

RealFarmer

FOR EVERYTHING FARMING AND FAMILY

JUNE / JULY 2018

Building a sweet
legacy in the high
country

Bees keep
agri economy
flying

Life change
leads to growing
opportunities

Options open
up to lower farm
footprint

Has the cropping
industry changed
in 20 years?

From the Group CEO



We work hard to bring you a vast array of informative and interesting articles, which showcase the diversity, depth and breadth of all things pertaining to agriculture.

Every issue of Real Farmer is a careful blend of articles from reputable and

knowledgeable rural experts designed to provide you with up-to-date information and insights into the varied aspects of our exciting farming sector.

And this Real Farmer is no exception, with plenty to interest everyone.

In this issue we are taking a look at a couple of farming operations, which are a little outside the norm. We hear from experts within New Zealand's apiculture sector who report on our thriving bee industry, which is currently experiencing high demand to meet the pollination requirements for our specialist seed crops, such as carrots, radish and pak choy, and for its valuable honey harvests.

Mees Bees NZ Ltd was formed three years ago by Ben and Leah Mee in the high country of Mid Canterbury. Their honey business focusses on producing high quality alpine honey in a sustainable, family focused way and the venture fulfils Ben's long held interest in bees and apiculture. It's quite a shift from flying helicopters and nursing in Perth, Australia, but the couple are now

working hard to ensure their business benefits the environment, farmers and the community they work in.

A lifestyle change is also behind another one of our feature stories in this issue of Real Farmer. Canterbury saffron growers, Geoff and Jude Slater were long-term city dwellers, until a life changing stroke turned their world upside down and forced them to look for an alternative lifestyle, which could generate an income while also allowing Geoff to look after Jude. Saffron has proved to be a great solution, and ideally suited to Canterbury's cold winters; its warm, dry summers; and its free draining soil types.

Still in Canterbury, we also catch up with Oxford dairy farmer, Andrew Mehrtens. Like many farmers on the Canterbury Plains, he has been anxiously keeping an eye on the implications of the region's land and water regional plan and its proposed nitrogen limits. Keen to explore his options he set up a farm trial on his 330ha dairy unit to compare nitrogen based liquid product alongside conventional dry urea fertiliser. He shares his experiences with Agrichem, an Australian company regarded as a pioneer in the liquid fertiliser industry.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Real Farmer. Happy reading.

Rob Sharkie
027 801 9929
robert.sharkie@ruralco.co.nz

RealFarmer

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RURALCO NZ LIMITED
PO Box 433, Ashburton 7740
0800 RURALNZ (787 256)
www.ruralco.co.nz

EDITORIAL ENQUIRIES:
Our team welcome your contributions, enquiries and letters.
Please email to:
marketing@ruralco.co.nz

ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES:
Please contact the Marketing Department on:
Tel: 0800 RURALNZ (787 256);
marketing@ruralco.co.nz

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CONTRIBUTORS

Anita Body
Annie Studholme
Niamh McCarthy
Richard Rennie

PHOTOGRAPHY

Amy Piper
Annie Studholme
Bryce Sharkie

TECHNICAL ARTICLES

Agrifeeds
Tel 0800 787 256
ruralco@ruralco.co.nz
www.ruralco.co.nz
Ballance Agri-Nutrients
Tel 0800 787 256
ruralco@ruralco.co.nz
www.ruralco.co.nz

Beef + Lamb New Zealand
Tel 0800 233 352
enquiries@beeflambnz.com
www.beeflambnz.com

Craig Trotter
Centre for Dairy Excellence
Tel 03 693 1043
info@dairyexcellence.co.nz
www.dairyexcellence.co.nz

DairyNZ
Tel 0800 4 324 7969
info@dairynz.co.nz
www.dairynz.co.nz

Datacom Payroll
Tel 0800 111 414
NettpayAnswers@datacom.co.nz
www.datacompayroll.co.nz

Farmside
Tel 0800 32 76 74
contact@farmside.co.nz
www.farmside.co.nz

Farm Strong
info@farmstrong.co.nz
www.farmstrong.co.nz
Nick Pyke, CEO
FAR - The Foundation for Arable Research
Tel 03 345 5783
far@far.org.nz
www.far.org.nz

Horticulture NZ
Mike Chapman, CEO
Horticulture New Zealand
Tel 04 472 3795
mike.chapman@hortnz.co.nz
www.hortnz.co.nz

Irrigation NZ
Tel 03 341 2225
admin@irrigationnz.co.nz
www.irrigationnz.co.nz

Lincoln University
Tel 0800 10 60 10
info@lincoln.ac.nz
www.lincoln.ac.nz

Peter Jacob
Ruralco Compliance Manager
Tel 0800 787 256
Peter.Jacob@ruralco.co.nz
www.ruralco.co.nz

Tracey Gordon
Ruralco Energy Account Manager
Tel 0800 787 256
Tracey.Gordon@ruralco.co.nz
www.ruralco.co.nz

Sebco
Tel 0800 473 226
ed@sebco.co.nz
www.sebco.co.nz

Ian Hodge
VetEnt Riverside Ashburton
Tel 03 308 2321
riverside@vetent.co.nz
www.vetent.co.nz



ON THE COVER:
Geoff Slater picks saffron flowers daily during the season into sterilised buckets

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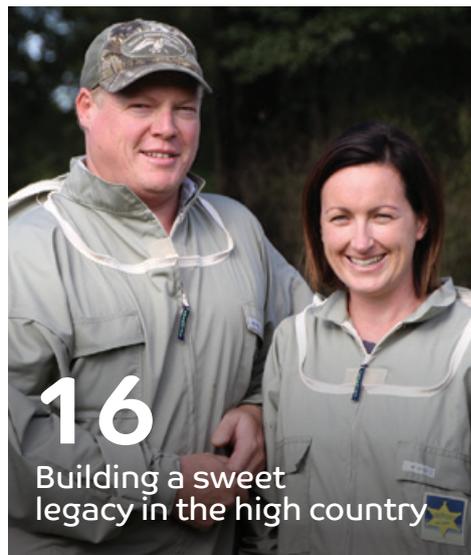
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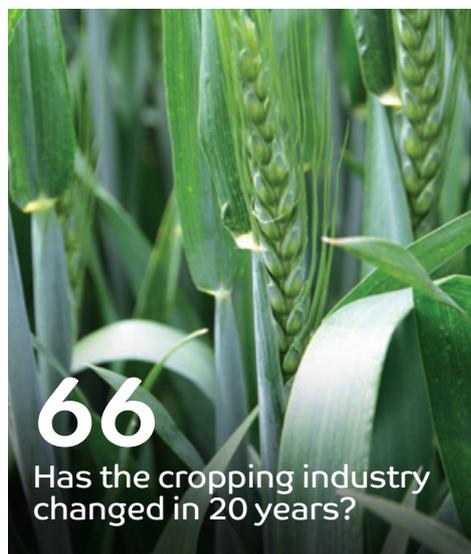
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Life change leads to growing opportunities



A lifestyle change signaled a return to farming roots for Canterbury Saffron growers Geoff and Jude Slater.

WORDS AND IMAGES BY ANNIE STUDHOLME

Geoff and Jude's story starts about five years ago. Happily living in Christchurch, where Geoff worked in civil construction, the Slater's whole world was turned upside down when Jude suffered a severe stroke, which very nearly cost her her life, resulting in nine months of rehab.

Reduced to just one income, it forced the pair to look at other alternatives. "I wanted to spend more time with Jude, and the only way I could see to do that was moving onto a lifestyle block that could generate us an income," explains Geoff.

Although they had lived in the city for more than 30 years, both had grown up on farms and had a strong affinity with the land. Jude was brought up on a sheep farm in Southland, while Geoff's family were dairying in the Catlins. To forsake suburban living for a small piece of paradise seemed like the logical next move, but there was still the question of how they were supposed to generate an income off just 4 hectares.

Geoff looked at a number of different options, and that's when he discovered saffron. The bulk of the world's saffron is grown in Iran, Greece, Morocco and India, but there are a handful of growers in New Zealand with the return to growers doubling in the past 20 years.

Saffron, which is the stigma of the purple-petalled autumn flowering *Crocus sativus*, is the world's most expensive spice; weight for weight it's more valuable than gold, and has been used as a yellow dye, perfume, medicine and in food flavouring for thousands of years. Traditionally, just a pinch of saffron is used to flavour rice dishes such as risotto, biryani, paella, and in the French style fish soup, bouillabaisse. It can also be added to sweet foods such as rice pudding, halwa, cakes and pastries.

Geoff soon found that the unique Mediterranean native was also ideally suited



to Canterbury's cold winters and warm dry summers, preferring well-draining, light, friable soils with a sandy or loamy texture, and doesn't need a lot of irrigation.

"We looked at growing blueberries and feijoas, but with the cost of the trees and ongoing irrigation, they simply didn't add up. In some cases, it was going to be two to three years down the track before we could generate any income, whereas saffron was right away," explains Geoff.

They went in search of the right property and looked at many before settling on 4 hectares near at West Eyreton, near Rangiora. "We looked at 8–9 different 10-acre blocks but

ABOVE: Saffron is the world's most expensive spice; weight for weight, it's more expensive than gold
BELOW: Weeds remain the Slater's biggest problem with all weeding done by hand

kept coming back to this one and we won't be moving from here. We just love it here." After much research, Geoff and Jude took the plunge and planted their first 6,000 corms (bulb-like plant organs) which they managed to source from a fellow local grower in January 2017, planting them at 10cm apart and between 10–15cm deep. Just 40 days later, on March 27, the Slater's excitingly started welcoming the first of thousands of tiny crocus flowers as they emerged through the soil. Having found full-time work on a nearby dairy run-off, Geoff worked the harvest in around his employment, picking in the early mornings before the flowers have had a chance to wilt. Harvest lasts around 4–5 weeks depending on the weather. Each plant may produce 4–6 flowers over the entire picking season. Flowers have to be picked daily, explains Geoff. "You can't afford to leave a flower until the next day because it will deteriorate."

The blooms are picked into sterilised buckets and carted inside, where Geoff spreads them out on a table and tirelessly plucks out each of the precious orange-red stigmas by hand before transferring them to a small, domestic dehydrator, drying them





down to 10% moisture. While the flowers can be stored for up to three days in the fridge, ideally, it's best to move the stigmas straight away, he says.

Drying times vary depending on the machine, humidity and quality of the threads, but on average, Geoff dries them at 65 degrees for about 1 hour to achieve the maximum glossy, dark red colour.

It is pain-staking, labour intensive work, but the pay-off is worth it, says Geoff. To make up one kilogram of dried saffron, requires more than 170,000-200,000 flowers, depending on the quality. To put it in perspective, one kilogram of quality dried saffron sits at well over \$10,000 on the commercial market and can fetch anywhere up to \$30,000 per kilogram.

For Geoff, it's been a huge learning experience. They knew little about growing saffron when they first put it in. Luckily, he says saffron is "pretty easy" to grow, and it's the perfect lifestyle crop because it doesn't require much land.

"The other benefit of saffron is that it is dormant over the summer, so it doesn't need water, and it starts growing again in April. It can get root rot due to poor drainage, but we use a product to try and eliminate that, which we use after flowering or when it's dormant in the summer."

Although it doesn't need irrigation, looking ahead, ideally Geoff wants to have the ability to irrigate when and if required. Rain (irrigation) 10-15 days before harvest can greatly affect production, whereas drought has a tendency to cause small flowers and stigmas. Rain in the spring is also said to be important for producing corms underground. He's looking at making the space between the rows big enough so he can fit a tractor between them, so he can use a 1,000 litre water tank to spray irrigate when needed.

"It's like everything, if the soil conditions are right, they get fertiliser and water, they will grow. It's just about knowing what they need to be at their best," says Geoff.



LEFT: Saffron is infertile and does not set viable seed, so replication comes from corm (bulb-like plant organs) multiplication
BELOW: Geoff picks the flowers daily during the season into sterilised buckets
BELOW LEFT: Saffron is planted in long beds about 1m wide at 10cm apart at 10-15cm deep

To maintain a high nutrient content in the soil Geoff's found that a gypsum soil conditioner with added potassium works well to enhance flower production. During flowering, he is also exploring the option of using natural fertilisers such as fish or seaweed. They also use a mix of dolomite lime and magnesium, as saffron thrives best in a neutral soil (ph 6-6.5).

With spraying not an option to keep a totally natural product, weeds continue to be their biggest battle, with all weeding carried out carefully by hand.

Ultimately, like so many crops, Mother Nature has the potential to have a huge impact. "Last year was good because we had the frosts to bring them on, but this year's been a lot warmer and we haven't had the frosts, so it was almost a week earlier. The rain over the summer has also helped. The stigmas weren't as big as they could have been this year, but they were much brighter," he explains.

This season was just the Slater's second in operation. Unlike most traditional crops which are planted annually, saffron is infertile and does not set viable seed, so replication comes from corm multiplication. Each season the crop grows as the corms multiply. "It's not cheap to put in (5,000 corms cost \$8,000), but the beauty is that it's a once, they keep on producing," explains Geoff.

Working on an average of each mother corm being replaced by four new cormlet daughters (in some cases they can have as many as 10) each season, the Slater's should have had 24,000 corms this season, which equates to four times the amount of saffron from 2017.

By the fourth year, they could have as many as 384,000 corms in the ground at which time Geoff intends on digging them up in December, sorting and air drying them before replanting them in bigger beds, so the process can start again.

"We are working on the lowest side of the scale. At the fourth-year mark we could be





ABOVE: Every tiny stigma is pulled out by hand
RIGHT: Depending on the quality, between 170,000-200,000 flowers will yield 1kg of saffron which can fetch anywhere from \$10-\$30k on the commercial market

BELOW RIGHT: Saffron is dried in a home dehydrator at just the right amount to achieve that maximum, glossy red colour so revered world wide

harvesting up to 2.25 kilograms of saffron. If we worked on five corms per year that would grow to 4.4 kilograms in the fourth year. You can always overstate it, but it's nice to be realistic. By year five we hope to be producing 4-5 kilograms of saffron."

Geoff has just finished his second harvest. He was pleased with the results, but it's made him realise that they'll need extra help during the 4-5 week picking and processing season going forward.

Harvest time is a tough few weeks; sleep is at a premium. Geoff is out there on his hands and knees picking most mornings after the dew has lifted, and then is up into the wee hours of the following morning by the time he's finished removing the stigmas, going to bed with his fingers stained purplish-black from the petals. It's all encompassing. There is no time for anything else. "We barely managed this season, and it's only going to get bigger. There's just no let up over that time; it's full on for a few weeks and then it's [the picking season] gone," he says.

As well as employing short-term staff, Geoff is also looking at options for future mechanisation to get him off his hands and knees, but over thousands of years no-one has come up with a way of substituting picking by hand because of the delicateness of the saffron. That's why it's so expensive. "There are a lot of options out there, it's just a matter of finding one that is going to work for us."

As the business grows, Geoff hopes to create new markets for his prized saffron either selling direct to restaurants or adding it to other products like cosmetics or honey, but admittedly that's still a year or two off.

While he and Jude are focused on growing their saffron business for now, he is also experimenting with growing Myoga ginger (*Zingiber mioga*) with the first rhizomes planted last October with the first crop expected in 2019.

A native to Japan, China and South Korea, Myoga ginger or Japanese ginger is a true delicacy, sought after by Japanese Kiwis but almost unknown by everyone else. A bit like a cross between ginger and a mild pickled onion, it is floral and gingery, with the flower buds and shoots (not the root as with traditional ginger) used in many Asian-style soups, salads, stir-fry's, seafood and savoury dishes.

While there is little grown in New Zealand commercially, research results from the late 1980s and 1990s suggested it was likely to be a successful crop when grown under 50 per cent shade cloth to avoid sunburn on the top growth, explains Geoff.

It likes similar soil conditions as saffron, but the similarities don't end there. It also dies down, retreating underground before the frosts arrive and re-emerges in September.

The flower shoots come up from the soils separately from the leafy stems and the pale-yellow flowers open at ground level. The unopened buds are harvested just before they appear through the soils and the flowers start opening. Picking starts in February and goes through to about April. It's so new to New Zealand there seems to be no diseases or pests to attack it.

