

## MEDIA STATEMENT

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### Lamb rich in healthy fats now on the menu in top New Zealand restaurants

A new kind of lamb boasting a unique fat profile and billed as the world's healthiest has been launched in leading New Zealand restaurants.

Te Mana Lamb, bred in the New Zealand high country and finished on chicory herb pastures, is finely-marbled and rich in naturally-elevated polyunsaturated and Omega-3 fats.

The launch of the first commercial quantities is challenging a 20-year-old tradition of producing lean lamb and instead rearing animals with higher levels of what nutritionists' call "good fat". In addition to the health benefits, many chefs believe fat is needed for red meat to process well, cook well and be tender and succulent with much of the flavour contained within the fat.

Te Mana Lamb is part of the Omega Lamb Project, a Primary Growth Partnership (PGP) programme between leading food company Alliance Group, a group of progressive farmers known as Headwaters and the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI).

The project is aiming to increase the total value of lamb and the share of value captured in New Zealand by developing healthy, high quality branded products.

Mike Tate, General Manager of the Omega Lamb Project, said the project builds on a decade-long scientific programme and breakthrough research involving Headwaters that's found that the right combination of genetics, management and feeding can alter the fat profile of lamb and produce animals that are healthy, while delivering a healthier product for consumers.

"New Zealand lamb is internationally renowned for its quality by consumers and the hospitality industry.

"However, Te Mana Lamb is something different. The specific breeding programme and pasture requirements don't lend themselves initially to mass production. At this stage, it is very much aimed at the fine dining experience. We see it as heralding a rebirth of different lamb dishes and reaffirmation of New Zealand as the home of the world's best lamb."

There has been an extremely positive response from chefs, and the feedback from multiple taste panels shows the extra good fats really enhance succulence and eating quality, said Mr Tate.

Peter Russell, General Manager Marketing for Alliance Group, said the Omega Lamb Project was originally conceived to produce less 'lean' sheep, able to thrive better in high altitudes, pastures and conditions.

"The happy discovery was these lambs were not just healthier, but also better-eating due to a new type of intra muscular fat, the healthy polyunsaturated Omega-3 fat; which in turn means the resulting lamb doesn't taste or cook like any other lamb before it.

“Te Mana doesn’t behave like regular lamb when cooking. Because the lamb meat is full of ‘good fat’, it has essentially less moisture. That means it doesn’t suffer shrinkage when cooking, retains its shape, flavour and texture and is more versatile.

“It boasts a delicacy and lightness in mouth feel and a mild aroma that no other lamb before it has been capable of. The product has outstanding succulence, tenderness and flavour.

“This discovery will benefit a whole new generation of foodies that may have thought lamb was consigned to a previous generation.”

Justine Gilliland, Director Investment Programmes for the Ministry for Primary Industries, said: “Over time, the programme aims to deliver premiums for our farmers and processors, and raise the value and profitability of New Zealand’s lamb overall.

“This Primary Growth Partnership programme is designed to add over \$400 million in earnings, increase lamb revenues by 34% for adopting farmers and deliver a 19-fold return on the government’s investment.

“Many of the technology and systems developed will also apply to grass-fed product, and the wider lamb supply.”

Te Mana Lamb has been tested to chef and customer acclaim at luxury lodges and leading restaurants such as Auckland’s Langham and Wellington’s Bolton Hotel as part of a trial in 2016.

Dale Bowie, chef and co-owner of the renowned Wanaka Gourmet Kitchen, one of the chefs who has been serving the lamb, said: “It’s a revelation – radically different. With ordinary lamb, I have to do a lot of adjusting during cooking, but with Te Mana Lamb, it’s really simple to get a perfect result every time.

“Since we’ve been using Te Mana shoulders in the restaurant, many customers have commented the lamb is even better than before. It’s really succulent, with a great taste but none of the fattiness you traditionally associate with lamb.

“We’ve had customers say they don’t like lamb but when others on their table start saying how good the lamb is, they try some and think it’s phenomenal. The meat is so moist and succulent you just can’t go wrong. In terms of new recipes and innovation, the sky’s the limit.”

Volker Marecek, executive chef of The Langham, said the new class of lamb was a game-changer for chefs: “This lamb hits the sweet spot for taste, tenderness and succulence.”

Te Mana Lamb was also selected as the centrepiece of the main dish prepared by New Zealand’s team when it competed in the international Culinary Olympics in October, winning a coveted silver medal in the live hot kitchen competition.

Te Mana Lambs are raised in New Zealand’s iconic high country in spring. Then in summer they are brought down to naturally graze selected chicory and chicory / red clover pastures.

Te Mana forms part of Alliance Group’s Pure South family of premium lamb brands with each celebrating the distinctive characteristics developed due to its origins, forage and flavours.

About 30,000 Te Mana lambs have reached the programme’s criteria for Omega-3 intramuscular and polyunsaturated fats this year.

Te Mana Lamb is currently being served at the following restaurants:

- Ostro, Auckland
- SIDART, Auckland
- Cassia, Auckland
- Langham Hotel, Auckland
- Woodpecker Hill, Auckland
- Cable Bay Vineyards, Waiheke Island
- Matterhorn - Wellington
- Jack's Point Clubhouse, Queenstown
- Minaret Station Alpine Lodge, Wanaka
- Wanaka Gourmet Kitchen, Wanaka
- Rata, Queenstown
- Chillingworth Road, Christchurch
- The Barnacle, Auckland
- Blanket Bay Lodge, Queenstown

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