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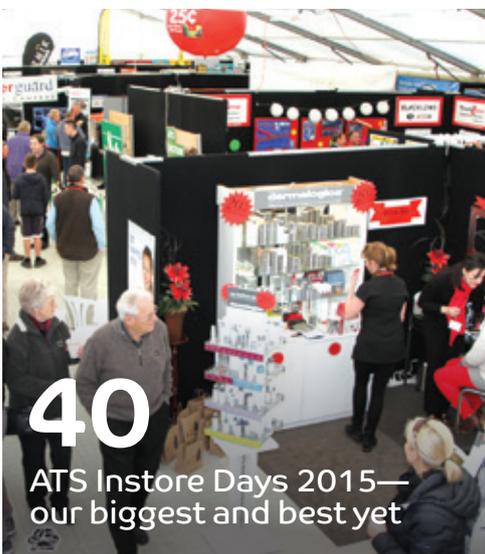
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ON THE COVER:
Debs Stilgoe-Brooker
with daughters Amy
(left) and Penny
(right)

Canterbury focus for Firstlight grass-fed Wagyu

Few dedicated carnivores, and even a few who waiver a bit, can resist the alluring scent of a good steak cooking. The smell brings a primeval promise with it, of sustenance and satisfaction, tapping into the deep primeval part of our caveman being when cooked meat was a hard fought, well-earned meal to be cherished.

BY RICHARD RENNIE



Firstlight Wagyu attaches another story to its Wagyu beef products that runs parallel to that caveman passion for red meat. But the Firstlight story is one that also fits with a modern consumer's desire to purchase quality food knowing where it has come from, and that rather than being hunted like the red meat sources of our forebears, it has been cared for and tended to over the course of its life.

For Firstlight Wagyu its beef will now often begin life in the cradle of a Canterbury dairy farm,

before moving along a pathway to be reared and finished by a carefully developed network of beef farmers committed to being part of a system that delivers high value beef to discerning diners, both here and overseas.

Firstlight Wagyu stems out of the innovative food company Firstlight Foods, which started business in 2003, known then only as "pipeline."

Managing director Gerard Hickey says the working title came from its founders' desire to connect the farmers who grow animals for meat,

ABOVE: Peter Keeling, Firstlight Supply Chain Manager with Wagyu calves

to the consumers who eat it in a transparent, easily connected fashion.

"It was a case of wanting to produce meat that meant the consumers who ate it could feel free to pick up the phone and talk to the people who grew it, if they had that urge," he says.

The company became most well-known for its Firstlight Venison products, with a high standard of animal welfare and farming.

Venison is sourced only from red deer, with tenderness assured by only processing yearling deer, farmed in a consistent, low stress environment. This is reflected in a high quality eating experience by the consumer, and is open to inspection by the affiliated retailers.

Late last decade the company moved into Wagyu beef production, following the same ownership model it had for its venison business, where farmers own half the enterprise and get a stake in its profits.

Originally from Japan, and often associated with cattle that are fed beer and massaged, the breed has proven to adapt well to New Zealand outdoor grass-fed conditions when used as a terminal sire, providing half bred Wagyu progeny.

Gerard Hickey says the quality of Wagyu beef is measured by its degree of "marbling", the fat deposited within the steak, rather than layered on the outside which is more typical of traditional cattle breeds.

The marbled effect is often achieved through grain feeding animals, but experience with grass fed Wagyu has proven even with 50% Wagyu genetics the breed can achieve the desired marbling effect on grass alone, and the higher premiums that brings. Produced on grass, the marbling is a special type of fat that also contains nutritive values with high levels of Omega 3.

"Typically you can sell a grass fed Wagyu steak for twice what you would get on a quality traditionally sourced steak. Consumers in cities like New York and Los Angeles really understand what marbling is, they know about Wagyu, and they are prepared to pay for it," says Gerard.



For Gerard Hickey that combination of quality "healthy" beef reared in a healthy outdoor New Zealand environment, fed only upon nutritious grass was a package no marketer could ignore.

From initial market success it soon became apparent there was considerably more potential overseas to capitalise on the company's aim to grow the world's only 100% grass-fed Wagyu beef. Suppliers requiring year round delivery of the quality steaks meant the numbers had to be

ABOVE: The next generation of Wagyu

BELOW: Wagyu has proven to adapt well to New Zealand outdoor grass-fed conditions when used as a terminal sire

increased on farms to ensure supply security to those premium market buyers.

In 2012 a Primary Growth Partnership Programme (PGP) between Grassfed Wagyu and the Ministry for Primary Industries was established, and it aims to establish grass-fed marbled beef exports at higher volumes while also giving dairy farmers another choice when they're looking at mating options for dams not required to produce replacement heifers i.e. provide a higher return for calves not wanted by the dairy farmer or the traditional dairy beef finishing farmer.

The \$23 million PGP project has government funding matching that of Firstlight Wagyu and other investors and aims to deliver economic benefits to NZ of \$80m/year by 2025.