Geoff is excited about seeing just how successful the Myoga ginger might be. "It's always exciting when you are growing something for the first time, but only time will tell."

In time, Geoff's confident they can be completely self-sufficient off their 4 hectares and is looking forward to the day when he doesn't have to leave the property to find additional work elsewhere to supplement their income.

The Slater's joined Ruralco last year with an eye to the future, broadening the spectrum of outlets they can use throughout Canterbury, securing great deals, while at the same time simplifying their accounts with just one, simple bill.



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Go Further

Agriculture poised for technology leap

At last year's New Zealand Precision Agriculture conference key note speaker Raj Khasla, Professor of Precision Agriculture at Colorado State University maintained that technology will do much to lift New Zealand agriculture's sustainability and productivity. WORDS BY RICHARD RENNIE



He spoke as someone from a university priding itself on its sustainability focus, and was confident technology will do much to help right the problems of nitrate losses and water footprint that have dogged agriculture, here and overseas. He also pointed to the huge boost in computing power that has enabled farming to become automated and sensor based, with the Galaxy S6 smartphone rated billions of times more powerful than the computer that got Apollo 11 to the moon.

ATS/Ruralco Director Gabrielle Thompson can put a Canterbury context around Prof Khasla's observations, with her first-hand experience owning and operating a 530ha arable and store lamb property at Dorie with her husband Peter and his family.

Gabrielle is a strong proponent within the ATS/Ruralco Board of technology uptake and rural connectivity, championing the co-operative's latest move to an eCommerce, on-line billing and invoice system for shareholders.

Back on the family property she is witnessing the benefits of new technology in a more obvious fashion as airborne drones regularly patrol the property's potato crop, equipped with infra-red

cameras to identify the presence of the psyllid within plants.

The 530ha farm block incorporates a recently purchased 170ha property. This offers a blank slate opportunity for them to establish a farm equipped with the latest in remote technology innovations.

"I think there has been this perception that maybe agriculture, and farmers are a bit slower to take up this sort of technology."

"Of course some people will be slower than others to pick up on it, but overall I think there is a generational shift going on in agriculture, where younger farmers are taking over farms from an older generation that maybe was more reluctant to pick up some things."

"But the new generation of farmers in their 30s are comfortable with the internet and technology, and keen to have it on board. And often they are tasked with running really big operations over hundreds of hectares, so they need technology to play a role to make that task possible, and effective."

While drones may be the most obvious example of tech uptake in broad-acre cropping country of Canterbury, Gabrielle predicts some of the big

gains in productivity and sustainable production will come closer to the ground.

"There are some things we will probably have to change our thinking about, for example like what a tractor is. While people are concerned about large un-manned tractors out in paddocks, we are just as likely to have swarms of small solar powered 'tractors' out there, spraying specific weeds, or applying fertiliser in specific amounts."

Closer to the definition of a robot than the traditional concept of a tractor, these machines could ultimately stay in-situ while the crop grows, tending to specific tasks over its lifetime.

In the Bay of Plenty researchers are only a couple of years away from commercialising an automated kiwifruit robot that will alternate between picking, pruning and spraying depending upon the time of year, operating 24/7 in a sector struggling to find enough staff for burgeoning crop volumes.

"I think the outcome of such technology is we will have smaller machines that consolidate the soil less, with less spray residues because only a specific weed is targeted, and lower nutrient losses because fertiliser will be applied in a more precise fashion."

She sees this technology being responsible for the next leap in agricultural productivity gains, the last achieved after World War 2 through the use of sprays and nitrogen fertilisers.

More passive background technology is already in play on their property, with the latest generation of soil moisture probes providing real time data on water loss on their property.

"These allowed us to go on a holiday this summer for the first time and not have to be at home irrigating. We could log in and observe where the moisture was being lost, and make some tactical decisions about where we would send the centre pivot next."

While they had to have a family member move the equipment, the next centre pivot they install will also be capable of being moved remotely to where it needs to be.

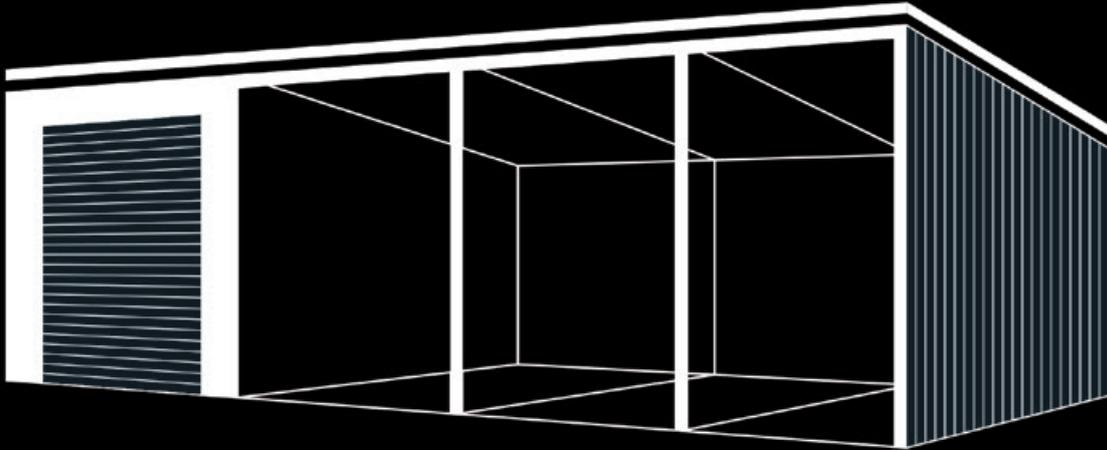
Gabrielle has welcomed New Zealand's steps into space through Rocket Lab's success, and sees huge potential for farmers seeking satellites to perform specific tasks.

"The cost of getting small satellites up in space is a lot less, and we are now moving to the point you can get regular updates via satellite on farm pasture cover and crop performance for example."

As consolidation in Canterbury drives farms to be bigger, such measurement technology will save valuable man hours over manually logging grass growth and crop performance.

"It is a very exciting time, the growth we can expect will be exponential, and we are only at the bottom of the curve right now."

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Getting prepared for payday reporting changes

The changes coming for New Zealand's payroll reporting system will affect all employers. Farmers need to be up to speed on what the changes mean and what they need to do.

WORDS AND IMAGES SUPPLIED BY DATACOM

From 1 April 2018, New Zealand employers paying more than \$50,000 PAYE and Employer Superannuation Contribution Tax (ESCT) per year have the option to switch to an electronic payday reporting system, before it becomes compulsory on 1 April 2019. While a year may seem a long time to prepare, it pays to do your homework early to avoid hassles with Inland Revenue later.

What is payday reporting?

If you own or run a farm, you'll be filing employee earnings and PAYE information to Inland Revenue each month, no matter how frequently you pay your employees. But under payday reporting, this information will be reported to the IRD every time your employees are paid.

This brings New Zealand into line with the UK and Australia and streamlines the whole reporting process, making any mistakes easier to spot and correct online as soon as they're made and allows government social policy to be based on more real time information. Paper IR 330 and KiwiSaver deduction forms for new employees will go online as well, making it easier for employers to enter the correct information when an employee starts. Payday reporting relates only to the need to report the earnings and PAYE information

each pay to Inland Revenue. There is no change to the dates on which tax payments are due. These remain the same, either once or twice a month depending on whether your business is withholding less or greater than \$500,000 per year. Employers may choose to make payments on a more frequent basis, but this remains optional.

How can you get ready?

To get your farm business ready, you will need to ensure that the payroll software you are using, or that of your payroll provider, is compatible with payday reporting by 1 April 2019. We suggest you talk to your accountant or payroll provider about the changes and how they are planning to be ready.

Now is a good time to review how well your current payroll system is working for you, and if your needs have changed. Are you already using a payroll system that is built using a modern cloud infrastructure, so it's capable of adapting to the upcoming changes quickly without messy updates? If not, it might be time to take a look at this.

It's also a good time to look at whether you need to make changes to your payroll procedures, similar to when KiwiSaver was introduced. Getting the right procedures

in place can take time, so it's good to have some time up your sleeve.

If you're using Datacom's NetPay solution, the new payday reporting framework will be seamlessly integrated into Datacom's existing payroll software to avoid any disruption to our customers. Our system will be in line with payday reporting well before 1 April 2019 when the new process becomes mandatory. We already handle the Employer Monthly Schedule (EMS) filing requirements for most of you, which means that we're already filing your PAYE information automatically each month without you having to do a thing.

Payday reporting will be handled in much the same way, which means you should notice very little difference (if any) come April 2019. Datacom will simply report this information for you on a real-time payday basis instead of once a month. If you've been filing your EMS manually each month, we recommend you consider filing electronically instead before payday reporting comes into effect.

If you have any questions about whether you or your payroll provider will be ready for the introduction of payday reporting, please give Datacom a call.

Bees keep agri economy flying

Anyone with even a passing interest in agriculture and food will be familiar with the dire stories abounding about the decline in bee numbers throughout parts of the Northern Hemisphere.

WORDS BY RICHARD RENNIE, IMAGES BY AMY PIPER

Reports of whole populations declining, even disappearing through an assortment of diseases have caused huge concern in regions like Europe, and despite the resources thrown into the problem, the reasons still appear difficult to explain.

As with many things in life the humble honey bee has been taken for granted, there has been little census data taken on its health and numbers. Like all under-appreciated things in life, it's not until it's gone that it's noticed.

Reports done on the declines in Europe touch on the impact of pests and diseases, loss of habitat, pesticide impacts and the genetic diversity of bee populations declining.

Here in New Zealand however, it appears bees are thriving, enjoying a new found status not only as the need for their pollination skills grow, with growth in horticultural crops, but also thanks to valuable manuka honey harvests.

The growing value of the honey, for use in medicinal treatments, cosmetics and as a health food has helped inject a renewed level of interest in beekeeping, both as a back yard hobby and as an industry.

In Canterbury, the specialist seed sector is also experiencing growth, providing high value seed crops like carrots, radish and pak choy, all requiring bees to pollinate them.

The small seeds sector is a growing one, requiring more bees every year, and would typically require about 25,000 hives. For some growers the cost per hive is high, at up to \$1,800 a hive, but this compares to a specialty seed industry with an export value of about \$200 million.

In the Bay of Plenty strong growth in high value horticultural crops like Gold kiwifruit, with an additional 700ha a year being converted to the fruit, guarantees a continuing healthy demand for nature's pollinators to keep crops viable. New Zealand now has almost 900,000 hives, well up on the 300,000 in 2000, and every hive hosts about 60,000 bees.

Apiculture New Zealand Chief Executive Karin Kos says the growing market for bees as commercial pollinators has not gone unnoticed by their beekeeping owners.

"In fact, when you look at the nature of the honey business, which can be influenced quite heavily by the weather, having a second string to your business with pollination makes a lot of sense and it is an area more beekeepers are starting to consider."

Dr Mark Goodwin, head bee researcher for Plant and Food has said there was a strong likelihood New Zealand could reach one million hives in only a couple of years.

He said there were health issues facing bees, including varroa's presence now meaning the bees could not exist without human help. However, on a world level, NZ has some of the healthiest bee colonies in the world.



The greatest impact upon New Zealand bee populations in recent years was the incursion of the varroa mite in early 2000, ultimately spreading south to affect the entire country. The biggest population impact on bees has been to almost wipe out the feral bee population here.

Among the multiple factors that have impacted upon bee populations overseas, a United Nations Environment Programme report has identified varroa mite as "the most serious threat to apiculture globally."

However careful management and a strong contingent of hobbyist beekeepers has helped keep the mite at a manageable level in New Zealand.

As with many species suffering from growing human incursion into the natural world, bees represent something of a counter to that. In New Zealand they have thrived with human intervention, driven in part by a growing appreciation that to grow the high value crops overseas markets need, we need bees to make it happen.

The intervention is reflected in registered bee keeping enterprise numbers.

The 2017 Ministry for Primary Industries apiculture monitoring programme records 795,600 hives to the middle of last year, up 110,000 on the year before, with strong demand coming from iwi and corporate expansion. That number is now estimated to be nearer 900,000.

However this increase also came with one of the poorest harvest years on record for honey, with a tonnage of 14,855t the lowest crop since the 2011–12 year when there were only 370,000 hives.

The 2017 bee colony survey found the estimated hive loss to winter 2017 was almost 10%, unchanged from the previous two years and a result that puts New Zealand well up globally in terms of hive and colony health. Overall the number of colonies reported that year had increased by 17%, following a 20% increase the year before that.

Overall the surveys are finding the high beekeeper to hive ratio in New Zealand is helping contribute to generally positive



results. The ratio allows for a more hands on management approach by beekeepers, including being able to inspect hives more regularly for disease and damage, and being able to respond quickly to those problems.

On-commercial or "back yard beekeeping" also plays a big role in reinforcing colony numbers and health. These operations with less than 250 colonies comprise 93% of beekeeping operations, and hobbyists' passion for their interest has helped maintain numbers through urban and rural areas alike.

Of the 7,800 beekeeping enterprises in New Zealand, Canterbury is a big player, comprising 1,048 businesses, almost 50% of the total South Island hives.

The conversion to dairying in the greater Canterbury region has bought an extra challenge to bee populations, with the loss of shelter belts and areas of traditional broom and gorse that once provided valuable nutritional resources for the honey bee at certain times of year.

Federated Farmers "Trees for Bees" campaign has done a lot to help educate farmers on the need to provide for bees in the corners of the farm that are less productive, such as the un-irrigated parts of paddocks, irrigation pond areas and marginal stream and river boundaries.

The campaign provides well founded information for farmers on latest research and planting guides specific to different locations on its website www.treesforbeesnz.org.

Overall Karin Kos says New Zealand is in a good place with its bee health, and her upbeat view also reflects some departure from earlier doomsday forecasts about global bee populations completely disappearing.

An article in Time magazine in 2013 pointed out that the world's "backbone" foods of corn, wheat and rice are self-pollinating. However it would mean for less colourful dinner plates, with plants like lettuce, cherries, kiwifruit and many others absent.

For a country like New Zealand the cost would be even greater, given the billions of dollars earned through valuable horticultural, crop and seed production.

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New device could help identify disease outbreaks

Lincoln University will play a significant role in identifying plant, animal and disease outbreaks after receiving a game-changing piece of technology from two senior food safety researchers in the United States.

WORDS AND IMAGES SUPPLIED BY LINCOLN UNIVERSITY

The BEAM device, which is a scanner for quickly identifying harmful strains of bacteria in food, is the only one of its kind available in New Zealand.

The technology was developed at Purdue University in Indiana with an initial focus on the United States market. It has been offered free of charge to Lincoln University Associate Professor Stephen On, in recognition of his taxonomic skills and common interests with the US researchers.

The unique BEAM technology is designed to better identify disease outbreaks by providing a “specific fingerprint” of bacteria that has been cultured on a standard agar media plate.

This allows scientists to pinpoint strains of interest more quickly, with a particular focus on pathogens.

“If there’s an outbreak of *E. coli* or *Salmonella*, for example, you may have dozens of samples to examine,” said Dr On. “The technology provides the major advantage of identifying the pathogen of concern by rapidly screening it from microorganisms naturally present in food or clinical samples.

“Because it is non-invasive, you can take your isolate of interest and further characterise it with sub-typing methodologies to better identify an outbreak.

“No comparable technology is available elsewhere—it’s a real game-changer.”

Dr On will explore the utility of BEAM in investigations that encompass microbiological aspects never examined, such as characterisations of *Saccaromyces*, *Kluyveromyces* and *Toluraspora* strains used in New Zealand wine production. This means farmers could be able to detect plant and soil health problems much more quickly.

Dr On visited Purdue University in 2015 to investigate whether the BEAM technology would be relevant to New Zealand.

Early work has already shown 26 pathogenic *E. coli* strains important to New Zealand meat products.

“They showed the potential value of BEAM to national problems and indicated that the method might be capable of identifying *E. coli* strains with a higher infection potential than others. This is a first in the history of underpinning BEAM research.”

Dr On will examine a geographically diverse range of strains of microbial species

of clinical and economic importance to New Zealand.

