

Bopriva benefits new bull policy.

Strong prospects in the bull market and the flexibility of the stock class were key incentives for the owners of Tuatahi Farming Partnership to make a serious policy shift into bull beef in 2010. The company comprises of three blocks. Moerangi, Oraukura and Manunui Stations have been combined into a single entity, and as a whole represent a unique union of two different Maori trusts.

The property has set benchmarks for governance and environmental management, winning the Ballance Farm Environment Award back in 2006. It was also one of the first to work with the Waikato Regional Council to retire land area and sell nitrogen credits as part of the new Lake Taupo land management rules.

For long time manger Barry Pope the move to bulls on the 3000ha Moerangi-Oraukura block offered a lower cost opportunity to enter the beef market. The potential existed to provide quicker finishing times and better cash flow than the property's traditional stud bull operation.

"Bulls also tend to do well here over summer, it is not as hot. Our aim was to have them ready for killing by March, and weight gains through winter were critical to achieving that," says Barry.

However past experience meant he was well aware of the problems that can accompany bull farming, and as suitable as the flatter, well subdivided Moerangi property was, running 400 bulls was going to prove a management challenge.

Ali Reid the manager of the neighbouring Waituhi Kuratau Station provided Barry with an insight to how using the vaccine Bopriva could help make bull management simpler and less stressful.

Bopriva was launched by Pfizer Animal Health in New Zealand two years ago for use in non-breeding bulls, and Ali was one of the first farmers in the country to be involved in its trialling.

Bopriva reduces testosterone which has the effect of calming bull behaviour, reducing aggressive socialising amongst bulls and delivering benefits for operators wanting to run larger mobs over difficult winter months.

"Ali's experience had shown that the bulls were far easier to manage when treated with Bopriva, and like him we were intending to run them on crop over winter. We needed mobs that were placid and intent on getting on with the job of grazing," says Barry.

The Friesian bulls are sourced from a contract rearer in the Bay of Plenty, arriving in several lots between October and mid November. To maintain strong weight gains through the difficult winter months when snow is not uncommon requires break feeding on kale from June until around October, quitting progressively from March or May.

"They basically have to have a home or be killed by May, the cover we have on May 1 has to be around 2000kgDM/ha to get us comfortably through winter. Growth can drop off very quickly from May if winter decides to come early."

Bulls were split into mobs of around 100 for break feeding on the crop, and as a double shot vaccination, the first shot of Bopriva administered in early June with the booster shot six weeks later.

“The change after the second shot is almost overnight. They settle down very quickly, grazing and sitting down when they are full, not chasing each other and crashing around.”

Despite the multiple frost days and challenging winter conditions, the bulls still averaged a daily growth rate of .7kg/day, keeping them on track to achieve their 270kg CW target by March.

With the Bopriva vaccination Barry was able to graze different bull mobs side by side through conventional fences.

“In the past when I have managed bulls you will always end up with two or three in every mob that get picked on, have to be pulled out and then you have more work with these smaller mobs all over the place. We lost no bulls over winter through riding and fighting.”

Bopriva’s impact on behaviour was bought home when two mobs got mixed up one day while grazing kale.

“Rather than broken legs and chaos, we could just split them in half and put them back where they were, they settled right back down.”

The logistics of winter management became far easier with the settled, larger mobs. With only three mobs to shift break fencing took less time, while feeding out lucerne silage from the wagon in larger breaks as required was far easier.

“The staff appreciated the weekends, only shifting the three mobs, and then the hoggets on swedes, you could be all finished by 10.30am.”

Improved bull manageability also meant weighing every month was a safe reality.

As winter progressed and still being fed kale, it was possible to run all the bulls over weigh scales and split into four groups across three weight ranges. The newly drafted mobs could then be more closely managed depending on their weight range, and days to processing. They were returned to the kale until it ran out and then progressively drafted into smaller mobs of 35-37 head, coinciding with the fading effect of Bopriva.

“We dosed to match the spring flush, so the bull effect would be back in place over the high growth phase through spring early summer, when they can gain up to 1.2kg of bodyweight a day.”

The experience with Bopriva now sees it part of the bull beef policy at Turatahi, and Barry contemplating the potential for even increasing bull numbers.

“That ability to draft into weight based mobs is really a big plus that we could not achieve otherwise, while management is just that much simpler with those larger mobs, the benefits are all there.”

For more information please contact Pfizer Animal Health or visit www.bopriva.co.nz

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Richard Strang – Horahora.

Spring pinch eased with Bopriva.

The light sand and ash country around South Waikato can provide a challenge for anyone running bulls, with holes easily dug and the soil lending itself to being damaged by active bulls, particularly over the winter months.