"Using Wagyu genetics provides a win: win opportunity for both dairy and beef sectors. Dairy farmers now have the opportunity to mate their Kiwi cross cows with Wagyu genetics and receive a premium payment for the four day old calf, and receive a guaranteed \$150 for it. Or they have the option to rear it until weaned, again receiving a premium and having the security of a contracted buyer at the end of the period."

For the beef sector there is the opportunity to capture some of the calves slaughtered as bobby calves or lost on farm each year, estimated to be two million in 2014. Beef farmers can become part of a value chain at any stage of the rearing process, from contracting to rear the four day old calves off dairy farms right through to finishing, or buying at weaning or even later and running for a period that fits their farm's management system.

For dairy farmers wanting to get a small calf out of their first calving heifers, the only option they often



reach for is a Jersey bull which achieves a low risk birthweight, but also delivers a low to no value calf. Gerard says the Wagyu's lighter birthweight opens up another breed option that will ensure a small calf, but also one that has up to five times the value of the usual Jersey genetics option.

Canterbury has become an integral part of Firstlight Wagyu's efforts to build tighter relationships between the dairy sector and beef farmers.

As part of the PGP the company initiated a sire proving programme working with (then) Synlait Farms, now known as Purata Farms, to determine what Wagyu sires were the most suitable for crossing with Friesian and Kiwi-cross dairy cows. Comparing the genetics from nine Wagyu bulls the company initially had 600 calves in the first year as comparison.

Firstlight Wagyu supply manager Peter Keeling says the progeny trial owes much to being able to work closely with Purata Farms over a larger number of cows. The trial involved the farms initially putting the Wagyu semen over non replacement cows, and then follows the offspring from birth right through to slaughter, determining the bulls that deliver the easier calving, shorter gestation periods, and best growth rates through to weaning then to finishing, and finally the highest quality meat and best carcass yields at processing.

The progeny trial is helping hone the genetics offered to dairy farmers who are enticed by the prospect of a guaranteed buyer for a higher value calf in a year when dairy payouts are low.

Peter Keeling says Firstlight is keen to talk to Canterbury dairy farmers who want to generate more cashflow and who may enjoy being part of an exciting, established premium beef brand. Payment premiums are typically up to five times what calves would get as Kiwi-cross bobbies, with collection at four to seven days, and payment within 21.



"There is also a fantastic opportunity here for the region's beef and dry stock farmers who may be seeking a stock type that fits in with their farming system. Delivering a guaranteed, value added return holds strong appeal in what is becoming a volatile global commodity market."

Gerard Hickey's market visits to catch up with buyers has reassured him the prospects for 100% Grassfed Wagyu are firm.

Firstlight Wagyu has started to gain a solid foothold in the highly competitive, top quality Los Angeles beef market, with premium supermarkets like Bristol Farms enjoying strong demand for the beef.

"Not a week goes by when we don't have buyers or consumers tell us this is the best beef they have ever tasted. It is easy to market a product as good as this," he says.

And for farmers wondering what the fuss is about when it comes to eating grassfed Wagyu, they can now find out.

The company is entering all dairy farmers who sign up for Wagyu semen into a draw to win a box of high value Wagyu steaks this spring.

Firstlight's "Wagyu Lady" making her mark in Canterbury

Debs Stilgoe-Brooker has found her double barrel surname has been dropped over the past year, and instead she's become known locally in Mid Canterbury as "Debs the Wagyu lady."

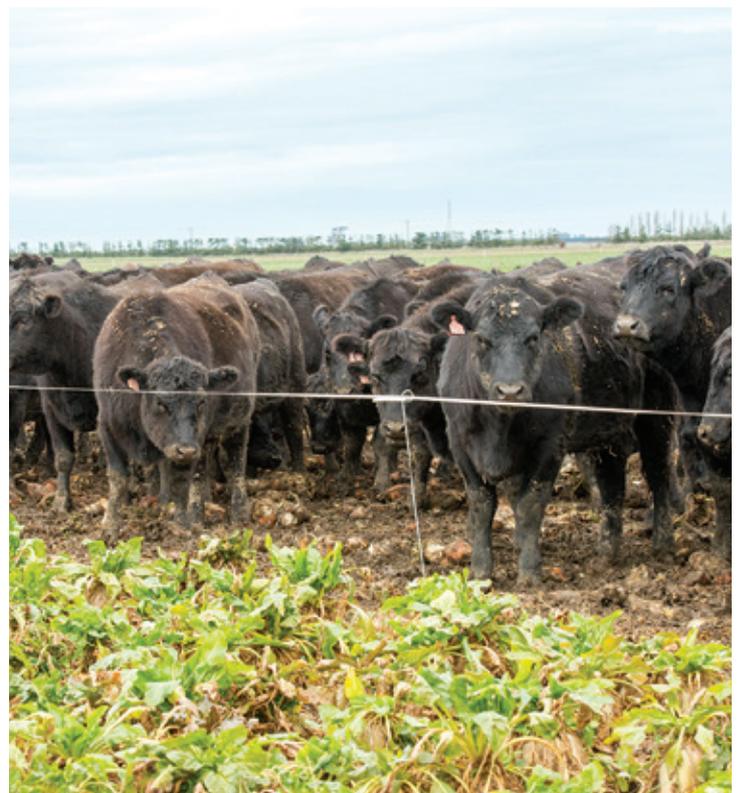
It's a title she's proud to claim in her capacity as South Island Firstlight Wagyu hub manager, and it's a role that has her acting as a proud matron to her young Wagyu charges.

