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What Sheep Farmers Most And Least Enjoy

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Sheep farmers get their greatest enjoyment from producing healthy stock – and they most dislike extreme weather.

An analysis of responses from 184 farmers who have applied to join Sheep for Profit reveal the five things sheep and beef farmers enjoy the most are:

· Producing quality, healthy stock (70% of 184 responses) · Working with animals (66%) · Country lifestyle and being outdoors (53%) · Being their own boss, managing their own business (39%), and · Achieving their goals by managing their assets (16.5%).

The five things they least enjoy are:

· Weather extremes, from storms to droughts (62% of 176 responses) · Seeing animals with health problems (55%) · Poor prices and being "price takers" (40.5%) · Accounts and paperwork (33%), and · Dagging, docking, dipping and killing (28%).

Farmers say their greatest satisfaction comes from finishing good healthy stock, and the majority like working with animals, including mustering, lambing, drafting – specially "on a good day". One respondent cited "good old fashioned mustering with a horse and team of dogs".

They draw deep satisfaction from working in the outdoors and the "healthy country lifestyle" and "space and freedom" which goes with it, including the "mix of physical and mental challenges".

It is interesting that only 16.5% enjoyed achieving their goals at the time they applied to join Sheep For Profit. That may be because many farmers have trouble setting their own goals and lack direction to take them to the next level.

The sixth most enjoyable aspect of sheep farming is the flexible hours and work variety, followed closely by working with family members and others as a team.

Making money ranks seventh (12.8%).

Among the other least enjoyed aspects of farming are repetitive manual work (16%, ranked sixth), and the flipside to the lifestyle benefits, including long hours, work during school holidays, no holidays or weekends off and isolation (ranked seventh at 12.3%). Staff problems and costs rank eighth at 7%.

One farmer says he least enjoys "the IRD" - and another hates being "zapped by an electric fence".

Sheep for Profit advisor Chris Mulvaney, of AgriNetworks, says the analysis shows farmers have a keen interest to achieve optimal animal performance by having healthy, well fed stock. They get real satisfaction from planning and setting goals – and achieving better prices, while enjoying the chance to be their own boss, be accountable, and appreciate country life.

Mulvaney says the S4P system is helping farmers set their own goals - and improve their risk management strategies for things like animal health and bad weather - to help them achieve what they most want: Good stock and less chance of being "price takers".

"That helps make more money, and the concept seems to fit well with what farmers are telling us in this survey. The people using the system tell us one of the big benefits is that it gives them more control over dealing with the risks."

"With Sheep for Profit you're measuring everything and if there's a problem you can at least look back and find the cause."

A three-year pilot programme, which included 50 farms from all over New Zealand, showed the Sheep for Profit system lifted gross income per farm by \$67,752 above the national average from 2001 to 2003.

Sheep for Profit is now inviting applicants nationwide for its third quarterly intake.

Successful applicants each have a Sheep For Profit advisor. The measurement system they'll use helps them identify what's driving or hindering farm performance. Farmers set their own goals and can achieve significant rises in revenues and cash surpluses.

The current intake will close on January 31.

Application forms are available now from Sheep for Profit coordinator Fiona Owen 07 872 0247. Those submitted after January 31 will be weight listed for the fourth intake, closing on April 30, 2006.

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