Putaruru maize grower Richard Strang usually opts to run store lambs on his maize country over winter when he sows Tama rye between crops.

However the winter of 2011 had lamb prices soaring to all time highs, driven by short supply and positive market returns. He stopped stocking up at 3000 head, and opted to fill the remaining stock gap with 280 R1 Friesian bulls. His plan was to run them to mid August and then quit onto the store market again as the early spring grass market came away.

“The young bulls provided a cheaper option to fully stocking up with lambs, and offered a means to spread a bit of risk around out of the lamb job.”

He was conscious of the damage the bulls could inflict on the light soil of the cultivated, re-grassed maize country. Richard also had the additional challenge of few fences through the property, demanding larger mobs to be run than typical for bull grazing.

“I had heard about Bopriva, and it sounded like it could be what I was looking for, to enable me to run larger mobs of bulls that would hopefully be settled and manageable.”

Developed by Pfizer Animal Health, Bopriva is a vaccine for non-breeding bulls which reduces testosterone and aggressive behaviour, resulting in a calmer more manageable animal.

With an initial shot and a booster shot delivered 6 weeks later it offers bull farmers the ability to run larger mobs without the consequent aggressive actions of fighting and damage.

After administering Bopriva, Richard found the bulls that had been placed into three mobs of 90 to be as he had hoped, quieter and settled into grazing.

“But it was later on when I thought things might get interesting.” Initially he had hoped to quit the bulls in mid-August, but feed supply had got tight, and there was little alternative grazing about.

He boxed two mobs into one and put them on some light sandy country between Horahora and the Waikato River. He moved the remaining 90 up to his other property

“I thought this could be a challenge, but even when mixed together like that they behaved like a mob of steers, there was no digging, they continued to be really settled and get on well. It is pretty easy sandy country for them to dig holes in, and we just did not have that problem. You normally would not get away with putting them there, particularly not in a mob that size.”

Being able to run them in the larger mob made the sand country option viable at a time of feed shortage on the main farm. It meant he was able to carry them through a period when the usual early spring grass market did not fire the way it usually does in the Waikato.

Once the market picked up in October he was able to start moving the mobs through until the end of the month.

“The agent commented on how quiet they were and wanted to know if they had been break fed. He was surprised to learn they had been run in a mob the size it was.”

Given the demands of cultivation in the lead up to the maize planting season, Richard appreciated the fact he was not having to shift multiple mobs every day.

“I think you can only go on your own experience, and Bopriva provided me with the flexibility and ability to put those bulls where I did, and get through the feed pinch and still make a decent margin on them.”

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CHKD by ALI.

Bopriva files: Ali Reid, Waituhi Kuratau Station Western Lake Taupo.

Wintering an option with vaccine.

Autumn of 2009 had store cattle prices at a low point, and Ali Reid of Waituhi Kuratau Station, Western Lake Taupo faced having to quit his rising one year bulls with little margin. The station usually sells 800-1000 head of steers and bulls a year, complementing the 11,000 sheep that are also part of the progressive station.

Like many properties in the central North Island, Ali also faced a tight feed supply last autumn. Summer temperatures switched quickly to winter with little autumn growth on the light pumice country that demands regular rainfall.

“We had the dilemma of quitting these bulls and getting little for them. We were offered the opportunity to trial Bopriva on a mob over winter, and figured it could prove an ideal option, rather than letting them go for very little return.”

Developed in New Zealand for New Zealand bull beef operations, Bopriva has the effect of calming bull behaviour, reducing aggressive socialising amongst bulls and delivering benefits for operators wanting to run larger mobs over difficult winter months.

With 18ha of kale for winter grazing the bulls on, Ali would typically run mobs with around 30-40 head in them. Using Bopriva however he was able to run a larger mob of 200.

“We gave them their first shot of Bopriva in April and after 10 days they were quiet, and then following the second shot they were very calm. It made running the larger mob of 200 on the crop over winter far easier.”

Typically Ali and his staff would have to be drafting off bulls that have been picked on, putting them separate around the property and only adding to the winter workload.

“They inevitably end up being a problem throughout because you cannot put them back with other mobs. We usually try and run mobs that match unit loads and taking bulls out upsets the numbers.”

Treating the large mob with Bopriva meant less labour input over winter and the kale crop could be grazed in good time with minimal hassle. No bulls were tossed over the hotwire, and paddock damage typical of fighting mobs was reduced on the light soil that does not take well to bull holes and digging.

With the influence of Bopriva waning as spring arrived, he has kept the larger mob together, without the usual behavioural problems.