Debs has become something of a moving attraction on Canterbury roads over spring and

ABOVE: Debs Stilgoe-Brooker with her children Amy (left) and Penny (right)

BELOW RIGHT: Deb's and her husband have an 8ha block including a calf rearing operation, which has reared up to 150 calves.

BELOW LEFT: Debs is looking forward to building a tight network of dairy farmer providers, rearers and finishers of Wagyu



autumn calving periods with her “Wagyu Wagon”, a specially adapted trailer complete with pink and blue sign and the words “Baby Moos on Board”.

It provides some light relief to anyone farming over the stressful calving period as she drives up the farm race to collect the precious four day old Wagyu-cross calves born on contract to Firstlight Wagyu.

Debs’ role covers all aspects of the “genetics to the steak” for Firstlight Wagyu, as hub manager. This includes ensuring collection of the calves and delivery to rearers who take them through to weaning and liaising with finishers.

“They are pretty pampered, we disinfect the trailer daily, put in fresh straw and there are vents to let the air circulate on warm days—sometimes I will arrive at the rearers’ place and they have all gone to sleep!”

Debs’ role with Firstlight Wagyu started two years ago when she was asked to help out the company On Farm Research with the Firstlight Wagyu progeny trial. This required careful recording of calves from birth as their growth rates and genetics were followed through after being born on the (then) Synlait Farms Limited properties (now known as Purata).

Her role was a natural fit for this English woman who ran a mile from the office accounting cubicle after backpacking around the world and New Zealand.

“When I got residency here I looked for a “proper” job. I was a trainee accountant for three years in the UK before backpacking, but just could not face going back into the office and needed something else.”

So despite a fear of pigs, she opted to go pig farming, where she reasoned the fear was less than that of occupying an accounting cubicle for the rest of her working days.

She well and truly overcame her porcine fear, to become a manager running farm operations that fell within the top 5% of the country’s piggeries, and was ultimately offered a job by Pfizer Animal Health as a technical representative.

Her hands on experience managing young animals has made her ideal for the role with Firstlight Wagyu, a role that she has come to occupy and thrive on in the Canterbury rural scene.

“Between Firstlight and work with a technical farm consultant, small business advice, running our own small block and some livestock trading, things usually involve farming, and is always busy.”

She is also Mum to two young daughters Amy (11) and Penny (12) who are well used to adopting and rearing a menagerie of animals on their block.

Summer time also has her busy in the community as a volunteer fire fighter with the rural brigade and after 15 years active service she is now Deputy Fire Chief with the Rural Fire Force.

Debs’ and her husband of 3 years Vaughan have an 8ha block including a calf rearing operation, which has reared up to 150 calves.

After years backpacking around the world she says she has fed calves in almost every system possible, and is convinced by the value the Firstlight Wagyu programme can bring to farmers in the South Island.

“Over the last couple of years I think farmers have been just watching to see how things go. But with a lower dairy payout this season, they can see the opportunities that come from this, and that the Firstlight model is a really sound, value added option for them to mate cows with for non-replacement, higher value calves.”

Her practical experience rearing young stock means she is able to offer some practical tips for farmers thinking about using Wagyu genetics.

“A challenge I often help overcome is to identify the Wagyu cross calves at birth, as it can be

Initially all calves went to the North Island for weight and growth monitoring, but Debs is looking forward to building a tight network of dairy farmer providers, rearers and finishers throughout Mid-Canterbury and further around the South Island from now on, providing some valuable alternative income streams.

For this lady who brings her farmer clients morning tea when calling over the busy calving time, Wagyu is an extension of her own values and beliefs on eating healthily, knowing where your food comes from, and caring for the animals that provide it.



ABOVE: Debs’ famous “Wagyu Wagon”

difficult to initially tell them apart from a Kiwi-cross calf. I encourage larger farm operations to consider an “A” and “B” herd, with the “B” being the Wagyu mated cows. Marking them differently too, with tail paint, perhaps with a mark on their flank so if they do get mixed up, you will easily know them apart.”

With 1,300 calves born in the past two years, her phone is ringing off the hook with farmers interested in mating with Wagyu this spring.

“I am not a religious person, but Wagyu is my religion in a way.”

“It’s a chance for dairy farmers to have the option to rear the animals on themselves or produce animals to be finished in the beef sector, and have a high value animal that makes for a great steak!”

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NEAL SHAW, GROUP CEO

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When this article goes to print we will have just completed our financial year with 1 July signalling the start of the new 2015/16 year, and our first being 100 percent owned by ATS. The market place has experienced challenges, both climatically and at the farm gate with lowered returns affecting all agricultural sectors, and this will present challenges and opportunities for Ruralco as it continues to grow its business.