He said the economic and public health significance of pathogenic *E. coli* remained of critical importance and partners of the NZ Food Safety and Science Research Centre (including ESR and Plant & Food Research) had identified other bacterial pathogens of concern, including *Campylobacter* and *Listeria*. “This will require improvements in diagnostics,” he said.

Dr On’s expertise encompasses the theory and practice of microbial taxonomy, notably including the development, evaluation and application of an extensive range of phenotypic and genotypic identification systems for bacteria.

The New Zealand-focused research will complement studies already being undertaken in the US by Endowed Cytometry Professor J. Paul Robinson, of Purdue University, and Professor James Lindsay, senior national program leader for the US Department of Agriculture.

The data will be pooled for maximum global impact.

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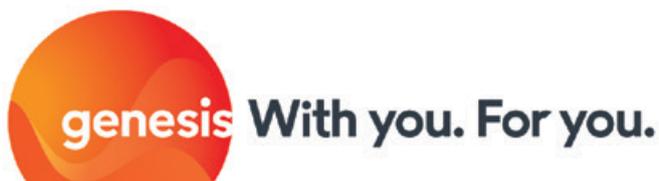
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Conference looks to the future of irrigation

In April IrrigationNZ held its biennial Conference in Alexandra. It was a great chance for the participants to catch up, preview and discuss new technology and changes affecting the sector, whilst talking about the way forward for irrigators.

WORDS AND IMAGE SUPPLIED BY IRRIGATION NEW ZEALAND



Agriculture Minister Damien O'Connor attended the Conference dinner. He said he wanted to see the primary sector striving for value over volume. Large-scale irrigation schemes had to be viable on their own, and only vital regional infrastructure would be supported by Government. The preference is for smaller environmentally sustainable water storage schemes to help prepare for the future.

The Minister said that New Zealand is the best country in the world at farming but that this needed to be backed through a story of integrity. The negative impacts of irrigation, whether real or perceived, needed to be addressed.

INZ also shared its future strategy for the irrigation sector.

A raft of issues are impacting on the sector. Consumers are becoming more conscious of where their food is sourced from, creating a need for sustainable production traceable back to the farm. Demand-supply automation will become increasingly used to reduce food waste, and plant-based food options have already started to replace some traditional protein sources.

Water scarcity will become a more pressing issue globally. In New Zealand although rainfall is relatively plentiful by world standards, it will demand that irrigators become more water efficient and new technologies will evolve to assist this.

There are still water quality and quantity issues to be addressed, but there is a growing shift to farming within limits globally. Achieving better environmental outcomes is now part of the everyday business of farming. In New Zealand a recent national report has shown that more rivers are now improving than deteriorating and farmers are playing an important role in this change. Looking forward as a sector we need to be more transparent and provide more information about irrigation. There is only a limited understanding of how irrigation is used or its benefits.

Meeting regulatory best practice requirements is now a minimum standard. Bottom lines need to be enforced both by sectors and councils, and it does irrigators more harm than good to be seen to be lenient on those who don't comply.

We showcased a wide range of new irrigation technology at our conference expo and heard from speakers on recent advancements. We now have the technology available to enable wide use of precision irrigation. Those who don't adopt this on their own will find eventually they will need to due to increasingly stringent environmental standards.

We would like to see more investigation of catchment wide solutions and the ability to compel everyone in a catchment to support these. For example, a wetland restoration project to restore the water quality may be prohibitive for the property owner alone but sharing the costs across the catchment would allow it to get underway.

Finally, we need to acknowledge that, our sector is not viewed positively by many in the community. There needs to be an increasing focus on how we can contribute to our communities and to improving the environment. Our future decision making needs to look at production, environment and community and for solutions which genuinely balance all three.

Building a sweet legacy in the high country

The Mee's Bees main yard, positioned in the beech forest below Mt Somers

Ben Mee has replaced the buzz of chopper blades with a very different sort of buzz as he and his wife Leah work hard to establish a sustainable business that will be a family legacy for years to come.

WORDS BY RICHARD RENNIE, IMAGES BY AMY PIPER

Three years ago, Ben gave up a 16 year career flying helicopters in New Zealand, Asia and Australia to return back to Canterbury and founded Mees Bees NZ Limited, a honey business focussing on producing a high quality alpine honey in a sustainable, family focused way that benefits the environment, the farmers, and the community they work in.

Ben has harboured a lifetime interest in bees, having done some work when he was much younger with a beekeeper, and he retained that interest even while spending plenty of time himself airborne in his professional career as a chopper pilot.

The couple spent time in Australia, living in Perth where Leah was a nurse and Ben flew helicopters.

But after the birth of their two sons Huey and Thomas, they decided they wanted to return home to their rural roots, to be closer to family and friends. For Leah home was Clinton in South Otago, and for Ben Mount Hutt.

The couple had made the difficult juggle to move back, with Ben continuing to fly out of Perth on a two weeks on, two weeks off roster while Leah came back with the boys.

"We had always known we wanted to do something for ourselves, and start a business of our own and looked at a few options," says Leah. Before Ben had come back permanently they purchased four experimental hives, and it seemed that business would be heading down the apiculture pathway.

To get established Ben called on the help of local long-time beekeeper John Syme.



For John, helping Ben out with the bees has proven to be something of an arc back to where he came from.

"John and John's father were family friends of my grandfather, and our family bought the Symes' farm which originally had their beekeeping operation upon it. John's property now neighbours my parents' farm, so when we bought those initial four hives, John was very keen to help us and teach us what he knew."

At 76 John is still extremely active, packing in plenty of 12-hour days moving hives and checking honey frames within them, with a keen eye for what healthy hives should look like, and helping Ben and Leah identify issues before they become problems.

"John may not have had to deal with varroa when he was beekeeping in his younger years, but he has dealt with almost every other health issue a hive can have, and he's been vital for helping us learn more about what to look for, and how to deal with it," says Ben.

The company in its full form really kicked off when they bought 300 hives from a



ABOVE: Leah, with a full frame of beech forest honeydew, ready for extracting
 ABOVE TOP: From a bee's eye view, checking hives and honey stores
 LEFT: The finished product, which you can find on the shelf at a Ruralco Store near you

reputable Southland beekeeper in 2015, with Leah continuing to juggle the business and family while Ben finished his last year of flying in Australia.

The humble shipping container on Ben's parents' farm they bought to work out of soon became too small, requiring more space and storage and in later 2016 they expanded into Symes' Aperia's former honey shed at Staveley that needed time and investment to bring it up to scratch.

Their upgrading included installing their own Crystech honey extracting plant to give them more control over the quality and consistency of the honey batches as they began to market retail pots of it through Canterbury.





The couple have a long held view that they will not be caught up in expanding too fast, nor be caught in the “Manuka fever” that has swept through the industry in the last couple of years.

“Manuka is only a small part of what we harvest from our hives, and our focus is on Alpine Clover honey, and Honey Dew honey—they are quite different in their own way, with the Alpine Clover’s taste quite distinct from the typical clover honey you will find,” says Ben.

The honey types are not the high value of Manuka, but are establishing their own niche among the keen supporters of their honey, many who compare it to the “honey they used to have when they were kids.”

The couple work hard to cultivate the distinctive types. Working with John, they position hives through the south side of the Rakaia gorge up to Double Hill Station at the top of the gorge, and around the foot hills to Arrowsmith Station on the Ashburton River. Here they capture the unique alpine clover nectar.

“It’s somewhere a lot of beekeepers in their rush to Manuka have shied away from, it’s more remote and you have to work hard to move the hives for winter, where we take them down to private farmland in the beech forests near Mt Hutt and Staveley for pre-wintering.”

The operation also aims to keep the hives fed naturally, with only a small amount of sugar offered early in the season to stimulate the hives’ pre-nectar flow.

Being a local, Ben’s long-time family contacts play a big part in helping with successful hive placement. The locals whose properties he puts the hives on know him well.

The entire operation is built on a relationship of trust with landowners, an element that has been lost in some cases as the industry has clamoured to get more hives in more places to capitalise on the Manuka gold rush.

“It’s a good relationship. They provide the sites for our hives and we provide the pollinators for their clover.”

Meantime the catchment between the Rakaia and Ashburton rivers lends itself well to their Southern Alps Honey brand, putting them closer than any other beekeeping business to the mountains themselves.

Today the couple oversee 1,200 hives and their work placing the hives in beech forests also includes working hard to try and reduce resident wasp populations, by far the biggest threat to bees, and the greatest biomass of species in the forests.

“We have been using Vespex bait which is very effective, but to really deal to greater numbers we would need more baiting from DoC on its adjoining land.”

At a time when New Zealand food producers are told to focus on the “story” behind their food, the Mees have woven much into the background of their honey products.

“A lot of the locals told us they wanted John’s honey back when we started putting it on the shelf, and we are told ours tastes like his did. We try to keep our approach simple and close to traditional methods—beekeeping is one thing, but processing honey well, that is another skill entirely we are also learning.”



ABOVE: Busy bees

ABOVE LEFT: Pre winter inspection of the hives

BELOW: Queen bee with her fellow working bee’s

Today Southern Alps Honey is sold through the Ruralco Farm Supplies stores, the Netherby Butchery in Ashburton and Fox Store in Fox Glacier, with a small amount also sold through word of mouth locally.

“Having our own plant means we can now oversee every step ensuring the frames we put in have quality honey on them and are from the source they need to be from.”

The couple also produce a multi-floral honey that includes a blend of the two main types, along with hints of high country matagouri, lupin and viper’s bugloss (blue weed). Hints of kanuka, manuka, flax, kowhai can also be found in them. This season they also produced a Manuka multi-floral honey.

The honey dew type has a reputation in Asia for its healthy benefits, being high in antioxidants, and the couple have a Japanese client who regularly stops by to stock up his shelves with the variety.

But the Mees are not overly committed to large volume exporting at this stage, and are



enjoying taking a low key, organic approach to the business's growth working alongside John. "John has always said if we wanted to go larger scale retail, you need to have two years stock on hand to allow for the ups and downs in seasonal production. So for us our focus has remained on small scale retail and the rest on bulk sales for now."

To keep the business running smoothly the Mees have established a tight group of workers whose routine fits in well with the business's.

Five local mums and a farmer work from 9.30 to 3.00pm in the extraction and packing plant, providing them with valuable work and social contact in a region where part time jobs are not always so accommodating.

Out in the field beekeeping is heavy, tough work. Every hive needs to be opened and inspected to understand what is happening with the colony and for Ben that hands on inspection is a key reason why he does not want to expand too soon.

"You always run the risk you end up more manager than beekeeper, and that is something I really did not give up my flying career to do!"

Over summer when the honey is in full flow, the honey boxes can weigh up to 35kg, and days are long within the confines of a sweltering beekeeping suit.

They have also recently employed an assistant to work in the field with Ben and Leah.

Courtenay Petrie is an ex high country farmer with an interest in bees and keen to build on that interest. For Ben it is ideal having someone with some "farm sense" working in the business.

"They appreciate things like shutting gates and watching out for stock in the field, but they also have a feel for the weather and what can stress animals, including bees—really you are as much a farmer as you are a beekeeper when it comes to running hives."

Leah is particularly excited about their next step in hive management over the next



couple of years. Working with John on a queen breeding operation they are hoping to "re-queen" the hives twice a year to ensure good hive vitality and health. They are also going to double queen hives from next year.

"It is an old technique, and not one that you see used much, but it is like having a twin engine helicopter, if one starts to fail you still have another to rely upon. There are only a couple of beekeepers in Canterbury that actually do it nowadays, and it is a bit of an art form to do well."

The New Zealand bee population is in a healthy state today, with the country approaching almost 900,000 hives. Ben and Leah have some hard earned advice for anyone considering getting some hives of their own.

"We suggest you get some training first, and be mentored by someone who is already established, or just get your local

ABOVE: Bees with some of their winter stores
TOP: Leah and Nikita in the extraction plant, processing the honey
LEFT: Honey being packaged up for the consumer

beekeeper to put some hives on your farm. It is also important to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy hives, as this can be disastrous for neighbouring beekeepers hives if disease spreads."

"There is definitely more to beekeeping than many people believe, so you need to do your homework before purchasing hives," says Leah.

This committed couple continue to enjoy learning from one of the best, investing their time building a strong and sustainable beekeeping business providing opportunities for locals and the next generation who already enjoy following Mum and Dad in their own junior sized beekeeper suits.

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Getting Fit for Calving

A new six week programme to help women get in condition for the demands of calving season is about to be launched with the support of rural wellbeing initiative Farmstrong.

WORDS & IMAGES SUPPLIED BY FARMSTRONG

Nicole Jackson and Alice Liljeback began creating Fit for Calving in Mid-Canterbury last year after talking to other women about the strains and injuries they were experiencing as a result of coming into the physically-intensive calving season unprepared. It's a common issue says Nicole. "Most women prepare for the calving season by getting the kids ready, getting meals ready, getting their husbands ready but they don't actually look after their own needs."

"We run a sharemilking business with 600 cows, so that's generally 600 calves that need rearing. Next year we're stepping up to 1,000 calves so I'll need to be even fitter. That's why I'm taking steps to take care of myself."

Keeping Women Injury-Free

2017 Sharemilker of the Year Siobhan O'Malley's agrees, "I'm getting involved in Fit for Calving because every year I go into calving unfit and within a couple of weeks I am hurting, so this year I'm going to be up and ready to go by the time I start feeding those calves."

"We run a sharemilking business with 600 cows, so that's generally 600 calves that need rearing. Next year we're stepping up to 1,000 calves so I'll need to be even fitter. That's why I'm taking steps to take care of myself."

Rachael Rickard who helps run a sharemilking business with her husband in Hinds, Mid Canterbury has a similar story, "As women, we often spend about nine months of the year not doing a lot physically then suddenly the calves start dropping and we're picking them up and moving them round the sheds. We're suddenly active in a different way on the farm. I think anything that helps women get more mobile and stronger before they do all that lifting is a great idea in order to stay injury free."

TOP: Getting fit for calving in Hinds, Mid-Canterbury are Jessie Chan-Doorman, Alice Liljeback, Julie Cressey and Rachael Rickard
MIDDLE LEFT: The six week conditioning programme is designed for women of all physical abilities and strengthens muscles commonly used during calving
MIDDLE RIGHT: Sharemilker Rachael Rickard
BOTTOM LEFT: 2017 Sharemilker of the Year Siobhan O'Malley (left) signs up with Fit for Calving organiser Nicole Jackson (at right)

Designed For Calf-Rearers

The Fit for Calving exercises are tailored specifically to the needs of calf-rearers says Nicole. The programme of stretches and condition exercises works for women of all physical abilities and involves movements that will strengthen muscle groups commonly used during the calving season such as arm circles, calf raises, toe taps and shoulder shrugs. "We're lifting buckets and leaning over fences, so we definitely need these types of exercises to target those repetitive movements so that we can avoid injury," says Nicole.

Convenient and accessible

Nicole says the idea of the 6-week programme is so that "women can begin where they are comfortable. If that's with 5 to 10 minutes of exercises a day, that's great, and then build up to 30 minutes a day by the end, so they ready to go."

She stresses that you don't need to be a 'gym bunny' or buy specialist equipment to participate. "The exercises are designed to be as affordable and accessible as possible. Everything you need for these exercises can be found around the farm—cans of food, cast iron pots and chairs."

Promoting women's wellbeing

Fit for Calving has also been developed with busy rural women in mind. Alice and Nicole both juggle family and farming responsibilities themselves. Alice works alongside her husband sharemilking 350 cows on the outskirts of Methven, whilst raising a 9 month old. Nicole runs a busy farm contracting business with her husband and has two children.

Alice says, "Women are often so busy look after the needs of their families and farms that they often neglect their own wellbeing. Fit for Calving has been designed with them in mind."

"Everything you need for these exercises can be found around the farm—cans of food, cast iron pots and chairs."

Nicole adds, "Scheduling the time in for yourself is a big one to make sure you are looking after yourself physically and mentally. Women are often the glue that holds the whole family together, so it's important that they do what they can to keep healthy and active."

Watch Fit for Calving Video Clips

Last year the pair launched Fit for Calving by posting homemade video clips on Facebook. This year they are joining forces with rural wellbeing programme Farmstrong to reach more women. A series of exercise video clips have been produced featuring local women demonstrating the exercises. These will be promoted through social media and on the Farmstrong website.

