

## **New Zealand sheep lead the way in ground-breaking international research**

New Zealand sheep are at the cutting edge of ground-breaking research in Britain to determine the benefits of using high quality genetics.

The Sustainable Lamb Project is being undertaken by AFBI (Agri-Food and BioSciences Institute based in Belfast, UK) and funded by supermarket and retailing giant Marks & Spencer to assess the impact of using Rissington Breedline sheep breeding systems and its improved Primera genetics on :-

- meat-eating quality and consistency,
- animal welfare, carbon footprint and greenhouse gas emissions,
- on-farm productivity benefits,
- processing efficiency.

A dozen Primera rams from Rissington Breedline were shipped to the UK in September, '10 as part of the two year project.

Marks & Spencer Agricultural Manager, Steve McLean says UK lamb production continues to fall and there's a growing need to find a more sustainable production model to ensure continuity of UK supply for Marks & Spencer.

"Our goal is to produce lamb that's guaranteed tender, succulent and flavoursome everytime, produced within a sustainable supply chain and complies with our company's commitment to producing meat to independent environmental standards," says Steve.

"We believe Rissington Breedline's high quality genetics could help us to achieve that goal."

Rissington Breedline CEO Graham Leech says it's an exciting project to be involved in.

"We have an ongoing relationship with Marks & Spencer having been involved in the last five years with the innovation and implementation of the integrated supply chain model for New Zealand supply of Primera lamb to the UK. This substantial research project is costing almost \$1m New Zealand dollars and we hope it will enable expansion of our UK-based genetics business."

The trial is based at Bowhill in the Scottish border country and will compare progeny from the recently exported Primera, with Primera already in the UK and Texels - crossed with Highlander, Blackface and Mule ewes. The 1,350 ewes in the trial have been split into 27 mating groups. Linden Foods, based in Belfast, is the meat processor involved in the production assessment work.

Steve McLean says more and more consumers are demanding to know from where and how the lamb they are eating was grown.

"This trial will help ensure the journey of the lamb from pasture to plate is transparent and of the standard our consumers expect," says Steve.

### **For further information contact:**

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