Ali is now confident he has another option to help keep bull operations flexible. He was able to stagger the sale of the bulls through spring, gain a margin absent in autumn, and would consider using it on larger bulls next winter.

“Wintering is a big one for us. If we can winter large mobs through, then we will do it because it gives us more options going into spring and summer about when and how many to quit.”

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Bopriva snapshot.

Farm operator: Ali Reid

Farm location: Kuratau, Western Lake Taupo.

Farm size: 2000ha

Cattle numbers: 800-1000 sold per year, including 400 bulls as R2s

Bopriva solution: A large (200 head) mob of bulls able to be held over winter and grazed on crop.

Management benefit: Less labour in pulling out incompatible bulls, fewer problems with fighting behind crop hotwire, better spring margins gained at sale.

Bopriva Files: Alf Harwood, Limestone Downs Station Port Waikato

Steep hill country a wintering option with Bopriva

Running 1000 bulls a year has provided plenty of flexibility for quitting stock depending on schedules and seasons for Limestone Downs manager Alf Harwood.

With ownership under the C.Alma Baker Trust, and an emphasis on progressive management methods, Alf is no stranger to being under the spotlight through farmer field days and trials ranging from animal health treatments to hill country urea application.

So last winter provided him with the opportunity to combine the flexibility of bull farming with a new product trial, and the results have left him looking forward to greater options for winter bull management next winter as well.

He was informed by his vet about a new vaccine developed by Pfizer Animal Health, Bopriva, an immuno-castration vaccine that would calm bull behaviour and make winter management of bulls easier.

“It came along at a very opportune time for us and we decided to run with it.” Summer turned to winter quickly with little positive autumn growth in between and using Bopriva on a mob of 170 bulls meant he could run them on steep hill country not usually suitable for wintering.

Two shots of the vaccine were administered, one in late May, the other in mid June, with an outcome that exceeded Alf’s expectations. Behaviour calmed significantly, grazing patterns were more established and fighting was down significantly.

“One thing I really noticed was now they did not come running down to the gate when you came to shift them, doing that on hill country they pull the hill down with them, and instead they just kept grazing,” he says. Hole digging was non existent and fence damage far less than usual from the treated mob.

“There would just be no way we could run a large mob like that normally on that sort of country.”

Given the tight feed levels through winter, taking advantage of the hill country meant he was able to hold the 170 head on a tight grazing rotation. Feed conversion was more efficient, with the bulls not expending as much energy fighting and knocking each other around.

Management for Alf was also made simpler, with only the one mob of 170 to move and manage, shifting every few days.

“We would normally have had to have three mobs of around 50 in each, and a lot more work to go with that.”

Even three months after the final shot the bulls have remained mobbed up as 170, and displays of aggression were not as marked as in untreated mobs. The timing of Bopriva’s decline in influence fitted well with the rise in October spring growth at Limestone Downs, as they revert to typical bull spring growth rates.

Alf believes using Bopriva gives him another option in his winter management toolbox and means it would be possible to stock more bulls ahead of steers if he wished.

“They basically start behaving like steers, but you have the option with them being bulls to quit them when it suits – you are not going to get caught if it turns dry if you have bulls the way you do with steers, so we would have even greater flexibility there.”

Bopriva snapshot:

Limestone Downs Station

Farm operator: Alf Harwood

Farm location: Port Waikato

Farm size: 1200ha (CHK)

Bull numbers: 1000

Bulls treated: 170

Management benefit: less mobs to shift over winter and steep country became viable as a wintering area without damage. Greater future flexibility potential to run bulls rather than opt for increased steer numbers.

Bopriva Files: Peter Fullerton-Smith, Mairoa King Country.

The damage and workload that went with running bulls saw Peter Fullerton Smith switch out of running bulls two years ago on his King Country property and move into dairy grazing. However Peter has reassessed that decision, appreciating the value of owning stock and the flexibility that goes with bull operations in the King Country.

He started buying in bulls as 100kg calves this autumn, but was keen to work on ways to reduce the damage, stress and time bull farming bought with it.

This winter he wanted to find out the outcome of trialling the immuno castration vaccine Bopriva on a mob of his rising two year old bulls.

Developed in New Zealand for New Zealand bull beef operations, Bopriva has the effect of calming bull behaviour, reducing aggressive socialising amongst bulls and delivering benefits for operators wanting to run larger mobs over difficult winter months.

The appeal lay in having quieter stock that could be run in larger mobs without the accompanying hassles of fighting, damage and poor growth rates. He vaccinated two mobs of 70 bulls with their first shot in autumn in late March, followed by the booster shot on May 12 (**CHK DATES**).