Ruralco is steadily building its supplier network and while predominately focussed on the South Island there are a number of Ruralco nationwide suppliers who accept the card throughout the North Island.

Plans to offer card and bulk fuel to the North Island farming community within the next 12 months are also underway. The South Island already has a strong, established fuel network, meeting a variety of farming needs through a continually expanding network.

Subject to some anticipated programming changes, you will soon be able to use your Ruralco Card at truck stops and service stations after hours. This will allow purchases to be consolidated on one card (your Ruralco Card) creating a greater level of convenience. Those who require a fuel card to cover at over 380 fuelling facilities nationwide can still use the Ruralco Mobilcard.

The fuel market has become extremely emotive recently and widely misunderstood. Discounts offered do not always reflect true offers. Prices for bulk on-farm fuel have varied from 17 to 29 cents off the national pump price and depend on the barrel and dollar fluctuations, therefore your current discounted price might not be a true reflection of your ongoing discount.

Some companies may have you believe you are receiving the same discount across all their card acceptors which in many cases is not correct, or you may be paying transaction or card fees you were not even aware of.

If you want to understand more about fuel pricing, talk to our Ruralco Fuel Sales Manager, Don Joseph. Don has had 30 years in the fuel industry and can fully explain the offers so you can make the best decision for your business. He

can be contacted at don.joseph@ruralco.co.nz or by phoning 0800 RURALNZ (787 256).

An example of how you need to keep an eye on pricing is the discount which is available through NPD (Nelson Petroleum Distributors) in Halswell Junction Road, Christchurch. NPD give 12 cents* per litre discount off at the pump price for diesel and 6 cents* per litre for petrol. By using your Ruralco Mobilcard you also receive the 12 cents per litre standard Ruralco discount as a credit on your account, which means the actual discount to Ruralco Mobilcard holders is 24 cents per litre for petrol and 18 cents for diesel. (*NPD discount current as at 1 July 2015).

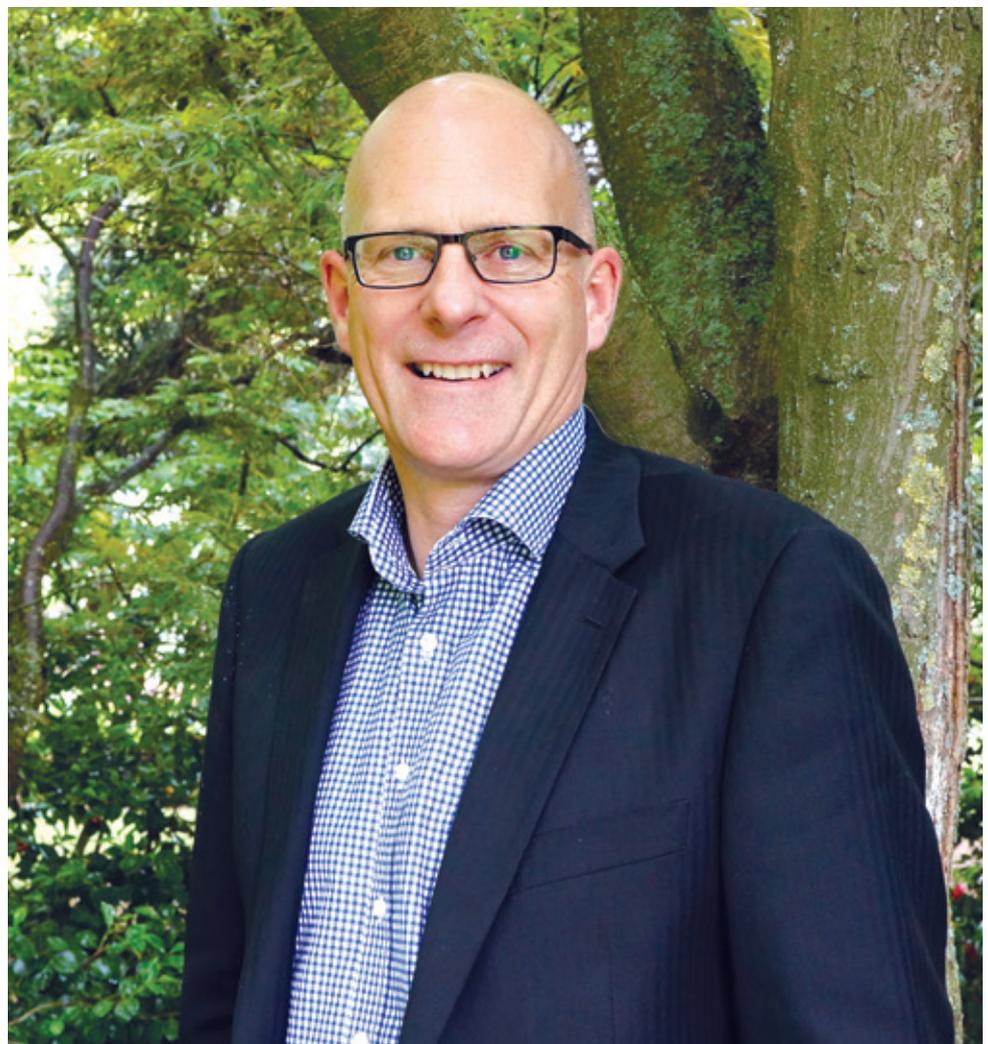
There has been a small amount of feedback on the annual Ruralco account fee and the benefits therein, which I would like to address. ATS Members who have purchased their \$500 worth of shares are entitled to the card as part of their ATS Membership, while non-ATS Ruralco Cardholders are subject to the account fee. It is worth noting for those of you who have shares

