

# Cheviots serve the ultimate purpose



Cheviot rams serve the ultimate purpose for fourth generation farmer John McLaren.

It's to guarantee a live lamb out of his hoggets.

John and his wife Kate tried several different ram breeds, without success, before putting Cheviots over their Coopworth-Texel cross hoggets eight years ago.

"We used other rams, but they didn't work too well," John said.

In 2004 the McLarens approached their neighbours, the McKelvie family, who breed Cheviot rams, about using them over their hoggets.

They didn't have any two-tooth rams left so they leased a few ram hoggets from them and were impressed with how easily the hoggets lambed.

"Our main purpose is to get a live lamb on the ground - the Cheviots just get up and going," John said.

The McLarens farm 3500 Coopworth-Texel ewes and up to 30 beef cattle, at any one time, on their 350ha flat to rolling hill country property at Wyndham in Southland.

They also lease a 120ha property at Otama which son Matthew manages while working full-time on a local dairy farm.

The 900 replacement ewe hoggets spend

the winter on the lease block, where they will lamb in October, before returning home as two-tooths in March.

Matthew is paid to look after the lambing hoggets and part of the deal is that he will get to keep half of the hogget lambs.

The extra land has allowed the McLarens to lift ewe hogget numbers from 750 to 900 and they have the potential to go to 1000 as they focus on growing their ewe flock.

The McLarens feed their hoggets well by giving them priority over their works

lambs and they are all-grass wintered.

"We try and pump as much feed into them as we can," John said.

This season the hoggets went to the ram at an average 51kg liveweight, for 28 days, and scanned about 118 percent which was up on last season. The dry hoggets are usually culled.

The hoggets are pre-lamb shorn and from early August supplemented with feed nuts which helps put on weight.

The McLarens, have only "properly" been lambing hoggets for the past 10 years, John finds the smaller birthweight lambs, as a result of the Cheviot influence, ideal but admits they are good at finding holes in the fences.

"They can be a bit of a challenge at times and they will try you and the dogs.

"They have a habit of sticking together," John said.

The McLarens wean their ewe hoggets in late January at which time they usually get a small weaning draft.

John said the Cheviot lambs could be quite deceptive and often weighed heavier than they looked because they were very meaty.

All the Cheviot lambs were killed at an average 17.8kg carcass weight last season, which was back slightly on the previous year at 18kg.