Small steps make a big difference

Rachael Rickard is already singing the praises of the programme. "It's only really going to take 10–20 minutes out of your day to get your body moving again and fire up muscle groups that haven't been fired up for a little while. It makes you feel good about yourself and about where your body needs to be when you're lifting and pushing and pulling. It's a big help."

With Farmstrong now on board, Nicole hopes that over time Fit for Calving will become an integral part of preparation for the calving season. "The main benefit of Fit for Calving is an injury-free calving season. It also gives women that time pre-calving—whether it's five minutes or half an hour—to be in their own space and think about what that season means for them. To get themselves ready mentally and physically for a very important part of dairying's yearly cycle."

"It's only really going to take 10–20 minutes out of your day to get your body moving again and fire up muscle groups that haven't been fired up for a little while. It makes you feel good about yourself and about where your body needs to be when you're lifting and pushing and pulling. It's a big help."

How to join Fit for Calving

To sign up for Fit for Calving head to the 'fitforcalving' facebook page or contact Nicole Jackson fitforcalving@gmail.com. You'll be directed to exercise video clips so you can get started.



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Collaboration key to effective Health & Safety



“Worksafe has been visiting farms – random visits are happening and some farmers have been made aware of improvements they should be making. But it’s not all bad, and in fact there has been some really good feedback from farmers regarding these visits,” says Peter.

“At the end of the day, it’s about everyone working together.”

Part of the secret to having effective and meaningful health and safety practices is to ensure plans are both manageable and compliant. “They don’t have to be vast. What’s really important is making sure they are ingrained into everyday life on-farm and ensuring everybody (including staff and family) knows and plays their part. The reality is that no one is immune.”

Ruralco has a long history of supporting its farmers in a variety of ways to ensure they keep themselves, their staff and their families safe.

“We have been providing health and safety training for a number of years.” This training is designed to help farmers ensure they are compliant, while also adopting user friendly practices and documentation.

Implementation of health and safety policies and procedures needs to be as simple as possible – it needs to be part of the day to day routine, otherwise it will never become a fully integrated part of the farming operation.

“Our courses use Compliance Partners as trainers. There are a lot of companies out there doing similar work. Compliance Partners is one alternative and we think it is a good one.”

Ruralco also has a long history of supporting its farmers in gaining their Approved Handler certification. “Chemical and fuel handling and storage are all part of the big health and safety picture. It all goes hand-in-hand.”

“At the end of the day, we are here to support our farming community, and if we can also help to keep our farmers and their families safe in the process, then that’s a great outcome,” says Peter.

For more information on Ruralco’s health and safety training options or Approved

Handler certification, Peter Jacob can be contacted at peter.jacob@ruralco.co.nz or by phoning 0800 787 256.



Peter Jacob, Ruralco Compliance Manager

Effective and manageable health and safety practices are becoming the norm on many of our farms these days, and that’s a good thing, according to Ruralco’s Compliance Manager, Peter Jacob. WORDS BY ANITA BODY

New health and safety legislation was implemented in 2016 following investigations into the Pike River disaster, and while many of the changes and heightened awareness was initially met with plenty of apprehension, the mood is changing.

“We have had a number of farmers proactively send us their Health and Safety Policies and hazard awareness information, including how and who we should contact if any of our staff are going to visit them on-farm,” says Peter. It’s a good indication that farmers are taking their obligations seriously and that they are putting into practice the plans and suggestions outlined in their policy documents.

Knowing who is coming and going from a property and ensuring they know about specific on-farm hazards are good and sensible practices. All visitors, including contractors and farm reps, should be signing off relevant documentation acknowledging their understanding and acceptance of that particular farmer’s policy.

Peter says this practice, and particularly farmers being made aware of who is coming on farm and when, has been welcomed by

many. “It’s been a really good thing because some farmers were getting a bit stropky about people just turning up on farm unannounced. Now it has become normal to make appointments. It’s also a practice we have taken on board at Ruralco, and all of our reps make appointments before visiting our farmers.”

“This is even more important with the current issues around mycoplasma bovis, and the need to be aware of movements between properties. These sorts of situations reinforce the need to make contact with the farm owner or manager or property owner,” he says.

One of the most pleasing things Peter has notice over the last couple of years is how farmers are generally embracing the intent of the Health and Safety at Work Act, which is that we all work together to ensure every worker comes home safely to their families every day.

“Farmers are doing this a lot more than in the past. They are doing it very well and they are also promoting these practices with their workers.”

The myth around the Act and Worksafe being a ruthless enforcer of health and safety rules is also being debunked.

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A fresh perspective on disbudding

Recent research provides more evidence that calves should be given a long acting anti-inflammatory as well as local anaesthetic at disbudding.

WORDS AND IMAGES SUPPLIED BY DAIRYNZ



DairyNZ Developer Jacqueline McGowan recently attended a seminar by visiting UC Davis scientist Dr Cassandra Tucker, who is investigating pain associated with disbudding of calves.

Dr Tucker's research shows that calves probably experience discomfort for longer than previously thought. Her research included training calves after disbudding to choose between saline, which doesn't relieve pain, or an injection of local anaesthetic that would relieve pain for several hours.

Most of the calves that had been disbudded chose to get the injection of local anaesthetic, whereas control calves (that hadn't been disbudded) did not.

"This indicates that, even some time after disbudding, the wound was uncomfortable enough that they chose the local anaesthetic because it relieved the discomfort of disbudding," says Jacqueline.

"Since local anaesthetic only lasts a few hours and bringing calves in for another injection is unrealistic, good practice would be to also give them a long acting anti-inflammatory

to reduce the discomfort after the local anaesthetic wears off, much like we would take a paracetamol to help with residual pain when we're recovering from a trip to the dentist."

Dr Tucker also showed that the disbudding site is more sensitive to pressure until the new skin grows over the wound, which takes about eight weeks after hot iron disbudding. Jacqueline says, "This means that while calves are healing we should handle them in a way that reduces the likelihood of getting knocked around, for example, by giving plenty of space at feeders and avoiding transport.

"You may not notice that calves are in pain as they are good at hiding it, but we know they are because they have increased cortisol (stress hormone), are more restless, have reduced feed intake, and they show pain related behaviours like excessive ear twitching and tail shaking." (See red line in the graph)

When local anaesthetic is provided, these signs of distress are temporarily reduced, indicating that disbudding without pain relief is painful (yellow line). When calves are given

a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) as well as local anaesthetic, the signs of distress are reduced for much longer (green line).

The benefits of pain relief

- Easier and safer handling—calves struggle less when given local anaesthetic prior to disbudding, making it safer and easier for the operator and less stressful for the calf;
- Reduced risk of regrowth—because the calves are easier to handle, more care can be taken to completely remove the horn bud;
- Calves recover faster when they get pain relief at disbudding;
- Calves grow faster after disbudding if they are given pain relief. Research by Massey University found higher growth rates in calves that received pain relief prior to disbudding. On average, calves that received pain relief gained 0.09kg more per day for the next month, meaning they reached weaning weight about 6 days earlier.
- Market access—consumers expect high standards of animal care.

Options for disbudding

The vast majority of calves are disbudded by hot iron cautery with a minority disbudded using caustic paste or scoop/amputation. Good practice is hot iron cautery between two to eight weeks because it is least painful and leaves a clean, cauterised wound.

Caustic paste and scoop/amputation are not recommended. Caustic paste poses risk of chemical burn to other tissues or other animals. Scoop/amputation leaves a large, painful open wound with risk of bleeding, infection and disease spread.

Calves should ideally be disbudded before eight weeks. By two weeks, calves are usually robust and have passed the greatest risk period for scours, and the hornbud is easily felt. At around eight weeks, the hornbud fuses to the skull, so disbudding results in a much bigger wound and increased risk of burning the skull. Smaller calves are also much easier and safer to handle.

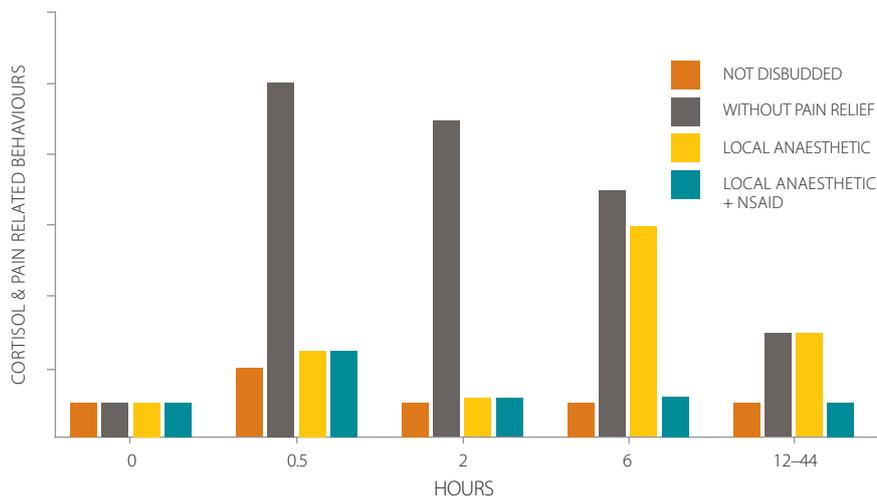
Let's bust some myths about disbudding

MYTH BUSTED:

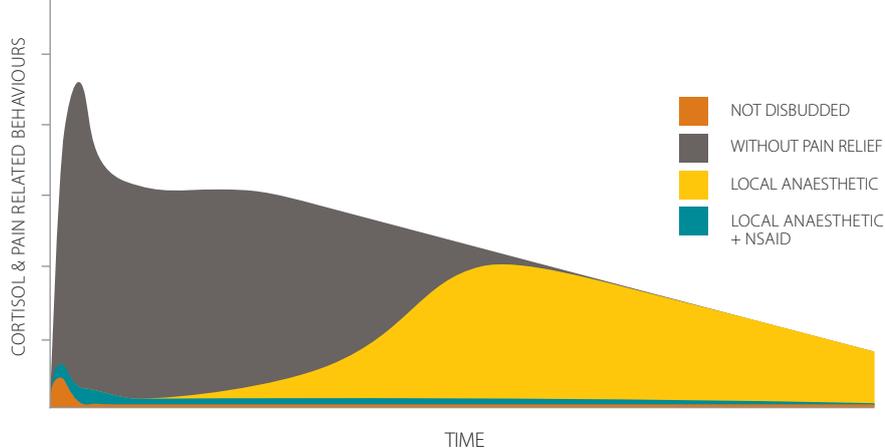
Injections of local anaesthetic are more stressful than disbudding

An injection to administer local anaesthetic causes the calf little more stress than being

CALVES DISBUDED WITH AND WITHOUT PAIN RELIEF



PAIN AND STRESS CAUSED BY DISBUDDING CAN BE REDUCED OR ELIMINATED WITH PAIN RELIEF



restrained for disbudding, and is significantly less stressful for the calf than being disbudded without pain relief.

MYTH BUSTED:

Hot iron cautery destroys the nerves so it doesn't hurt

Although the nerves are destroyed where the iron touches the tissue, the nerves around the area are still sensitive and the calf experiences pain from inflammation in the surrounding tissue.

MYTH BUSTED:

They drink straight afterward, so it's obviously not painful

Willingness to drink milk does not imply calves are pain-free. The act of suckling is soothing to the calf, similar to human babies being willing to feed immediately after an injury.

Using a vet or husbandry service provider

Any method of disbudding carries risks for calves and the handler, and is best carried out by someone with adequate training and experience. Using a vet or husbandry provider to carry out disbudding has many advantages.

You can do other work while they take care of disbudding. They will have good, well-maintained equipment and lots of practice.

The provider can be scheduled to ensure all calves are disbudded in the optimum window and can usually do other tasks at the same time, such as DNA sampling, tagging or removing extra teats.

Calving with care

Calving is a key event in the farming calendar. Having the right knowledge and skills for the job, the right equipment, and a well-prepared team, will ensure all calves receive the best start to life.

Set up the calf shed before calving starts, with new bedding material, new teats for calfeterias, clean utensils and calfeterias, iodine and electrolytes, meal, hay, and fresh water.

Calf rearing good practice

All calves, including bobbies, must receive adequate fresh gold colostrum within the first 24 hours of life, and should be fed colostrum, or a colostrum substitute, for at least the first four days of life.

Calves that are not with their mothers must be provided with shelter so that they can stay warm and dry in calf pens that are fit for purpose and well-maintained. Ensure bedding areas are comfortable and clean, with adequate ventilation, but draft free at the calf level. Exposed concrete, bare earth and mud are not acceptable.

Calves should be fed at the same times each day to minimise stress. Always ensure your calves have access to plenty of fresh water. Feed calves adequate quantities of good quality feed to rapidly achieve weaning weight with a well-developed rumen.

Reducing Scours

If scours has been a challenge for your calves previously, or you would like to minimise that risk, Jacqueline recommends vaccinating your herd three to six weeks before planned start of calving with a product such as Rotavec or Scourguard. "This will boost specific antibody levels in colostrum, giving calves an extra layer of protection against the common causes of scours. Of course, your calves will only receive that extra protection if they get ample gold colostrum soon after birth, so vaccination is not a replacement for good colostrum management."

For more information on caring for calves visit <https://www.dairynz.co.nz/animal/calves/>

FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN DISBUDDING

- Younger calves recover quicker and have fewer complications than older calves;
- Young calves experience pain in the same way as older calves;
- Use of local when disbudding prevents pain at the time of disbudding and for a few hours after;
- Addition of an anti-inflammatory reduces pain for a further 24–72hrs;
- Local, combined with an anti-inflammatory, provides the best pain relief.

ENSURE GOOD ROUTINE HYGIENE AND HEALTH PRACTICES

- Scrub all feeding equipment well with hot water and detergent;
- Remove sick calves promptly to a designated sick pen;
- Frequently clean and disinfect pens where sick calves are treated;
- Disinfect hard surfaces;
- Ensure bedding is regularly refreshed;
- Control the spread of disease by minimising movement between pens. Calves of the same age should stay in the same pen. However, small or unthrifty calves may be better off with a healthy younger group;
- Vaccinate, treat for parasites and provide access to shelter.



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Ultimate Broadband reveals latest total connectivity package for rural clients



Connected Farm not only promises efficiency but also is a cost effective solution for rural clients. Irrigation and other real time systems all operate via devices that apart from the obvious connectivity issues incur monthly fees and data use charges all on separate accounts. Connected Farm offers one monthly bill for all connected devices on the network, an additional saving is offered if you purchase your broadband from UBB. Depending on your requirements there will be different service level options available with plans, "these days restoration time for internet is critical and based on your budget and needs we will have a range of assistance levels available," Mike explains. An additional option is offering a full Internet service for staff on other properties on the farm that is operated and managed by UBB on the same connectivity hub. "It's essentially a two phase package, total farm connectivity for devices and then bringing staff dwellings onto the network." As official partner in Canterbury for the Rural Broadband Initiative 2 the company is very busy upgrading and expanding their rural coverage and in particular Mike is keen for the improvements to be ready before the Rugby World Cup in Japan next year so customers streaming the games have ultra fast connection.

UBB specialise in bringing connectivity to remote rural areas and Mike is confident he can offer solutions to most farms. Where there is no mobile coverage they can create wireless hotspots around the farm using long range wireless systems and can also build solar power repeaters on farm which are completely off grid "solar power repeaters can often last between 10-20 years so it's a great long term investment." Mike is also aware that the demand for real-time data is growing, especially with farmers being off site more and technologies evolving so quickly "real-time information is becoming increasingly important and Connected Farm offers our customers a head start on the trend, we're gathering specialist people together on one platform and the client will get a fantastic service."

"Connected Farm" is Ultimate Broadband's new service and it promises to take on farm Internet connectivity to a whole new level.

WORDS BY NIAMH MCCARTHY

Owner Mike Smith is excited about this new package and believes it will make life a lot easier for his many rural clients. "It's a simple concept, we know networks, we can build them well and once we have a great connection and network established, we can make all your devices talk to one another and we'll manage it for you." Essentially Ultimate Broadband will be the hub of the farm and the various spokes that run from the hub will be various communication systems operating on farm for example security, irrigation, health and safety or pasture data. "These days all systems are cloud based so if we can get everything talking to the cloud in one seamless system that effectively for the farm owner means a single one off network build cost and a small monthly admin fee to manage all the systems."

