

A North Island sheep station muster

It is an early start for the staff on Paparata, a 7,000 ha station situated in the rugged King Country of the Central North Island. The ewes and their lambs are to be mustered off the hills, and this is best done before the day gets too hot.

Because of the terrain, horses are still the favoured mode of travel. The only sounds that can be heard as the stock are slowly herded down into the tree studded valley, are the ewes and lambs calling to each other, with the occasional stockman's whistle and bark from the working dogs.

Once all the stock are in the cool shade of the large purpose built covered yards, the first priority is to look after the horses. A quick wash down and feed before being put to rest in a nearby paddock.

Working in the sheep yards can be hot and dusty, the dogs work hard to keep the sheep together as the stockman are busy drafting. The noise levels rise and dust whips around.

At the end of the day, it is a job well done. The stock are returned to their paddocks and the hardworking sheep dogs are rewarded with a tucker of fresh meat and a well deserved rest.

New Zealand sheep and beef farms (also known as dry-stock), farm around 3.7 million cattle and 30 million sheep. The major export markets for sheep and beef, worth over \$5 billion to the New Zealand economy, are North American, Asia and the European Union. Free-range, grass-fed farming has long been the backbone of New Zealand's primary industry.

<http://www.gerhardeggerphotographer.com>