in other rural supply co-operatives, and are unhappy about the Ruralco account fees, that on top of buying your shares you also pay an annual account fee for their rural supply card.

Non-ATS Ruralco Cardholders also have access to the ATS Rural Supplies business where they can purchase all their farm needs. They also have access to nationwide fuel and the card supply network. Non-ATS members don't have access to fertiliser and electricity through ATS—these are exclusive for ATS Members, as is the opportunity for rebates. New ATS members are always welcome to join.

As we move forward, Ruralco's role will continue to remain very important, particularly in tighter economic conditions. We will continue to offer guaranteed payment for suppliers, discounted rates for farmers and a centralised billing system which means everyone wins.

BELOW: Neal Shaw, Group CEO



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How to manage the calving season

As you read this calving will be underway on most dairy farms, and there may well be some early lambs around on lower country. ARTICLE SUPPLIED BY IAN HODGE. BVSC., MACVSC. VETENT RIVERSIDE

This time of year can be extremely busy, especially on dairy farms, and it is easy to lose sight of the importance of attention to detail while rearing calves and lambs up to weaning.

Calves should be removed from the cows as soon as possible following birth. It is ideal to pick them up twice daily. The reasons for this are to ensure adequate colostrum intake through stomach tubing, and to avoid infections establishing in the calf. Umbilical infections, intestinal infections (Johnes Disease) and pneumonia are common, and are best prevented by early calf pick up and suitable calf housing. Removing calves early may seem harsh, but in practice it provides them with the best start in life and optimizes their health and welfare.

Once gathered up from the paddock, calves should be separated in to males (bobbies) and females. All calves should have their navels dipped in a strong iodine solution (not iodine teat spray). They should also all receive an amount of colostrum equal to 10-20% of their birth weight by stomach tube, i.e 30kg calf will require at least 3L, but 6L would be better. This early feeding of colostrum within 12 hours of being born will provide vital antibodies for the calf, both in its blood stream and in its gut.

The quality of colostrum is very important and colostrum fed to calves within this "golden period"

should be the first milking colostrum from cows or heifers that do not have mastitis, and should not be diluted with any other milk. If the herd has been vaccinated with anti-rotavirus vaccines the colostrum will be hyper-immune with rotavirus, coronavirus and E. coli antibodies depending on the vaccine used. Using this colostrum will have the effect of protecting calves against infection, and in reducing the prevalence of the disease in and around the calf sheds. Colostrum feeding can be continued for three weeks to continue to provide local protection against infection in the calf's gut.

Preventing neonatal scours is important because once infected a replacement heifer may well have reduced productivity for her entire lifetime. Certainly her performance before weaning will be poor, her weaning weight target will be delayed, her post -weaning growth will be reduced and her reproductive performance at 15 months will be reduced. If the outbreak is severe enough the six week in calf rate of the herd will be reduced because of a poor heifer calving pattern.

Calves should be kept in North facing covered barns that are twice as deep as wide. This has the effect of preventing the impact of draughts and temperature changes in the pens. Draughts are highly significant in the development of scours in calves. The bedding in calf pens should be free

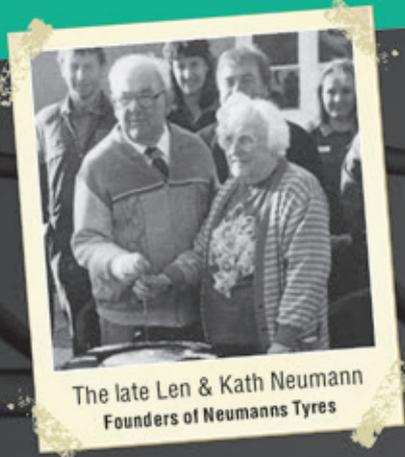
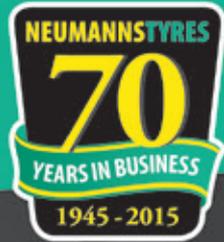
draining and the material used should be unable to grow bacteria. Sand is an excellent choice, but fine, soft bark chips are a good choice also. Pen walls should be solid to help prevent the spread of infection between groups. Calves should be stocked at about one per 1.5 square metres and there should be no more than 20 animals per pen. If calves become sick they should be removed from the pen and isolated for the remainder of the pre- weaning period because they remain infectious via faecal shedding.

