

23 February 2026

Claire Bleakley

President

GE Free NZ

By email: claire@gefree.org.nz

Dear Claire,

Official Information Act Request (PFR Ref. OIA.25.007)

I write to respond to your further request for information on 3 February 2026, related to the HME feeding trial. Below beside your questions, we have included our responses:

1. Were there a total of 48 sheep selected for the trial?

- **Part 1: Covariate Analysis** - A covariate analysis is standard preliminary work designed to minimise differences in all subjects across all treatments. A total of 48 sheep were fed commercial silage and their methane emissions measured. 24 sheep were selected from the covariate analysis (consider them as being from the middle of the bell curve) and paired 1:1 based on equivalence of emissions, then one from each pair randomly allocated to be fed either Null ryegrass (non-HME) or HME Ryegrass.
- **Part 2: Null vs. HME Ryegrass Feeding Trial** - A total of 12 sheep were fed ensiled Null ryegrass (non-HME). A total of 12 sheep were fed ensiled HME Ryegrass. Both types of ensiled ryegrass were grown in a containment glasshouse, harvested, and ensiled under the same conditions.

2. 24 were fed Null or HME ryegrass?

12 sheep were fed ensiled Null ryegrass (non-HME). 12 sheep were fed ensiled HME Ryegrass.

3. Can I presume that there are a further 24 sheep fed conventional ryegrass?

No sheep were fed conventional ryegrass (neither fresh nor ensiled) as part of the Null vs. HME Ryegrass Feeding Trial. Conventional (= commercial) ryegrass would not have been grown, harvested, nor ensiled under the same conditions as those used for the Null ryegrass and the HME Ryegrass, and therefore would not have been suitably comparable in the trial. In addition, the genetics (and associated characteristics) of conventional ryegrass would be very different to the background genetics of the Null ryegrass and the HME Ryegrass, again meaning it would not have been suitably comparable in the trial.

4. If so what was the species of conventional ryegrass?

See answer to Q3.

5. *How did the GGT levels affect the whether selection?*

GGT levels above 70 indicate previous exposure to facial eczema (sporidesmin toxin) which can naturally grow in NZ pastures during summer. Only sheep with GGT levels below 70 were selected for the study.

6. *Why were not the same tests carried out on the GGT, Triglycerides, B-OHB, Urea and Creatinine before the trial commenced on the selected sheep?*

The pre-trial test was only to test for previous exposure to facial eczema not for trial measurements/treatment comparisons.

7. *Can I have the raw data on each of the 48 animals methane emissions?*

In analysing the data from the HME animal feeding trial, our scientists have made a serendipitous discovery, not directly related to the purpose of the trial. The discovery requires further development and investigation and may also be protected by potential intellectual property. Disclosure of the data could disclose the discovery and therefore prevent the Bioeconomy Science Institute from obtaining intellectual property in the discovery, as well as limit opportunities to seek funding or partners to further investigate, develop and possibly commercialise the discovery. Accordingly, section 9(2)(i) of the Official Information Act applies, to provide good reason for withholding the data requested to enable the Bioeconomy Science Institute to carry out commercial activities without prejudice or disadvantage.

We recognise that there is public interest in transparency of outcomes in relation to the HME feeding trial recorded in the raw data. Our scientists are currently in the process of preparing a manuscript for publication of the outcomes of the trial, which we expect will be published soon, though we are unable to give a timeframe as the peer review and publication process of scientific journals is out of our control. While not directly providing the data that you seek through that process, we believe the public interest in the outcomes of the trial will nonetheless be met in a different way. We also therefore don't believe the public interest factors outweigh the reasons for withholding the data requested, and we have therefore decided to withhold the data.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

If you wish to discuss this decision with us, please feel free to contact me at nick.barracough@agresearch.co.nz.

Yours sincerely,

Nick Barracough

Chief Legal Counsel – AgResearch Group