The idea evolved when the company were noticing customers frequently having issues with various systems on farm interfering with one another and causing problems. "Often you get security companies installing cameras on properties, they have great expertise

IMAGE: Ultimate Broadband specialise in bringing connectivity to remote rural areas and Mike is confident he can offer solutions to most farms

with cameras but don't know much about wireless and their gear is running off the same frequency as the Internet and suddenly you get poor performance and all sorts of problems. What we want to do is build a great network and run it well and let other companies install their devices on our network so it runs at maximum efficiency with no hassle for the client. Then when there is a problem there is just one point of call." A small monthly admin fee ensures Mike and his team are on call if any issues occur "anything that is connected to our network we can manage it and see how it is operating, and any problems we can fix." The company is already talking to electrical and security firms plus a host of other potential partners to get on board and be part of the Ultimate Broadband connectivity hub. Mike however is happy to work with any supplier of choice with his customers as for him it's all about building a high speed efficient network "if there's existing supplier relationships let us talk to those companies and once we have a good network up and running anything is possible for clients."



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Options open up to lower farm footprint

Like most farmers on the Canterbury Plains Oxford dairy farmer Andrew Mehrtens has been anxiously eyeing the implications of the region's land and water regional plan when it comes to nitrogen limitations.

WORDS BY RICHARD RENNIE, IMAGE BY BRYCE SHARKIE

By 2022 many farms in the region will be required to further reduce their nitrogen losses by anywhere between 7% to 30%, depending upon farm type.

As a dairy farmer facing the likelihood of having to lose more nitrogen at that higher end, Andrew was keen to explore his options when it came to fertiliser use, particularly

if they meant the farm's nitrogen foot print was lowered but production per kg of nitrogen used could be largely retained or even increased.

After attending an Agrichem field day near Rangiora last year demonstrating some of the company's liquid fertiliser types, he was encouraged to set up a farm trial on his

330ha dairy unit to compare the nitrogen based liquid product alongside conventional dry urea fertiliser.

"To keep it as simple as we could, we split a paddock in half that had been direct drilled the year before with clover and ryegrass putting Agrichem liquid nitrogen on one half, and urea on the other."



“He was a bit hesitant to start with, but he managed to stick with the trial, and that has meant we could harvest regularly for analysis and comparison.”

Some of that hesitation eased as Andrew viewed the data coming back from the pasture samples taken, measuring energy and dry matter levels.

“When you looked at the grass you might have thought the urea treated paddocks were the heavier crop with more bulk. But, when they were measured, it seems it was the liquid fertiliser samples that actually had the extra bulk in them,” says Andrew.

Ed says in general the pasture may not have looked as lush, but the sward itself was denser on closer examination and sampling.

“And energy levels were generally higher than the urea treated pasture.”

Because the trial was relatively small at two 4ha plots, Andrew hesitates to claim the herd milked any better on it.

However the trial has found him at a cross roads this winter as he considers options including increasing the area devoted to the Agrichem treatment.

“It has a lot of merit in my eyes. If we can grow the same amount of grass with less nitrogen, all the better. For us going forward the challenge is the practical aspects of application—to cover more ground we would need a bigger liquid applicator to do the job.”

Ed said estimates are Agrichem nitrogen is up to 3.5 times more efficient per kg applied, thanks to its liquid combination of nitrogen, humic acid and micro-nutrients.

The company is hoping to conduct more trials in the Canterbury region over the coming years, with plans for up to a dozen trial sites.

The 4ha paddocks were grazed one after the other and the products were applied from last October, and both irrigated under the farm’s centre pivot irrigator.

Agrichem is an Australian based company selling its liquid fertiliser products in Canterbury through Ruralco. The company is regarded as a pioneer in the liquid fertiliser industry, and produces a wide range of speciality liquid fertilisers and soluble solid formulas targeted for specific crops and usage situations.

The company has developed an extensive global distribution network over 30 countries across 5 continents.

Ed Redfern, business development manager for Agrichem says interest is growing in his company’s nitrogen based product with its higher level of utilisation. More farmers are having to come to grips with the implications of regional water plans and nutrient limitations.

“Typically with conventional urea you can have a lot of losses, including to the atmosphere from volatilisation, and from leaching. Targeting the plant foliage with our liquid products instead of the soil with conventional product means you have more immediate uptake.”

Importantly for Canterbury farmers soil temperature can have a significant impact upon how much urea is leached through the profile. When temperatures fall too low, leaching tends to be greater due to less micro-organism activity, causing it to leach through the profile.

“But with the addition of humic acid in our products, less nitrogen is leached through the soil. You can also safely apply our product in winter without that risk being as great that it will leach through the profile.”

Ed helped develop a simple application programme for Andrew to use over the trial, with a nitrogen-micro nutrient blend.

ABOVE LEFT: Aerial view of Andrew Mehrtens paddocks, liquid fertiliser was applied to the paddock on the left

BELOW: Ed Redfern, Agrichem



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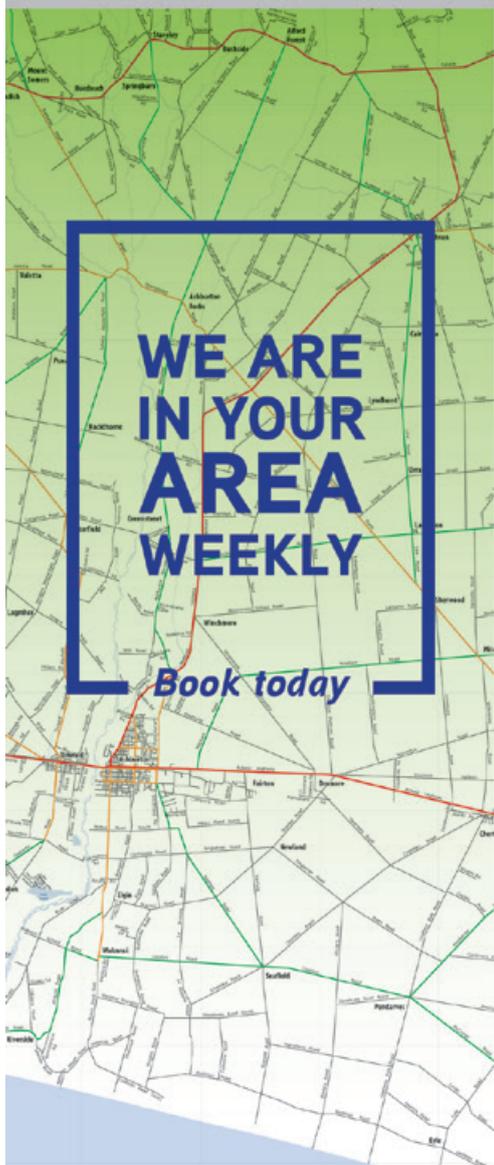
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Sustainable and cheaper energy offered by innovative new supplier

Canterbury based electricity retailer Kea Energy may be smaller than the average energy provider but there are a few advantages to using Kea Energy that are definitely worthy of consideration. WORDS BY NIAMH MCCARTHY



ABOVE: Kea Energy uses the highest standard of both panels and mounting gear for their solar stations
LEFT: Kea Energy's Campbell & Naomi McMath

For example free on-farm solar energy and significant power bill savings. Leeston local Campbell McMath is the founder of Kea Energy and his enthusiasm and expertise in sustainable energy solutions is certainly impressive. In 2005 while working as a Control Systems Engineer with Orion, Campbell and his family built four hydro turbines on the family farm on the Rakaia River with an output of 360 KW (roughly 400 homes worth of electricity). With his extensive knowledge of electricity and power consumption he decided to investigate the benefits of solar power and excited by the results he established two solar sites for neighbours in the district. Fast forward to 2018 and Kea Energy operates numerous solar sites and along with the hydro turbines produces 30% of the Orion/Christchurch exported embedded generation power supply.

Being a smaller company means Kea Energy devote plenty of time to building up a client profile and gaining insight into the clients power demands to formulate the best solution for saving money on power consumption. A unique point of difference with Kea Energy is their offer of PPAs (Power Purchase Agreements) to customers—for Campbell PPAs are a “win win” for the customer. Kea Energy will install a solar array at no charge to the client and in return the customer agrees to purchase electricity through Kea Energy for a 10-year period—normally 10% cheaper than their current provider. “PPAs are a fantastic option for rural clients, you get a solar

array free of charge and instantly lower power bills” he explains.

Kea Energy uses the highest standard of both panels and mounting gear for their solar stations. Should a customer require a solar set-up without a PPA in place Kea Energy also offers a turnkey service. They offer fixed panel systems as well as innovative tracked solar systems, meaning the panels follow the path of the sun for maximum gain and can also be faced to dairy sheds during maximum output periods during milking. Campbell enjoys all aspects of the build from consultation, to design and build “it’s a great feeling once its all installed and laid out and I get a great buzz from seeing what we’ve achieved.”

The company is also currently experimenting with the latest in battery technologies from Fronius and Tesla with the aim of increasing self consumption ultimately leading to increased cost saving and off grid reliability for customers. For users in remote areas and power networks suffering occasional outages the company believes future solar self-sufficiency could be a key advantage for farm operations. “Technology and battery power are becoming more and more affordable these

days and self consumption is something that more of our customers are interested in” Campbell confirms.

As well as offering significant energy savings having on farm solar energy is obviously attractive to rural customers adopting a more environmentally friendly approach to agriculture. In the current climate of increased environmental audits and potential ETS changes to come, adopting greener energy solutions at no cost to the farmer is a great opportunity. Thanks to monitoring software on the panels all energy saving can be seen via an app and customers can log in and see at a glance how many tonnes of carbon dioxide, trees and even kilometres have been saved in emissions.

Local Brookside based dairy farmer Matthew Ward is one of Kea Energy’s satisfied clients. After an initial scope Campbell and his team estimated his farm would save between \$2000 and \$3000 annually on power bills and that’s exactly what happened according to Matthew who is 100% satisfied with his PPA. “Campbell was really easy to deal with, we have a ground mount system on a piece of land that we don’t use anyway, he gave us an opportunity to use a green energy source at no cost and as a dairy farmer these days it’s nice to be seen as doing your bit to be clean and green, and save money obviously.” For a personal quote and energy saving estimate Ruralco customers can contact Kea Energy directly on 03 390 0009 or call their Ruralco Account Manager Tracey Gordon on 0800 BUY ATS.

Kea Energy is operating in Orion, EA Network, Mainpower, Network Tasman and Marlborough lines areas.



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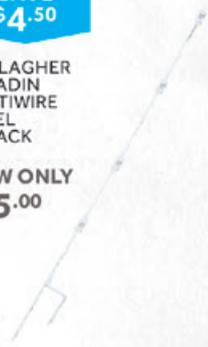
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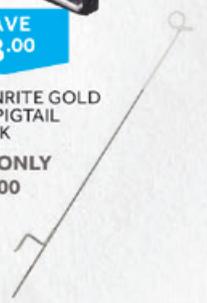
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FARM SUPPLIES

This is a game-changer

ARTICLE SUPPLIED BY:



FARM SUPPLIES



LEFT: Todd Portman (left) with Glenn France

The game is changing for New Zealand dairying and we face new challenges. With pressure to de-intensify, the challenge ahead will be to produce more with less.

In order to run a viable unit, milking less cows, the focus will be on having productive cows that remain in the herd longer. Farmers will need proven strategies, trialed under local conditions to change the game.

Queen of Calves Nutrition Program is a scientifically-validated (Massey University and AgResearch), calf rearing program that over three trials (2006, 2007 & 2014) was able to demonstrate animals that are reared on the program, during the milk feeding phase:

- Achieve eight days earlier weaning
- Require less milk (32L/calf)
- Require less calf meal (12 kilograms less/calf)
- Gain an additional 1 kilogram liveweight every 14 days

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE AND HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO GROW A HEIFER TO TARGET WEANING WEIGHT?

Using a conventional milk & meal diet, most New Zealand farmers feed approximately 5 litres* of milk to their herd-replacements each day and wean them between 82–96 days. The cost varies between \$200–354 per calf depending on the value derived for milk.

A Queen of Calves program is cost-competitive. It requires less milk from the vat and less time. Trials show on a like-for-like (4L/c/day) milk volume basis, calves achieve target weaning eight days quicker. The program costs between \$192–284 per calf** that includes the cost of milk, calfmeal, Queen of Calves STARTER & Queen of Calves FINISHER.

TREATED CALVES GO ON TO BE BETTER MILK PRODUCERS, FOR LIFE.

Further investment in research shows treated calves have gone on to produce 30kg additional milk solids, on average, per lactation, for the first five years. That's an extra 150kgMS per cow over 5 lactation cycles.

SCEPTIC TURNS CONVERT

Todd Portman milks 700 cows at Temuka. He was a first-time Queen of Calves user in 2017 raising 300 Friesian/Jersey/Crossbred herd replacements. Previously Todd was completely sceptical about Queen of Calves.

With a wet and cool spring calf rearing on the Portman's farm was challenging—a number of calves were affected by cryptosporidium. Despite this, Todd's heifer calves achieved 93.4kg target weaning weight with an average daily liveweight gain, during the milk-feeding phase, of approximately 740g/cow/day. That's about 105g/cow/day more than a well-grown Friesian heifer raised on a conventional diet (Massey University assessments 2006, 2007 and 2014).

Todd's calves were out of the shed about 15 days quicker than normal. They developed the rapid, early growth that is characteristic with the use of Queen of Calves.

"There were two primary reasons I changed my mind and raised my heifers on Queen of Calves. I felt I was banging my head against a brick wall with my current system, combined with the confidence of trusted friends who have used Queen of Calves for many years. Greg and Lenna Low farm in Ashburton, they told me I should use it. A meeting was arranged to see their heifers and herd-replacements. They looked amazing, way better than mine."

"Since my Queen of Calves heifers have been weaned, they have continued to exceed expectations. They are growing in excess of 0.8kg/heifer/day and are well ahead of MINDA weights. I've already ordered Queen of Calves for this spring."

If you are a person like Todd and you've invested more time, more care and more money into calf rearing to get a better outcome but your animals are not getting to weaning weight around 74 days, then it is the time to consider the game-changer, Queen of Calves.

If you would like a copy of the 2018 Queen of Calves This is A Game-changer brochure then visit your local Ruralco store and pick up a copy.

*Based on a survey that involved 507 dairy farmers who fed 4.8L/calf on average, and between them raise 8% of NZ's heifer calves. A base milk price of \$6/kgMS and \$1/kg calfmeal was adopted, and 200L stored-colostrum fed per calf.

** Depending on the valuation derived for the cost of milk. # The average time to weaning; data from 3 trials at Massey University in 2006, 2007, 2014.



Calves and consistency

ARTICLE SUPPLIED BY:



FARM SUPPLIES



There's a lot to be said for a commitment to consistency and the quality it gives rise to. When it comes to rearing calves, this approach will set up your animals for a healthy and productive life.

Calf rearing has its own appeal among farmers, not least because it allows a degree of latitude. After all, feeding and weaning strategies can be adapted to what works best with your approach or with any other commitments.

But within that flexibility there's also an overarching principle at play—the principle of consistency. Wendy Morgan, SealesWinslow Nutrition and Quality Manager, explains that the focus on consistency should commence the day the calves are born.

"It starts with a regular routine of collecting calves and feeding them," she says. "Quality colostrum is perhaps the most important success factor." She refers to "gold colostrum", meaning the product from the first milking after calving. Apart from vitamins and minerals it also contains vital antibodies (immunoglobulins), which are a pathway to improved immunity. However, timing is of the essence because the ability to physically absorb these antibodies declines with every hour; by time the calf is 24 hour old it can no longer absorb them. It truly is a game changer. "You simply can't overstate the importance of feeding colostrum as early as possible, ideally within the first six hours and then again a further six hours after that," Wendy says, "and continue feeding it for at least four days."

The focus on consistency also applies to other aspects of nutrition. Take meal, for instance: It should be provided very early

on with fresh rations offered regularly. Freshness and regularity play a particular role because calves are picky eaters at best, likely to refuse feed that has a whiff of mustiness or other signs of deterioration.

