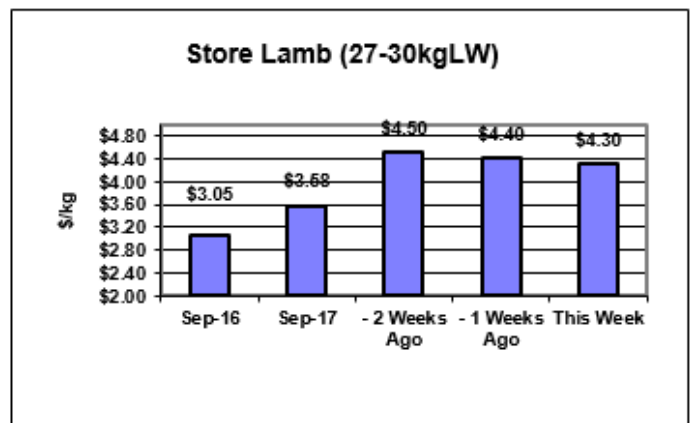
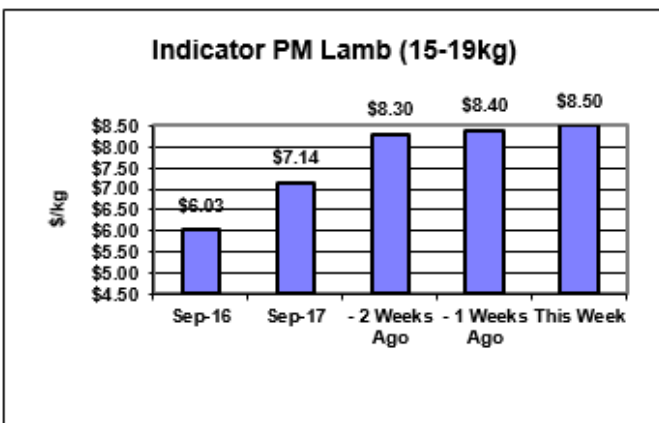
A reporter has watched the whole event. He (she?) says to the Harley rider, "Sir, this was the most gallant and bravest thing I've seen a man do in my whole life." The Harley rider replies, "Why, it was nothing, really. The lion was behind bars. I just saw this little kid in danger, and acted as I felt right."

The reporter says, "Well, I'll make sure this won't go unnoticed. I'm a journalist, you know, and tomorrow's paper will have this story on the front page. So, what do you do for a living, and what political affiliation do you have?" The biker replies "I'm a U.S. Marine, a Republican and I'm voting for Trump."

The journalist leaves.

The following morning the biker buys the paper to see if it indeed brings news of his actions, and reads, on the front page:

"U.S. MARINE ASSAULTS AFRICAN IMMIGRANT & STEALS HIS LUNCH"



OTHER PRICES

SI Lamb Schedule	\$8.20	SI P Beef Schedule	\$5.60
NI Local Trade Beef	\$6.05	NI 220-245 kg M Cow	\$4.60
NI 220-245 kg P Cow	\$4.60	NI Venison 60 kg stag	\$11.30

NOTICES

B+LNZ Tararua Farming for Profit Seminar & Eastern North Island Annual Meeting

Where: Dannevirke Services & Citizens Club, 1 Princess St, Dannevirke

When: 1–5pm, Wednesday 5 September

This day will explore the future of the wool industry in New Zealand, and what farmers can do in an environment of low product returns and high shearing costs. Also come along to vote for your Farmer Council representatives at the Annual Meeting at 5pm.

		SOUTHERN NORTH ISLAND		CANTERBURY		OTAGO/SOUTHLAND
Store Lambs (2017)						
Male & MS	38-42 kg	\$4.10-\$4.20	↓			\$4.00-\$4.30 =
	35-38 kg	\$4.45-\$4.70	↑	\$4.50-\$4.60	↑	\$4.00-\$4.30 =
	30-35 kg	\$4.50-\$4.70	=	\$4.50-\$4.60	↑	\$4.00-\$4.30 =
Ewe Lambs	30-35 kg	\$4.40-\$4.50	↓			\$4.00-\$4.30 =
	36-38 kg	\$4.00-\$4.40	↓			\$4.00-\$4.30 =
Works Ewes	22-24kg	\$5.30	=	\$5.30	=	\$5.35 =
Heavy Export Ewes	28kg	\$150	=	\$150	=	\$150 =
Ewes with Lambs at Foot	M/G Cond.	\$115-\$122	↓			
Ewes with Lambs at Foot	L/M Cond.	\$100-\$110	↓			
2 yo Steers	400-450	\$3.10-\$3.40	=	\$3.20-\$3.30	=	\$3.15-\$3.20 =
	350-400					\$3.15-\$3.20 =
Dairy X	350-400	\$2.90-\$3.00	↓			\$2.90-\$3.00 ↓
2 yo Heifers	380-420	\$2.90-\$3.10	↓	\$2.70-\$2.80	↓	\$2.80-\$3.00 =
Dairy X	380-400	\$2.75-\$2.90	↓	\$2.50-\$2.90	=	\$2.70-\$2.80 =
2 yo Bulls	450-500	\$2.90-\$3.10	↑	\$2.70-\$2.80		\$2.80-\$3.00 =
	400-450	\$3.00-\$3.10	=			\$2.80-\$3.00 =
Ylg Steers (Trad)	250-300	\$3.90-\$4.05	↓	\$4.00-\$4.20	=	\$3.80-\$4.00 =
Ylg Steers (Trad)	200-250	\$4.00-\$4.10	↓	\$4.00-\$4.20	=	\$3.80-\$4.00 =
Ylg Steers (Trad)	170-200			\$4.00-\$4.20	=	\$4.00-\$4.10 =
Ylg Steers (Exotic)	250-300	\$4.00	=	\$4.00-\$4.20	=	\$3.90-\$4.00 =
Ylg Heifers (Trad)	170-200	\$3.50-\$3.60	↓	\$4.00	=	\$3.50-\$3.80 =
Ylg Heifers (Trad)	200-250	\$3.50-\$3.60	↓	\$3.80	=	\$3.50-\$3.80 =
Ylg Friesian Bulls	260-280 kg	\$3.30	↓	\$3.00	=	\$2.80-\$3.00 ↓
Ylg Friesian Bulls	200-250 kg	\$3.30-\$3.40	=			\$3.20 =

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