“We would normally run this many animals in about eight mobs, but using Bopriva allowed us to run the bulls in only two mobs, and I felt we could have almost put the two mobs together as 140, their behaviour was that quiet,” he says.

Administration was a simple affair with the specifically designed vaccine gun, and Peter says the critical point was to calculate when it is desirable for Bopriva’s immuno castration effect to wear off.

“It is important to get the timing right so that it starts to wear off as spring growth takes off, given the main reason for running bulls is to maximise that growth rate, but we also wanted to minimise the hassle.”

Ten days after the first shot he observed behaviour was more docile, and easier to manage as a larger mob. While not having a control mob for comparison, he felt the mob grew quicker than would have been expected through the difficult winter, partly due to less energy spent of fighting and digging.

On a group basis Peter believes he saw 90 days worth of Bopriva’s full effect over the mob, and on some bulls up to 30 days extra.

For him the two large mobs cut back significantly on time shifting, and paddock damage on the unforgiving hill country was minimised.

“I would consider trialling it on our R1s, of which we have 700 of, that would make a significant impact on numbers of mobs, if we ran seven mobs of 100, rather than 17 mobs of 40 or so.”

Bopriva snapshot.

Farm operator: Peter Fullerton-Smith

Farm location: Mairoa, King Country.

Farm size: [to chk]

Bull numbers: 700 R1s, 300 (CHK) R2s

Bopriva solution: 140 head of R2s treated and run in two separate mobs rather than five mobs of approx 30 head.

Management benefit: Labour demands reduced through winter with larger mobs, less damage to fences and paddocks on rolling to steep hill country.

Chkd Steve.

Bopriva Files: Steve Parrott, Matira Northwest Waikato.

Bopriva helps sort downside to bull option

In response to tighter sheep returns, and the flexibility bull farming brings, Matira farmers Steve and Alex Parrott have lifted beef numbers using country previously only grazed by sheep on the 610ha property. Wanting to run more bulls this winter they had the dilemma of having the land, but not the fencing, water and smaller subdivisions to run small mobs of bulls on the ex sheep country.

The opportunity to trial Bopriva, the immuno-castration vaccine from Pfizer Animal Health was timely. By using the Parrotts were able to run more bulls, maintain a bigger mob of bulls treated with the vaccine, and reap some positive management benefits in the process.

Developed in New Zealand for New Zealand bull beef operations, Bopriva has the effect of calming bull behaviour, reducing aggressive socialising amongst bulls and delivering benefits for operators wanting to run larger mobs over difficult winter months.

Normally the Parrotts would run mobs of bulls numbering no more than 30 in a mob. For the Bopriva trial mob they split 165 head into two even mobs and injected their first vaccine shot in late April. This was followed up with a booster shot in mid June.

“These were massive mobs for us, but from the second shot they behaved more like steers than Friesian bulls – they were far less active, and there was a lot less fighting,” says Steve.

The winter of 2009 proved to be a tough one for farmers everywhere, and the coastal property like many had low feed reserves coming out of autumn, and experienced an unusual share of frosts. Having larger, calmer mobs meant valuable winter feed calories were not wasted on fighting, and the ex-sheep country with its larger paddock sizes and lack of hot wires was able to be bought into beef production sooner.

“The big surprise for us using Bopriva was that it was easy. It certainly took a fair bit off the workload with only two of us here over winter and only having half the mob numbers we would normally have had with 165 bulls.” Despite no hot wires fence damage so typical of bulls was avoided, and the paddocks are devoid of the usual bull holes.

Steve maintains Bopriva would be ideal for anyone considering bull beef farming and wanting to avoid the behavioural stress that bulls often bring with them, particularly over difficult winter months.

“Even in early October they have remained fairly settled, and as long as they remain that way we will test the water to see if we can run them a bit longer together,” he says.

With 80% of the farm’s income now sourced from bull beef, the Parrott brothers see Bopriva as a tool that only adds to the flexibility of bull beef, helping remove the downside of damage and stress that flexibility can sometimes bring with it.

“This has meant we could open up country we have not farmed bulls on before.”

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Bopriva snapshot:

Farm operators: Steve and Alex Parrott

Farm location: Matira, north-west Waikato

Farm size: 610ha

Bull numbers: selling 700 rising 3yo per annum.

Bopriva solution: allowed two mobs of 80 bulls to be grazed straight onto rolling ex-sheep country without requiring hotwire/subdivision/water upgrades.

Management benefits: Only 2 mobs for 165 bulls, less labour time shifting mobs over difficult winter.

Provided ability to capitalise on extra bull numbers immediately, rather than incur capital cost of paddock upgrades etc.