While they only eat a tiny amount of meal to begin with, the goal is two-fold. Firstly, to get them used to the texture and taste, and secondly to assist their rumen development. "The starch and sugars contained in the meal promote the growth of rumen papillae," notes Wendy. And since rumen papillae determine the uptake of nutrients, this factor is not to be underestimated.

When you're choosing calf feed, consistency once again comes to the fore and in this case it's about "consistency of formulation". It may seem a small thing, but make no mistake, it can have a big impact.

Budget calf-feed often contains by-products from confectionary manufacturing and the like. Those waste products are cheap to source, but they don't provide much in the way of nutrients. Moreover, the formulation changes depending on what's available which invariably changes the taste and general appeal of the meal for calves.

Keeping in mind their characteristic fussiness, this can lead to feed refusal and growth checks. Ultimately it can make growth targets much more of a challenge than they would otherwise be.

For the same reason, you're well advised to stick with the same product from day one, rather than changing to another product partway through calf-rearing.

Wendy recommends a meal regime starting with SealesWinslow's muesli (or pellets) then moving onto 20% calf pellets and finally 16% pellets. With consistency of formulation and quality ingredients devoid of fillers or waste products, you can be assured that you're giving your calves the very best nutritional start in life.

The last word on consistency should be reserved for housing. Remember to ensure that calf pens are consistently clean, draught free and allow calves access to clean, fresh water. It's a fundamental requirement.

For further information, head to one of the Ruralco Farm Supplies stores, or visit www.sealeswinslow.co.nz

A FINAL WORD OF CAUTION: BOVATEC, WHICH IS CONTAINED IN ALL CALF MEAL, IS TOXIC TO DOGS AND HORSES.

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Maintaining animal wellness vs treating the illness

For all stock types, and for farmers, this period in the year represents a significant challenge. Feed allocation, utilisation and quality must be monitored closely to ensure stock continue in their annual production cycle without faltering.

WORDS BY IAN HODGE. BVSC., MANZCVS. VETENT



For young dairy replacement stock growth must continue in a positive way so that these animals are at target weights through spring and at their first mating in October. Growth can only be accurately known by weighing regularly, and this practice is to be encouraged. Remember that it is important not only to know the heaviest animal in the mob but also the weight range. Knowing and analysing the range will allow for more preferential feeding and will help to bring underweight animals back into the normal range. Remember that some beet crops can be hard on young animals with developing teeth. Providing a good quality crop that is hard to eat may result in some young animals losing weight. These animals may well be better off on grass and silage.

Dairy cows also need to come through winter unscathed. Maintaining condition is very important, and lighter cows should be identified and preferentially managed so their body condition can lift. Many calving-associated problems can be minimised by having the majority of cows at the optimal body condition score for calving. Too light

and too fat will mean problems as cows calve. Regular checks on cow body condition through winter are important.

Diseases to watch out for during winter include bloat which can be associated with kale, rumen acidosis which can be associated with fodder beet, and nitrate poisoning which can be associated with green-feed oats. If fodder beet feeding is not managed well cows can show symptoms of calcium and phosphorous deficiency, ketosis and rumen acidosis all at the same time. Smooth transitioning is the key, and keeping break sizes accurate with good fence security is very important.

Lameness can be a big problem in winter. If it is wet we often see an increase in foot rot cases. The skin between the claws becomes soft and macerated and this allows for bacterial infection. Keep an eye out for very lame animals and treat quickly and appropriately.

Keeping animals well (healthy) is very important. Well animals have stronger immune function and are better able to

resist diseases. The concept of maintaining wellness rather than treating illness is becoming more important in farming. Systems will change to support wellness. Calves will be reared in ways that ensure better colostrum transfer and superior growth and development prior to weaning. At weaning, better treatments will ensure parasite infections are prevented for very long periods of time so that the damage parasites cause will not be possible. Because animals are well for longer periods waste will be less and animals will have more lactations with reduced disease incidence. This will positively impact reproduction performance and mastitis control.

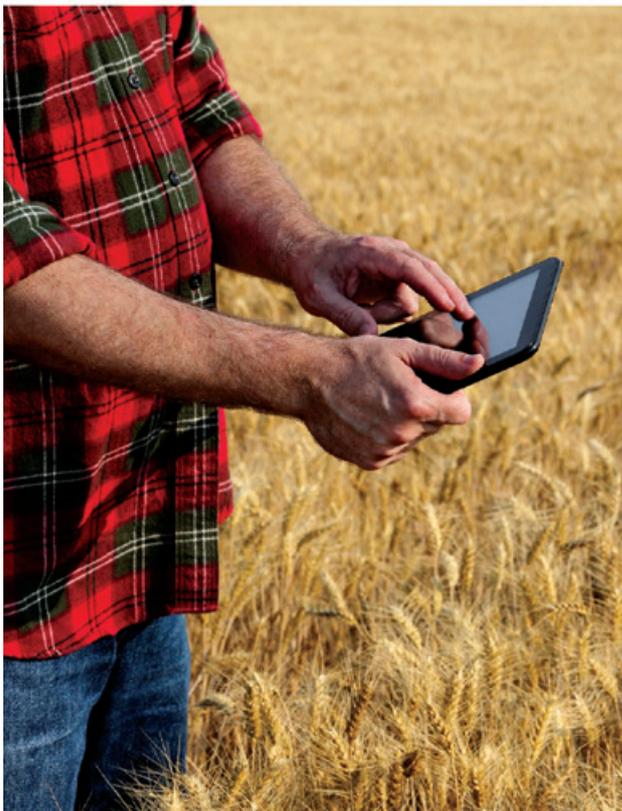
Vaccinations are critical to optimizing animal wellness. We all know that no vaccine is 100% effective but vaccinations reduce the impacts of diseases. Vaccines can be used in many different ways. There are certain vaccines that should be given pre-calving. You should discuss this with your veterinarian.

Maintaining animal wellness is generally far more profitable than treating animal illness.

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Ensuring performance of your future herd

Calving time is just around the corner yet again, if not already slowly kicking into gear for some farmers with the odd slipped cow. By now we will have our plans in place to be safely calving our cows down and easing them into their productive zone while juggling the demands of the new born calf that we are now rearing.

WORDS SUPPLIED BY STEPH MACFARLANE, CENTRE FOR DAIRY EXCELLENCE

Nutrition options for our future replacement cows are larger than ever before with the release of new products seemingly every season, but always with the same ethos that we need to get the basics right first to ensure full effect of any supplement we choose to purchase. Your vet will be able assist you in making the decision as to which rearing strategy best suits your farm as well as advise suitable colostrum management systems that ensure from hour one the calf can gain the antibodies and energy it requires to get up and go so to speak. Take the time to have that conversation well before the start of calving as improved systems and nutrition in those few crucial days can make all the difference when your calves are inevitably exposed to different viruses and bacteria.

From there the actual nutritional requirements of the calf remain relatively simple and as always with many options to choose from we need to be able to compare products equally. Quality is of upmost importance when thinking about how we nourish our future herd and there are a few simple measures we can use when making our decisions.

- Crude Protein is essential for the muscle and structural development of the calf.

Your ideal level when looking at calf meal options is 20%. This can be eased down to 16% once your calves have been weaned off milk and are on grass for at least two weeks.

- Ensure your starter meal does not have PKE in it—the meal needs to have high quality metabolisable protein ingredients such as soya bean or canola. ME should be no less than 12.5.
- Most calf meals on the market are already highly digestible. As it arrives on farm ensure it is fresh—it should smell and taste great! Store it in a cool dry and clean place to help it remain fresh as long as possible.
- Check your meal of choice has a balanced mix of essential vitamins and minerals. Selenium is particularly important for a young growing animal.
- Starch level should be between 30–40%.
- Having a coccidiostat is absolutely essential as it is the calves best form of prevention against coccidiosis.

There are many prebiotic and probiotic products on the market. These can have their place in a system when calves are going to undergo a definite stress—such

as being transported for sale at four days old, or if the calf has been unwell they can assist in rebooting rumen function. A lot of the probiotic products on the market also contain rennet which has a positive effect on increasing milk digestibility. This in turn can reduce calf scours from inconsistent feeding or over feeding.

With our entire young stock system needing to be focused on developing their rumen with as little stress as possible on the calf, we need to keep in mind that our young calves do not enjoy rapid changes. This applies to the transition both on and off different feeds so patience must be applied. Rearing a calf correctly from the start has a long term positive impact on her potential growth rates, disease susceptibility, reproduction and milk production performance later in life. In a nutshell we simply can not afford to not invest in quality time, systems and nutrition for our future herd.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss further please do not hesitate to contact a vet or one of the team at the Centre for Dairy Excellence regarding our Future Herds program. We are always more than happy to help.

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Robbos is ‘The Boss’ of beet

With over 20 different fodder beet cultivars available to New Zealand farmers, it takes a bit to stand out from the crowd. WORDS & IMAGE SUPPLIED BY AGRISEEDS

But Robbos sets itself apart at a glance this time of year, in a very good way—when the leaves of other cultivars turn yellow and begin to die off, this particular fodder beet stays green and leafy, even under high disease pressure.

Unusually good leaf retention through autumn, winter and if needed early spring is one of the reasons Robbos has become the new standard for anyone who wants to get the best out of fodder beet crops sown for grazing in situ.

“Farmers like Robbos because it is among the highest yielding grazing fodder beets. And the way it retains green leaf makes it stand out against other cultivars,” explains Craig Weir, upper South Island area manager for Agriseeds.

“This not only adds to the total dry matter (DM) yield of the crop, but provides an important nutritional benefit as well.

“Fodder beet leaves are the main source of the crop’s protein, so extra leaf means extra protein for livestock. This helps offset the high level of carbohydrate in the bulb, so you end up with a better nutritional balance.”

Leaves comprise around 25% of crop DM yield, and contain much higher levels of protein and fibre than bulbs—19–23% crude protein (CP) and 30% neutral detergent fibre (NDF), vs 8–11% CP and 13–15% NDF for bulbs. This results in less reliance on supplements to boost protein and fibre levels in the diet, Craig says.

Beet leaves also act as solar panels, capturing sunlight for energy to grow the bulb, so better leaf survival helps ensure better overall dry matter yield.

While unusual climatic conditions have caused many winter feed crops to struggle this season, Robbos has weathered the wide range of conditions well, living up to its reputation as a consistent, tough option, Craig adds.

“There has been a lot of fungal leaf disease in fodder beet this year. Among the most common have been rust, powdery mildew, and *Cercospora* and *Ramularia* leaf spots, brought on by higher humidity than normal. The result is a direct and sometimes heavy impact on crop yield as well as feed value.”

The Agriseeds technical team has been testing Robbos against other commercially available fodder beet cultivars in NZ conditions for 10 years now, and it has repeatedly been a top ranked performer across the country.

A true mono-germ, with high seed quality, it establishes well. It typically has 16–18% DM, with very high feed quality (12–13 MJ/ME). Beets are well accepted by stock, and sit 45–50% above the ground, meaning high utilisation and less soil ingestion when grazing.

Typical yield is 18–24 tonnes DM/ha, although higher yields are being achieved under irrigation and with very good management. The orange-yellow beets are easy for stock to graze. Farmers also appreciate the fact that seed quality is consistently high, Craig says.

He recommends farmers intending to sow fodder beet this spring start planning ahead now, if they haven’t already.

“Fodder beet has specific soil fertility and nutrient requirements which must be met

IMAGE: Agriseed’s Robbos fodder beet crop

if the crop is to achieve its yield potential. Soil pH, for example, needs to be above 6.0 so ideally the paddock(s) to be cropped will have been soil tested and any remedial fertiliser or lime applied as required.”

Because fodder beet seed is sensitive to agrichemical soil residues, farmers also need to check their paddock histories before sowing to see which chemicals have been applied over the past two years, and confirm their withholding periods, he says.

Sowing date depends on location and season, but early October to late November is usually advised, once soil temperatures are above 10°C.

“Sowing too early can lead to uneven germination. This in turn makes spray timings difficult and tends to mean poorer weed control. Sowing too late shortens the growing season, limiting yield potential.”

Craig says precision sowing is recommended to ensure seed is placed at the right spacing and depth (15–20 mm deep).

Post sowing, it’s important that farmers either check crops weekly for weeds and pests—or get someone to do it—as these can quickly compromise crop growth. “We always advise farmers to get expert advice on agrichemical applications and timings. The same goes for fertiliser.”

For more information on ‘The Boss’ of fodder beet cultivars, talk to your Ruralco rep today or ask in-store.



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Email Phishing— Have you been lured in?

Now more than ever, farmers are reliant on technology to assist in every day farming decisions.

WORDS AND IMAGE SUPPLIED BY FARMSIDE



Requirements from local government and pressure from consumers means farming information needs to be more accessible than ever. The better New Zealand farmers are doing this the more opportunities for business growth arise, however, with this also comes risk. In 2017 New Zealanders reported \$10.1 million of losses to online scams and fraud, these reported losses are likely only a fraction of the actual money lost. Common sense has been the predominant piece of advice when addressing cyber safety for adults, however as scams are becoming more sophisticated, they are becoming increasingly difficult to identify.

One of the most common scams that catches New Zealanders out is referred to as “email phishing”. As the name suggests, “email phishing” has parallels to real fishing, but using email ‘lures’ in order to ‘fish’ for personal information from the ‘sea’ of internet users. These emails attempt to trick you into providing your personal information by appearing as though they have come from a trusted source, i.e. using logos and company brand names, some of these emails can appear surprisingly authentic. While they appear to be genuine and targeted specifically to you – these emails are mass produced and are sent to hundreds, if not thousands, of addresses at once.

These emails may ask you to update your account information, complete a survey, make a payment or another request which would allow them to acquire your personal information. Some phishers use scare tactics to try and intimidate the user into giving up their information, for example, they claim to be from Inland Revenue and if you don’t make a payment for an overdue tax bill you will face legal action.

How to spot a phishing email?

- Unexpected sender/from address;
- Asking you to provide usernames, passwords or any other account details;
- Branding or logo errors;
- Spelling mistakes and poor grammar;
- Possibly a sense of unnecessary urgency (i.e your account will be shut down if you do not comply immediately);
- The email contains a mismatched URL. Sometimes phishers will embed a URL for the user to click on to complete their instructions. These URL links often look legitimate, however, if you hover your mouse over a URL you should see the actual hyperlinked address. If the hyperlinked address is different to the address shown on the email it likely fraudulent;
- If you’re unsure an email is genuine, call the company involved from contact details provided on their website—do not use info provided in the suspicious email.

What should I do if I receive one of these emails?

- Do not reply to the email. Any interaction with these emails; be it replying or clicking links alerts the scammers you have interacted with the email and means you are susceptible to be targeted again;
- Report as spam/delete email;
- Talk to the company that has been impersonated in the email via their contact details on their legitimate website to alert them to the scam.

Online Safety Basics

- Think twice if you’re unexpectedly contacted about a deal or a problem—even if they claim to be from a legitimate organisation like the bank;
- Don’t respond to an unexpected contact about problems with your computer – no one is going to contact you out of the blue about issues with your computer;
- Legitimate organisations will never ask you for your passwords;
- Think carefully before entering your personal details online;
- Be wary of unusual payment requests like gift cards, pre-loaded debit cards, money transfer or iTunes vouchers—these are untraceable methods of payment;
- Be wary of partners recently met online who request money or hint at money problems;

- If you’re using a trusted trading or booking website, don’t pay anywhere outside of that window/address;
- Invest in a good, credible antivirus and keep your software up to date. Many free versions online are fake and can download harmful malware rather than detecting and removing it;
- Back up your data – if you fall victim to a cyber attack you may lose access to your computer, phone or other devices. Ensuring you have backed this data to a separate location means you won’t lose that data regardless of what happens to the device;
- Only download apps from official app stores, set them to automatically update and check their privacy settings. Some apps are not legitimate and contain malware (viruses);
- Use strong passwords that are different for every account, never share your passwords;
- Only use trusted WiFi connections, especially when creating and logging into online accounts, making payments or accessing online banking;
- If someone offers you money or another offer up front, do not take it;
- Always avoid clicking on links within emails where possible and/or where the source may be suspicious or unexpected, instead type the known address directly into your browser or use your trusted bookmarks.

