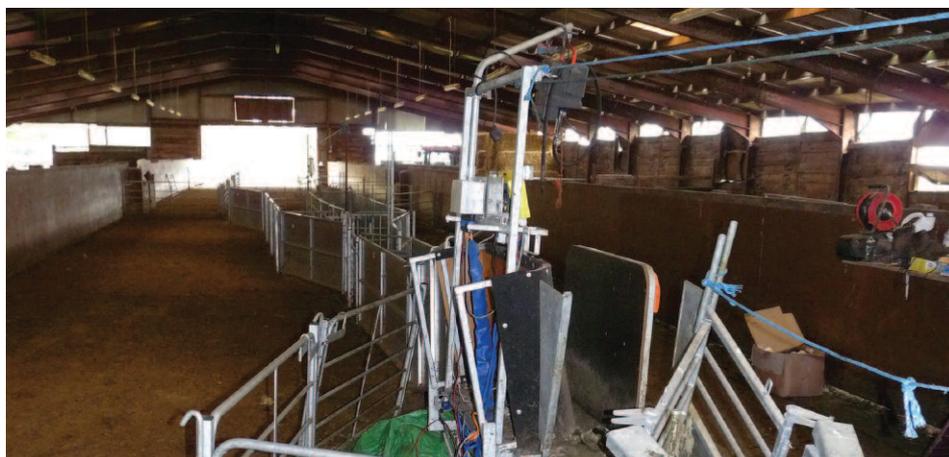




the perfect partner

COMBI CLAMP

USER TESTIMONIAL



Sheep Just Line-up to be Treated!

Lowther Estates has plenty of history but it's the coming years that it's really looking forward to! Lowther Castle and farmlands have belonged to the Lowther family for 800 years and it's Lowther Park Farms Ltd., the estates "in hand" farming company, which now manages 3,200 acres of farmland and historic parkland. All of the land is ring fenced, lies at 400-1,100 feet above sea level and comprises of medium clay soils to sand, with the higher land being shallow soil over limestone rock. Management practises adhere to the owner - The Honourable Jim Lowther's - policies of being smart, ethical and profitable. The in hand farming company plays an important role supporting Lowther tenant farmers supplying straw, forage, dried grain and grazing cattle.

Farm Manager, and Farmers Weekly's "Farm Manager 2013", Richard Price has transformed the estates farming business during his five year management. Consolidation, attention to detail and simplifying the farming operations are all core elements in Richards award winning strategy.

One area of major change Richard introduced was increasing the sheep numbers and profitability whilst pulling out of beef production. Lowther Park Farms exited an organic system in 2011, returning to an extensive commercial regime. Each farm enterprise has to be a stand alone profit centre, and whilst the farming business appreciates the ELS and HLS financial support, the Lowther family re-invest a lot of money into conservation planting trees and hedges etc. The farming company is 100% self financing. An area of improvement in flock management included adopting redundant beef buildings to form three permanent sheep handling centres.

Previously the 3,000 ewe flock was managed by five shepherds, whereas now with the new handling improvements three shepherds manage 5,280 ewes and 1,000 replacements. A Ritchie Combi Clamp sheep handling system was introduced as part of the smart thinking process in 2012 and a second unit introduced in 2013.

Various sheep handling systems were researched, evaluated and tested including staff time operation requirements. With a Ritchie Combi Clamp installed into two of the permanent handling systems, staff no longer need to catch and hold sheep, but are able to concentrate on the job in hand. Two shepherds now treat 2,000 fat lambs/ewes in a day with each sheep being gently but securely held, be it for tagging, injecting, weighing or foot trimming. Shedding gates within the sheep run separate the animals once through the Combi Clamp. Flock management has been taken to new levels with regular flock monitoring via the sheep's electronic ear tags, providing results on weight gain, market readiness and lamb to ram ratio. "The sheep line up to be treated." comments Richard, "Once the sheep have been through the unit they seem to appreciate the quietness within the operation... and so do the staff!"

The farm works a rotational flock field pattern around the three handling set-ups so sheep are always moving towards a pen holding area for treatment most weeks of the year. Each sheep-handling unit is indoors, in the dry, and farm staff appreciate the speed and efficiency the Ritchie unit offers, whilst reducing stress to both animal and operator. Encouraging "Pride in the Job" ultimately rewards everyone involved on the farm and help to keep good staff happy. Without the Combi Clamp Richard comments he would require 5 hard working shepherds to handle the volume of sheep - and staff would be exhausted by lunchtime!!

The Ritchie Combi Clamp has many different features that make the Ritchie sheep handler unique and very versatile. Operating "hands free" the shepherd utilises a foot treadle plate to control a wrap around, soft sided side panel which holds the sheep gently but firmly. The quiet operation of the unit is one of its most underrated features and when combined with a three way auto-draft exit gate, electronic ear tag monitoring weighing coupled to pre-programmed software technology, flock management at Lowther Park Farms is providing records of farming history for future Lowther generations.

"The future of profitable lamb production is not through the 'brown envelope'" says Richard, "but through attention to detail, minimal stress and efficient conversion of grass into protein. We have a top drawer team of shepherds at Lowther who are increasing profits annually and are using technology and innovation to reach the farms goals."