Calves should be fed whole milk twice daily at the same time each day, and from a week of age calf meal can be slowly introduced. The milk temperature should ideally be warm and must be kept consistent. Over feeding can cause gut upsets.

Feeding utensils that are used for the calves must be washed and disinfected between pens using HOT water and disinfectant, and human traffic between the cow shed and the calf shed should be kept to a minimum. A disinfectant foot bath for use by all visitors to the calf pen is a very good idea.

Sick calves should be promptly examined by a Vet to establish a diagnosis and treatment plan. At this visit your Vet will be only too happy to evaluate your calf rearing program and help identify any areas that may present a risk of disease breakdown.

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One of Ashburton's oldest and most trusted businesses, Neumanns Tyres, celebrates 70 years in business this month. BY LINDA CLARKE

Started by Len and Kath Neumann in 1945, Neumanns Tyres is now run by their sons Alan and Ian, with two of their children Vinnie and Emma working their way up the ranks.

The company values that worked for Len in the early days—hard work and great customer service—still apply and they are a business success story as well as offering a helping hand to community and sports groups through sponsorship where possible.

The whole week August has been earmarked for some special celebrations. There will be great tyre specials for customers, who will also be entered into lucky draws with lots of smaller prizes and one major prize to be won. Watch that space.

Staff too will celebrate the milestone at a special function.

The family is proud the third generation is keen to be involved. Emma, 26, has been working there for eight years and recently completed a Diploma in Business, specialising in accounting. Vinnie, 22, still dons the overalls some days to work in the tyre bay and has also completed a Diploma in Business, specialising in marketing and HR.

They have been involved in most aspects of the business since their days in after-school jobs there, and know customers by sight and name. Alan and Ian still take pleasure in coming to the counter too to deal with customers or simply catch up.

The business has come a long way, evolving and expanding. In the very early days Len would find himself repairing gumboots or inserting liners in the tyres of Bob Burnett's trucks to keep them roadworthy.

With post-war fuel rationing discouraging people from driving, Neumann's customer service never

waned. He would often be seen cycling around town to collect tyres in need of repair.

With such commitment to the needs of his clients, it was not surprising the Neumanns Tyres sales and tyre repair service expanded its scope to Ashburton's wider business community and to rural areas.

Not interested in sales alone, he would offer friendly advice and on-site after-sales service. These were the foundations on which the business today is based.

Later, with Alan and Ian at the helm, the enterprise flourished and soon expanded with the inclusion of Tyre General Christchurch and Tyre General South Canterbury (Temuka and Timaru).

With Jim Black, of General Tyres Southern, from Dunedin, the brothers purchased the Bandag retread manufacturing plant in Christchurch where a range of pre-cure treads for light and heavy trucks and for agricultural and earthmoving equipment was produced.

Specialising in heavy truck tyres and developing a rapidly growing customer base of large trucking fleets, it made sense that the company should increase its service network as far afield as Motueka, Nelson, Blenheim and Amberley and, south, to Oamaru, Cromwell, Dunedin and Invercargill.

In July, 2012, Tyre General's directors negotiated the purchase of several South Island commercial outlets from Beaurepairs that were earmarked for closure. These branches were merged with



ABOVE TOP: The business originally started by Len and Kath Neumann in 1945

ABOVE BOTTOM: The foundations that the business has been built on are friendly advice and on-site after-sales service

MAIN IMAGE: The business has come a long way each store now operates a number of fleet-servicing vehicles 24 hours 7 days a week

existing Tyre General Stores to strengthen the branding and presence in Washdyke, Christchurch, Nelson and Blenheim.

Each store operates a number of fleet-servicing vehicles 24 hours, seven days a week.

Those who cannot get to their closest store can arrange for a serviceman to come to them.

And their unwavering philosophy remains: Right tyre on the right rim, at the right pressure and the right price.



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Improving margins in a low milk payout

Commodity milk prices have not been recovering at a rate that is sufficient to sustain farmgate milk payments. AbacusBio dairy farm consultant Kevin Wilson provides some tips on how farmers can create higher returns from existing resources.

ARTICLE PROVIDED BY ABACUSBIO LIMITED

The significant variation in milk prices between seasons is predicted to be a future trend for New Zealand dairy farmers. Therefore, having a strong understanding of what drives profitability and flexibility within a farm system will hold most farms in good stead to withstand market volatility.

Although farmers have control over the quality and quantity of the milk they supply worldwide, they must—invariably—accept the market price. In the face of fluctuating market returns, how then could farmers improve the resilience of their farming enterprises?

Kevin and his farm consultancy team at Dunedin-based AbacusBio help New Zealand farmers maximise value from their businesses—drawing on practical—and science-based skills.

Based on years of farm management experience, Kevin says that farmers should not adopt a 'knee-jerk' reaction to falling milk prices—but instead implement changes that will have a positive effect on financial viability.

"The key focus here is to reduce costs that have a minimal impact on milk production and ensure that changes fit well with the overall farm strategy; often the first step in adjusting to a low payout is to analyse farm working expenses (FWE)."