Scam Spotlight

WANGIRI (“ONE RING AND CUT”) FRAUD

Wangiri calls are missed calls from an overseas number, with the caller hanging up after one ring or less, before the receiver can answer. Scammers behind these calls are hoping to entice you to call the number back upon seeing the missed call notification. If these numbers are called back, once connected the caller is charged premium rates to this overseas number while a message plays to entice you to stay on the line as long as possible. Callers can be charged anything from \$1 per minute to \$50 per minute.

One variation of the Wangiri scam is an operator will answer when you return the missed call, pretending to be from a trusted organisation and then attempts to get your personal information or payment details. A variation of this targeted thousands of New Zealanders in early 2018, scammers were pretending to be from a large supermarket chain and promised people grocery vouchers if they completed a survey.

If you receive an unexpected call from an overseas number, do not call the number back. Do not interact with the number at all. If you suspect you have been a victim of Wangiri fraud, check your phone bill and report it to your telecommunications company.

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Meeting the rural contracting experts

ACL has been working with rural clients for over twenty years and when it comes to local knowledge and expertise they are most certainly the leaders of the pack.

WORDS BY NIAMH MCCARTHY , IMAGES SUPPLIED BY ACL



Project Operations Manager Warren Mackenzie and Project Manager Dave Rowlands have over 40 years expertise between them and are proud of their experienced staff, "all our rural operators come from a farming background and are often ex farmers or farmers sons "Warren says. "For us it's a real point of difference, we know our team are top notch—they know the weather, the conditions and often the people."

ACL offers a wide range of contracting solutions for farmers. They specialise in cow laneways, tanker tracks, underpasses, effluent ponds, land clearing and fencing services. Laneways can be built from scratch or rebuilt and while ACL has its own quarry they are not tied to a specific aggregate and happy to source and supply a specific product based on the customers requirements. Warren and his staff will also advise on products when giving a quote "there's a subtle difference between products and depending on cow traffic various options can be used in different areas of the laneway and that can often help with costs."

Cattle underpasses are another area of expertise for Warren and his team and they have completed over 30 underpasses in the district. ACL manage the entire build of the underpass from organising consent and permits, construction, final Council sign off and road sealing. Dave is a civil engineer by trade and is qualified to design and build effluent ponds to exact specifications. They have also invested in new technologies to maintain their high standard of workmanship, using GPS technology and hydrovac excavators to minimise drilling and digging issues around existing services. Their latest sophisticated piece of plant is a precision laser leveller that uses

a laser guided blade to specify any gradient requirement and is ideal for working with feed or silage pads and dairy shed floors.

As well as a vastly experienced team of staff Dave and Warren have comprehensive local knowledge as both were involved in the construction of two large irrigation schemes in the district—the Ashburton-Lyndhurst and Barrhill- Chertsey Irrigation Schemes. "Through the schemes we've been on many of the farms in the district, we're familiar with the topography and the ground conditions and that's really an advantage when you are doing major works" Dave confirms. "We get clients ringing us wanting a gravel pit dug and there are areas around here with no shingle in them and we know that because we've been digging in these areas previously for kilometres and found none."

With ever increasing on farm health and safety requirements ACL is dedicated to the highest standards of risk management and both Warren and Dave believe this is a critical point of difference when liability is at stake. "We can offer peace of mind to clients, we always make a point of identifying hazards on farm and have a very comprehensive system in place to identify risks and mitigate them plus a huge network of resources available if something does happen," Dave explains.

An additional advantage of the wide range of services provided by ACL is jobs involving a number of operators can all be completed by

ABOVE: Their latest sophisticated piece of plant is a precision laser leveller that uses a laser guided blade to specify any gradient requirement
ABOVE LEFT: They specialise in cow laneways, tanker tracks, underpasses, effluent ponds, land clearing and fencing services.

ACL. Their sealing and hotmix and concrete products can be completed at the same time which offers convenience to clients as well as streamlining costs on a large job. For example tanker entranceways can be sealed at the same time as laneway and track work.

In terms of cost effectiveness Dave and Warren are very clear on the transparency of their costings and spend a lot of time working with customers on their budgets and expectations. "We are very open and honest with what we do and with us there are no surprises," they are happy to provide weekly cost breakdowns to clients and go over final charges with customers. While works are in progress the team always tries to work in with the schedules of the farm and ensure the minimum of disruption for customers. It is this dedication to customer service that ACL has many repeat customers and occasionally even ends up employing ex customers and family members. ACL is also very proud of the many community projects it has supported over the years "the farmers are a great bunch of people and at the end of the day we are local people doing local work for locals and that's what counts."



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Has the cropping industry changed in 20 years?

In March this year, Nick Pyke stood down after 23 years of leading the Foundation for Arable Research. In this article he considers how the cropping industry has changed in that time, and what needs to happen to maintain its viability in the future.

WORDS SUPPLIED BY FAR (FOUNDATION FOR ARABLE RESEARCH)

Looking back over twenty years plus of involvement in the cropping industry it is easy to identify a number of on-farm changes, but changes beyond the farm gate are not so obvious.

On-farm, the crops being grown have changed; vegetable seed crops are more important and forage brassicas or fodder beet are filling winter feed options, often for visiting stock. The yield of many crops has increased dramatically; wheat and barley yields are often nearly double what they were 20 years ago, due to both genetic and agronomic gain, while ryegrass seed yields have more than doubled through agronomic gain alone. Unfortunately, yields of maize and peas remain largely unchanged despite huge investments in genetics by seed companies. Also, unfortunately, few new high value food crop options have become available to support the significant farmer investment in irrigation and other infrastructure.

The basic functions of various types of farm machinery have not changed, but there have been big improvements in cultivators, seed drills, sprayers, spreaders and harvesters. These improvements, coupled with precision agriculture and improved data capture and interpretation, allow farmers to deliver crop inputs much more accurately, and through gross margin maps, to understand which parts of paddocks make money or lose money. Paddock recording systems mean farmers can accurately record and report on inputs for traceability and gross margins and convert their returns to dollars per hectare per day rather than yield per crop, which has limited value. Some of the crop management changes farmers have made, and are making, are driven by the desire to improve environmental performance. They include things like targeted nutrient management, in particular nitrogen; accurate irrigation systems, with significant investment in new equipment; reduced tillage to reduce sediment loss and improve soil structure; improved agrichemical application and short fallows to protect soil quality and reduce soil and nutrient loss. While good crop management usually results in the best environmental outcomes, the implementation of such improvements is generally not cheap, and the increased costs are seldom reflected in increased payments for their products. In the past most, cropping farms were



engaged in “mixed cropping” and many farms are again becoming more integrated, with animals an integral component in managing the cropping system to reduce weeds, disease and the risks of agrichemical resistance. However, in some areas, such as bird management or crop storage management, little change has occurred.

Changes such as those outlined above have allowed farmers to match increased costs with increased yields in many, but not all, crops. But what has changed off-farm to support these huge on-farm investments and improvements? Generally, crop prices have changed very little, if at all, and in real terms they have reduced markedly. Some crops are traded in a global commodity market, but for crops entering to the domestic seed, feed or process market, service industries should be able to influence prices and pass savings on to the farmer.

There has been little change to the way the businesses in the service industries operate, even though smart use of the internet should enable the value chain to be redesigned to reduce cost and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of communication and service delivery, enabling more value to be returned to the farmer.

New Zealand farmers pay some of the highest seed prices in the world for some seeds, with suppliers often arguing this is justified by the quality of the seed or the seed treatments required to ensure good establishment or yield. Perhaps we need to ask whether some of these seed costs are necessary, or are they just supporting a service industry infrastructure that is greater than the farmers need?

Services industries also have a major role in protecting the industry from biosecurity incursions over both the national and individual farm borders. It is essential these companies act responsibly, know what is in the seed lines they import or sell to farmers and do not introduce weeds such as blackgrass or herbicide resistant ryegrass seed with imported or domestic ryegrass seed lines. Similarly, it is not OK to risk bringing in brown

ABOVE: The basic functions of various types of farm machinery have not changed, but there have been big improvements in cultivators, seed drills, sprayers, spreaders and harvesters

OPPOSITE: Farmers will need more value, either from improved prices for current crops or the introduction of new higher value crops

marmorated stink bugs in machinery imports from countries such as Italy or the USA.

Going forward, returns to farmers must increase to maintain a viable industry and to ensure that growers can continue to make the on-farm improvements required to meet the increasing environmental, quality and traceability demands. Solutions have yet to be found for a range of issues from bird damage to climate variability. Good information on greenhouse gas emissions, nutrient losses and new non-chemical disease, weed and pest management practices will be needed. Farmers will need more value, either from improved prices for current crops or the introduction of new higher value crops. A redesign of the value chain will be essential to ensure all participants are integral to the value web and are operating using modern and effective practices to minimise costs. Without some of these changes it is difficult to see how cropping can remain a viable land use in the future.

Changes in the service sector are essential. Some, such as changes to national and farm border biosecurity practices will become an essential part of business. Blockchain, and other disruptive technologies, will ensure that future focused proactive businesses are able to improve the value they provide to farmers and consumers. Blockchain is being developed by agriculture support businesses now and these businesses are expected to be the leaders of the future.

Over the past two decades, the cropping industry has made good progress in many areas but in others significant changes will be required. A consumer-focused value web will be an integral part of a viable agrifood based crop system and proactive industry participants will be part of a collaborative effort required to achieve this.

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Sustain gains

Research is showing that Sustain can boost yield and profit for arable farmers.

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Wheat and ryegrass seed crops require nitrogen at key growth stages to maximise yield. There is less flexibility around application timing than in a pastoral context and a greater risk that nitrogen is applied in less than ideal conditions.

If 5–10 mm of rain or irrigation does not arrive within eight hours of application, some of the applied nitrogen will be lost due to volatilisation. Because arable farmers use high rates of nitrogen, these losses can be significant.

Sustain reduces nitrogen volatilisation losses by 50% on average. Trials are showing that the marginal cost difference between Sustain and urea is more than offset by the gains in crop yield.

Sustain and ryegrass seed

The Foundation for Arable Research (FAR) has released results of a ten-year investigation into nitrogen application on ryegrass seed crops, involving 26 field trials on sites throughout Canterbury¹. Nitrogen is generally applied pre-closing (to increase dry matter for grazing), at closing and again about three weeks after closing.

Information from 11 trials revealed that using Sustain delivered a 6% increase in yield, compared to urea, even when

applying the urea using good management practices.

Sustain and wheat

Sustain's performance on wheat has been examined in a Cropmark/NZ Arable study reported on in 2009² and more recently in a Ballance-commissioned trial completed in 2013.

The 2013 trial compared grain yields from winter wheat crops grown with urea and Sustain (against a no-N control) on irrigated sites in Wakanui and Temuka. A lower and higher rate of N was compared at both sites. Nitrogen was applied at GS32 and GS39.

Both nitrogen fertilisers produced significantly higher yields than the control. On the Temuka site, at the lower application rate (110 kg N/ha) Sustain increased yield by an average of 0.5 tonnes grain/ha, compared to urea. Sustain also delivered a net economic benefit.

At the higher application rate (220 kg N/ha), Sustain increased yield by 0.18 tonnes/ha more than urea. Sustain still delivered a net economic benefit, albeit a much smaller one than achieved using the lower application rate.

Test to dress best

To apply nitrogen efficiently, you need to know how much will become available

from your soil. Some nitrogen is locked up as proteins or amino acids in soil organic matter. This is called organic nitrogen. When soil is cultivated, exposure to air, water and soil organisms converts some of this organic nitrogen to forms that your crop can use, such as nitrate and ammonia.

To estimate how much nitrogen your soil can supply to your cereal or grass seed crop, do a mineral nitrogen test (also called a deep nitrogen test), preferably to 60 cm deep in late winter/early spring. Do not confuse this with the available N test (also called anaerobic mineralisable N test), which is more suitable for brassicas and other forage/vegetable crops.

Your mineral N test result (along with information on your cultivar's yield potential) will tell you how much extra nitrogen you need to provide from the bag at key growth stages. Your farm advisor or nutrient specialist can help you with this calculation if required.

¹ Foundation for Arable Research, (2016) Nitrogen Application on Ryegrass. From the Ground Up, Issue 86, Winter 2016. 10-11.

² FAR Arable Update No 193, June 2009. 'Comparing urea, Sustain and DCn for broadcasting over wheat.'

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LEFT: Sebcos Diesel Stations

Storing and using petrol or diesel on-farm has the potential to create workplace hazards which could harm employees, family and others living nearby and as a consequence rules, regulations and best practices are often subject to scrutiny, review and revision. WORDS & IMAGES SUPPLIED BY SEBCO

To that end, new Health and Safety legislation regarding on-farm fuel storage has recently been introduced. It puts the onus fairly and squarely on the PCBU (person conducting business or undertaking) to ensure they're compliant and do not pose a risk to staff or contractors and that means now is a great time to make sure all of your storage tanks meet the prescribed requirements under the new rules.

It may seem like just another compliance task, but these rules are designed to keep everyone safe. Essentially, if you are the main farmer or contractor it is your responsibility to have your yard and equipment safe for all users, including those filling vehicles and filling your tanks.

Responsibilities include:

- Safe separation distances of fuel storage:
 - Diesel—needs to be 6m from an ignition source or combustible materials (hay/fertiliser, etc);
 - Petrol—needs to be 15m from an ignition source;
- All fuel storage being at least 20m away from high intensity land use i.e. a dwelling/cook house or even staff quarters;

- All diesel pumps are considered an ignition source for petrol, so diesel pumps should be 15m away from petrol storage;
- All training records being up to date for all staff;
- Having an emergency response plan in place if storing over a combined total of 2,000 litres of fuel;
- Having two fire extinguishers of a 30B rating when storing over 500 litres of diesel and the same for over 50 litres of petrol. They must be within 30m of your storage tanks;
- All tanks must be clearly identified with appropriate Hazchem signage for the product contained.

Ed Harrison of Sebcos (a fuel storage supplies business) says he saw an interesting situation where there was an underground petrol tank with a vent and the diesel bowser was mounted right under the vent. This just opens the door for an incident if the petrol tank is venting and a spark comes from the pump—it's got the potential for a catastrophe.

Another area that can sometimes be overlooked is the delivery driver climbing a ladder to fill the farmer's overhead tank. Some good questions include:

- Are all the legs in sound order with no bending or rusting?
- Is it on stable ground?
- How high is the delivery person going?
- Has the tank been lifted up to get better flow?

A few years ago, a farmer was killed when a 500-gallon diesel tank which had just been filled, collapsed and rolled on top of him. Taking the correct preventative steps could avoid other tragic accidents like this from occurring in the future.

It is also worth checking your tanks have the original data plate. All brand new storage tanks must have these plates fitted. They outline the size, safe fill limit, method of construction and the manufacturing company of the tank. If your tanks do not have this information attached, they will potentially be non-compliant, and this has been the case on a number of farms in the last few months following Worksafe property inspections.

Another recent requirement is that all diesel tanks on farm of over 2,000 litres must be banded. Before you look to purchasing the likes of a 1,995-litre overhead tank, there are alternative options. Take for example the Sebcos 2,300 litre, with on ground filling, a high flow pump with auto shut off and a 25-year design life for \$7,300 plus GST to Ruralco Cardholders and also comes with a 90 day interest free option. To find out more about the various available contact Sebcos on 0800 473 226 or email ed@sebcos.co.nz for your free copy of their tank compliance guide.



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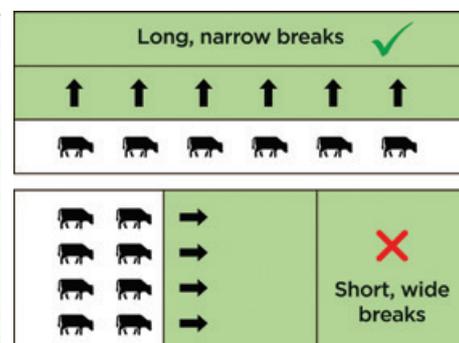


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Ten top tips for winter grazing of crops

Winter grazing of crops is a key source of sediment, nutrient and pathogen loss into waterways from farms. Reducing losses from winter crops can go a long way to reducing total farm losses. With a few simple steps, you can make a real difference now!

WORDS & IMAGES SUPPLIED BY BEEF + LAMB NEW ZEALAND (B+LNZ)



ABOVE: Long & narrow breaks diagram, refers to tip 4
LEFT: Final cattle grazing event in a winter crop of kale
BELOW LEFT: Strategic grazing diagram

7. **Look after your stock.** Provide adequate feed, shelter and clean fresh drinking water. Doing this will also limit stock movement and help reduce damage to crop and soil.
8. **Graze the buffer strips around CSAs when soil is not so wet** and risk of loss has reduced. Graze quickly and lightly if you can.
9. **Plant a catch crop.** Where soil conditions and farm management allow, consider planting a fast growing crop in spring such as greenfeed oats. It can make a dramatic difference to reducing nitrogen losses.
10. **Plan early.** When choosing paddocks for next year's winter feed crop, think about how you can improve your management of CSAs and waterways.

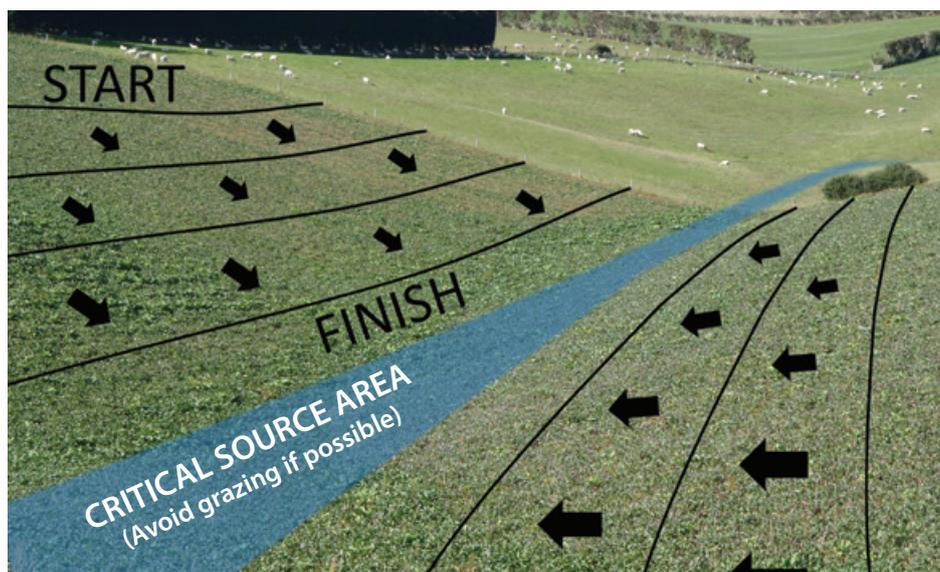
Additional information and acknowledgements

Beef + Lamb New Zealand would like to acknowledge AgResearch Ltd for their assistance with this fact sheet, which documents some of the findings made in the Pastoral21 research programme.

Other B+LNZ resources available on our website include: Farm Environment Plan, Land Environment Plan, A guide to feed planning for sheep farmers, Management practices for forage brassicas, and FeedSmart User Guide. www.feedsmart.co.nz – app to calculate feed requirements for animals, allowing you to calculate pasture/crop usage when moving animals to paddocks.

For more information visit: www.beeflambnz.com/wintergrazing

INFORMATION SOURCED FROM B+LNZ FACT SHEET "TEN TOP TIPS FOR WINTER GRAZING OF CROPS" DEVELOPED IN JULY 2017 (AVAILABLE TO DOWNLOAD AT WWW.BEEFLAMBNZ.COM). B+LNZ IS NOT LIABLE FOR ANY DAMAGE SUFFERED AS A RESULT OF RELIANCE ON THE INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THIS ARTICLE.



Soil is our greatest asset, holding on to more of it makes good economic sense. Damage to soil from poor grazing management of winter crops will impact on the future productivity of that paddock. Too much soil and nutrients in waterways impacts on their ecology and can kill freshwater species.

What can you do?

1. **Exclude stock from waterways.** Create an ungrazed buffer zone of crop between the livestock and the waterway. 3-5 metres is a good starting point but this should increase with slope and instability of soil.
2. **Leave an ungrazed buffer zone around either side of Critical Source Areas (CSAs).** These are parts of the paddock that can channel overland flow directly to waterways, like gullies, swales, very wet areas, spring heads, waterway crossings, stock camps and vehicle access routes.
3. **Graze paddocks strategically.** On a sloping paddock, fence across the slope and start grazing at the top of the paddock, so the standing crop acts as a filter. Or, if there is a waterway present, start grazing at the opposite end of the paddock.
4. **Make breaks "long and narrow".** Research shows that the crop will be utilised more efficiently by cattle.
5. **Back fence.** Regularly backfence stock off grazed breaks to help minimise pugging damage and to reduce runoff risk.
6. **Place troughs and supplementary feed in a dry central part of the paddock** well away from any waterways or CSAs.

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Gas an efficient option for farmers

Farmers now have the opportunity to access an efficient alternative energy source suitable for multiple applications within farm homes and businesses. WORDS BY RICHARD RENNIE



LPG is now available widely throughout the country, thanks to Genesis Energy purchasing Nova Energy's gas distribution business late last year.

The move makes Genesis the second largest player in New Zealand's gas market. Its 46% share in the giant offshore Kupe oil and gas reserves makes Genesis the only energy company with source and upstream investment in supply assets, giving the company a direct link through to its clients and consumers. Until now Genesis has been a niche player in the energy market, with residential focus its main area of gas supply, through third party bottled gas delivery.

Since taking over the Nova Energy assets Genesis has taken over an experienced national distribution network including 90 staff. Since then Genesis has also invested heavily in building its customer relations team based on their knowledge of the rural market, including both farms and rural communities.

LPG has been long recognised as combining portability, accessibility and convenience with clean burning, efficient properties, including lower green-house gas emission than typical fossil fuels. Its non-toxic footprint also makes storage low risk on farm in terms of soil contamination or aquifer pollution.

As New Zealand moves towards "decarbonisation", LPG gas also provides an ideal stepping stone energy solution for homes and businesses wanting to transition from traditional fossil fuel energy sources.

A well-established infrastructure for processing and delivery also means LPG

can be used without requiring any major investments at the customer's end, and offers a variety of means for storage and connection, depending upon the user's end needs.

Genesis National LPG Business Development Manager Craig Colbran says for some businesses in the rural sector, LPG is already a well-established energy source.

"Intensive green house operations use LPG for large scale temperature management. Similarly its ability to deliver a tightly controlled heat range also makes it ideal for heating intensive animal operations including poultry and pork operations. Dairy farmers enjoy almost instantaneous hot water supply for farm dairies with LPG heating source, while grain drying in Canterbury is one of the most common uses for the clean burning gas," he says.

LPG is up to five times more efficient than traditional fuels, reducing costs, gas emissions and time, particularly for farm operations requiring heat exchange or a rapid heat source.

Genesis can deliver LPG in a variety of gas container sizes ideally suited to match the user's demand profile.

The familiar 7kg "home barbeque" bottles and 45kg household bottles will be familiar to many, and provide a handy home based source of heat energy supply.

For larger users, including dairy farmers requiring LPG for heating or arable farmers for grain drying, LPG can be bulk stored through 220kg or even 5t tank storage facilities on farm.

For arable farmers LPG as an energy source for drying grains brings a number of advantages. Its clean burning nature and easily controllable power for mobile and fixed grain driers enables temperatures to be dialled into a very specific, stable range best suited for the crop being dried.

LPG suited grain driers typically offer a choice of fuel storage options with tanks or cylinders, ensuring a cost effective supply that is well matched to total grain processed in what is a highly seasonal task.

Typically 2.5 litres of LPG will reduce moisture levels in a tonne of grain by 1%, with LPG use improving drying efficiency with 90% of its bulk converting to energy.

A modern grain drier will require as little as 1650 Btus (British Thermal Units) of heat energy to remove 500ml of water, compared with older technology that required almost twice that.

The "clean" footprint of LPG minimises contamination risk, water ingress or fuel sediment issues, keeping the drying process straightforward and lowering any risk of crop wastage.

The clean burning nature of LPG reduces the risk of burners clogging, and of grain combustion during the drying process.

"And of course the risk of theft you have with traditional fuels is eliminated."

For dairy operators considering using LPG as a water heating source Genesis can advise on installing "on demand" water heating technology.

Working closely with Longveld Engineering in Hamilton, Genesis has also developed a heating system tailored specifically to the needs of farm dairies.

"And an ongoing benefit of having LPG as your energy source is its relatively stable pricing, and the absence of 'peak' pricing you get with electricity use at certain times of the day. Price wise LPG works out at 11–16¢/kWh depending upon your usage."

"Also, by reducing the demand for electrical heating, for example, farmers can reduce their capacity requirements and with that capacity charges, making a second saving."

Craig says Genesis now has a strong rural team in place to discuss farm energy needs and can offer a range of customised service plans to users that matches their seasonal business needs and equipment

demands. To discuss this option further for your business, contact Ruralco Energy Account Manager Tracey Gordon on 0800 787 256 or 027 652 2133.



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Saving our land

The “Our Land 2018” document was released by the the Ministry for the Environment and Statistics New Zealand in April.

WORDS BY MIKE CHAPMAN, CEO OF HORTICULTURE NEW ZEALAND, IMAGES SUPPLIED BY HORTICULTURE NEW ZEALAND



This report (available on the Ministry for the Environment website) draws together the data and details about New Zealand’s biodiversity and ecosystems, above and below ground, that sustain every aspect of life in New Zealand. It finds that the state of our biodiversity, ecosystems and soil resources continues to decline with a loss of indigenous land cover, coastal and lowland ecosystems, and the decline of indigenous land-based vertebrates and some bird species. Except for some on offshore islands and within fenced sanctuaries, exotic pests are found almost everywhere in New Zealand. Predation and plant-eating by pests, as well as disease and competition from weeds, continue to threaten our indigenous biodiversity and our commercial vegetable and fruit growing operations.

The report highlights the importance of land to New Zealand’s continued economic prosperity as our two top export earners, primary production and tourism, rely on our land. In 2016, half of New Zealand’s total export earnings came from primary production. The report substantiates horticulture’s concerns about on-going urban and life style block expansion into prime growing land. It shows that urgent action is required to slow this down. Fruit and vegetables, in particular, are grown close to cities and towns. This is because it is where high quality soils are found and before improvements in transportation, produce was grown close to where it was eaten. Between 1996 and 2012 urban land area increased by 10 percent. Auckland led the urban expansion, followed by the Waikato and Canterbury. Of the high class land in Auckland, 8.3 percent was lost to houses.

Land fragmentation—where large commercial growing areas are subdivided into smaller life style blocks on the fringes of urban areas—is



covered in the report, noting the risk this poses to keeping high quality soils for growing food. Of Auckland’s most valuable growing land for example, 35 percent is in life style blocks. Commercial food growing businesses adjacent to new urban areas and life style blocks are getting constrained by sensitivities which affect their ability to grow.

Our question remains: where are we going to grow healthy fruit and vegetables if the high quality soils continue to be lost to urban and life style development? There needs to be a balance between housing and feeding people. If this development is not controlled and constrained, our future ability to feed ourselves and earn valuable export dollars will be lost. Now is the time to act, before it is too late.

Environment Minister David Parker has heard our calls for action and is acting to address the problem. He is quoted as saying about the report: “I was particularly troubled by how much of our urban growth is occurring in our irreplaceable highly productive land. Even in a country as lucky as New Zealand we only have limited quantities

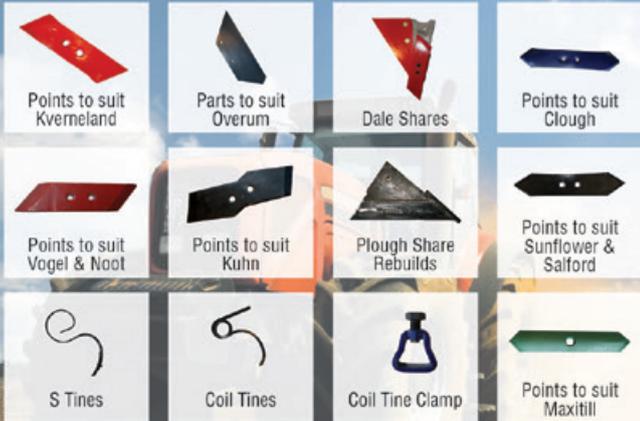
ABOVE: Land fragmentation—where large commercial growing areas are subdivided into smaller life style blocks on the fringes of urban areas
TOP: Our question remains: where are we going to grow healthy fruit and vegetables if the high quality soils continue to be lost to urban and lifestyle development

of these high-class soils”. In fact, only 5.2 percent of all our land is high quality land. Minister Parker is taking steps to address the loss of prime horticultural land, as well as the impacts life style blocks have on our most productive land. He has asked his Ministry (for the Environment) to start work on a National Policy Statement (NPS) protecting Versatile Land and High Class Soils nationwide. He says: “We have to ensure we have enough land to build the houses people need, but we must protect our most productive areas too”.

This is exactly what Horticulture New Zealand has been campaigning for. A NPS will provide a direction to councils to protect the land we need for growing vegetables and fruit. This is an excellent response and one the Environment Minister is acknowledged for making.

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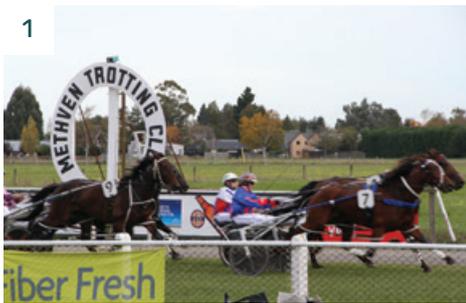
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3. Race day action
4. Micheal Heenan, Methven Trotting Club Committee Member

Methven Young Farmers Club Bark Up



1. 1st place farm dog Boots with Bryce Yorke;
2. Rhonda & Hillary from Royal Canin (sponsors), Billy Dowle and his dog Earl, Lucy Dynes, Brooke Dickey and Kelsie Laing (committee)
3. 1st place non-farm dog Rusty with Skyla Taylor
4. Nicola Turner with her dog Jack

Lincoln Young Farmers Club Speed Shears



1. Cody Macindor (Clean Shear category)
2. Lionel Taumata from Southland (Senior Shear category)
3. Lyall Windleburn from Canterbury (1st place Open Shear category)
4. James Wilson from Southland (Clean Shear category)

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Silo Heights Safety Training

Ruralco in conjunction with Compliance Partners and NZ Safety Blackwoods will be holding another popular Working at Heights (Silo's) course in July/ August (date to be confirmed). If you would like to attend the course or would like more information, please contact Peter Jacob either on 03 307 5100 or Peter.Jacob@ruralco.co.nz.

Ashburton District Council resigning as a Card Supplier

As of the 1 of July 2018, The Ashburton District Council has decided it will discontinue to accept the Ruralco Card as a form of Payment. This comes as a result of an internal review done by The Council. If you are currently paying your rates through your Ruralco Card, please get in touch with the Ashburton District Council on 03 307 7700 to organise alternative payment. We apologise for the inconvenience.

Personalised energy advice just for you

When is the last time you took a close look at your electricity accounts? When did you last review your energy plans? Are you getting the best pricing solution for your farm? Ruralco Energy is here to make managing your energy accounts easy by continuing to work with our partners—Meridian, Genesis Energy and Kea Energy—to ensure you get the best offers available to suit your individual needs.

Contact Ruralco Energy Account Manager, Tracey Gordon today to get an energy price comparison on your accounts.

Are you kitted out for the winter?

The 2018 Winter Clothing Catalogue showcases the winter range for the whole family. From onsies to wet weather gear, Ruralco has it all covered. Check out the catalogue at www.ruralco.co.nz.



New neighbours?

Do you have new neighbours? Then let them know about Ruralco and why they should join your local farm supplies co-op. If you are on the move please let Ruralco know so we can keep our database up to date, and to make sure you don't miss out on any important information. To update your details or to help your new neighbour join Ruralco please contact the Customer Service Centre on 0800 787 256

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