Benchmarking

Benchmarking allows a farm business to measure its performance against other similar operations. By carrying out the benchmarking analysis across financial and physical parameters, farmers can identify where critical improvements could be made—to enhance profitability. Doing so on an annual basis would also allow farmers to identify trends occurring at the farm level, which more importantly provides the ability to scrutinise their business and make relevant adjustments.

As expected, a noticeable trend from this benchmarking process is that there is a very small difference in gross income between dairy farms, and that's generally because we are "price takers"—not "price makers", Kevin says.

The main reason for a variation in profitability among farms is the FWE. FWE typically vary across farms and—as a result—are the main management tool farmers use to control profitability.

When reviewing FWE, farmers need to have a good understanding of how other farmers with similar operations are achieving higher profitability and/or lower costs. It is also crucial to monitor all FWE, as a farm can make valuable gains by adjusting some of the larger costs such as feed and fertiliser expenses.

Feed costs

One of the key components of FWE is reviewing the costs associated with what supplements farmers should feed—and where. Notably, the price of supplements tend to vary from year to year depending on availability and market demand. Supplements are an expensive component of a farm system, with potential losses of 5 to 10% occurring during ensiling and 10 to 50% during

CURRENT MILK SOLIDS PRICE (\$)		5					
Feed Type	Feed costs			Wastage* (%)	Milk solids response per kgDM		
	\$ per tonne	kgDM (%)	\$ per kgDM		0.1	0.075	0.05
Grass silage	120	32	37.50	25	-\$0.05	-\$0.13	-\$0.21
PKE	220	90	24.40	15	\$0.12	\$0.03	-\$0.06

*% gross margin per kgDM offered

feeding-out processes. Managing this well can significantly reduce wastage and improve returns per unit of feed.

“The best way to make huge savings in feed costs is to have the flexibility to feed different supplements within a farm system—which is really great if market feed prices change.”

For instance based on current market prices, feeding palm kernel extract (PKE) is more economical than feeding pasture silage. After wastage and adjusting for milk solids response, PKE provides a margin of \$0.15 per kgDM (Dry Matter)—over pasture silage (refer to the table).

If a farmer feeds 500 kgDM per cow of supplement, that would be \$37,500 worth of savings for a 500-cow herd. This savings effect will even be higher if the quality of silage is poor. Wintering costs could also be lowered by using straw with fodder beet—rather than baleage—without affecting performance results. This case would also apply for the substitution of silage with hay to springing cows.

If pit silage is the only option, farmers can also make gains by altering the feeding method—in order to reduce wastage. For instance by feeding under fence lines to avoid spoilage, or feeding all supplements on feed pads to reduce overall wastage. Doing so could present \$20,000 worth of savings—under the situation of feeding 250 TDM (Tonnes Dry Matter) of supplements.

Other expenses

In addition to feed costs—when looking at the farm system on a whole level—there are many minor ways of saving costs—which can collectively reduce overall FWE.

“Some farmers do this (reducing redundant costs) exceptionally well and should constantly monitor them to find incremental gains.”

Instead of hiring farm contractors for duties such as mowing silage paddocks, do it yourself. It is

also a good opportunity to save on wages by reviewing the use of casual labour.

In terms of grazing costs, animals can be supported at home longer through various options such as the use of unutilised land, strategic use of nitrogen or crops, and using cheaper supplements. A good example would be using pit silage instead of baleage, or hay instead of baleage. Savings could also be made for fertilisers by reverting them to maintenance levels—when soil nutrient levels are adequate, which should be monitored continuously.

Quality management decisions

Profitability does not usually happen by accident. It requires a sound understanding of the entire business as well as good planning and monitoring. Making good decisions in a timely manner can create higher returns from existing resources—at little or no cost.

“Many farms have the ability to improve returns through subtle changes in the way tasks are performed. Often this can be done by altering the timing of operations throughout the year,” Kevin says.

This philosophy can be applied across all farm aspects from wintering to dry-off. Notably in most cases, these gains are usually based around decisions relating to pasture management.

Pasture generally contributes to over 80% of a milking cow diet. Therefore, there should be a high emphasis on maintaining the quality and quantity of this feed—in order to enhance milk production levels. Measuring pasture regularly provides information to assist decisions on feed allocation, identifying a surplus/deficit, and poor performing pastures—all of which are crucial to promote future farm performance.

Farm economic data from DairyNZ have consistently shown that there is a strong

relationship between pasture harvested and profitability (refer to the figure).

“Having said that, it is essential that farmers manage pastures well to maintain quality; lifting pasture quality by 0.8 MJME (megajoule of metabolisable energy) per kgDM could be worth an extra 30 kgMS (milk solid) per cow over a season.”

Consideration could also be taken that cows do not milk well off poor-quality silage.

Operators who continuously monitor and manage their costs and utilise high levels of pasture per hectare have the most profitable enterprises—irrespective of farming system, DairyNZ farm economic data show.

New Zealand farmers pride themselves on their ability to convert pasture into milk at a low cost, which will continue to be the industry’s competitive advantage in New Zealand.

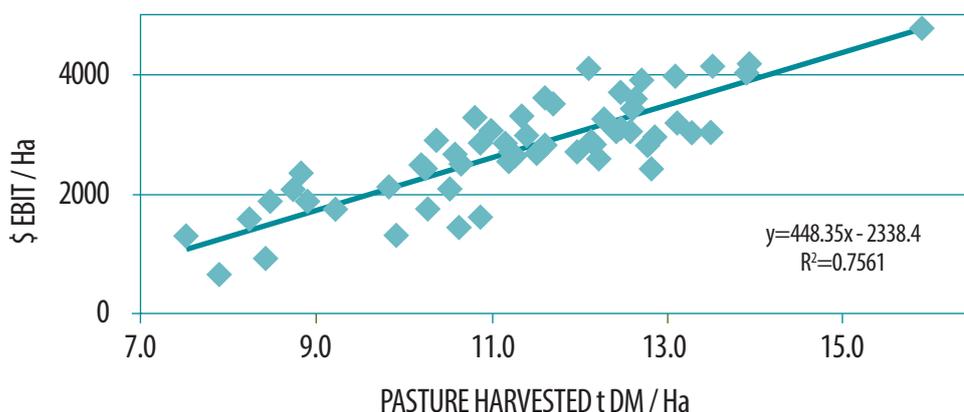
In terms of investment, staff training and good animal genetics will have immediate impacts on farm performance. Farm staff are constantly making decisions that directly influence profitability. As such, staff training is a sensible business decision and should continue to be a key focus for all farms. In addition, investing in superior animal genetics will not only produce quality future replacements but also improve farm profitability through a more efficient converter of feed.

The dairy industry has invested heavily in resources and information technology to help farmers make informed decisions for enhanced production and profitability.

“A lot of resources have been developed—with farmer input—and are therefore very user-friendly. More importantly, these resources are able to support farmers in making timely decisions throughout the year.”

Kevin is passionate about helping farmers meet their longer-term personal and financial aspirations. If you need practical and structured analysis on your farm system, please contact either Kevin Wilson at 027 602 7740 or Peter O’Neill at 027 434 7352. More information about AbacusBio’s farm consultancy services can also be found on our website www.abacusbio.com

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BELOW: AbacusBio dairy farm consultant Kevin Wilson



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Farming with foresight in Central Otago



Breeding merinos on Central Otago's dry hills is a way of life and fortunately also a good way to make a living, says Earnsclough Station's Alistair Campbell. BY KATE TAYLOR

Alistair and Judith Campbell, their son and daughter-in-law Duncan and Amanda and their daughter Jessica, an accountant in Dunedin, are shareholders in the 21,000ha property.

"It's a way of life, that's for sure, but it's not much fun if you lose money," Alistair says.

"Once I started to farm on my own account with merino I knew I couldn't work with any other sheep. Once you've started it's like some kind of terminal disease."

Duncan also has passion for merinos and says the next 20 years will be huge for the breed.

"There's a huge upside at the moment with people breeding them with more foresight and more figures," he says.

property. That is not my thing. I like animals and I hate machines."

Altitude on the property ranges from 170 metres above sea level to 1,850m with rainfall ranging from 300mm at the bottom to 1,200mm on the tops. Climate is generally a Mediterranean climate with hot, dry summers and cold, dry winters.

"I would have said the winters were getting warmer but we've been bought back to earth again this year," laughs Alistair.

Change has been in the air at Earnsclough Station in recent years. The station's flats, sold to a gold mining company about 20 years ago, had historically been the site of most of the station's infrastructure, such as the homestead, woolshed



Duncan moved to Earnsclough Station when he was just three years old—the same age as his son Blake (he and Amanda also have daughter Holly, 2). He attended John McGlashan College in Dunedin, did a Bachelor of Agricultural Science at Lincoln University then travelled overseas for three years including an eight-month stint working for merino studs in Australia. He's been home for 12 years now, but worked as an Earnsclough shepherd many times in between.

Alistair says he calls Duncan the boss, but Duncan says it's a joint effort.

"I run the day to day things and he's always there to ask questions. We handle the studs together. I do the cattle recording and he does the sheep. There's a lot of record keeping and computer programmes," Duncan says, while also admitting a lot of that data input work is done by Amanda.

There's an element of pride in how far his parents have come and his aspirations mirror theirs.

"I want to see it be profitable while keeping the land in really good order, improving it at the same time. I want to hand it on in better condition than when I got it."



"There has been a lot of carcass and fertility work on the merino that has never been done before. It has worked for 100 years on the wool alone but with improvements to things like yield and eye muscle, it will become a strong, dual purpose animal. Merinos are not far away from weaning at 140 percent and fattening lambs slightly slower than crossbred but still retaining that great fleece."

The business produces more than 100 tonnes of high quality Merino wool annually and has three cattle and six Merino sheep pedigree stud operations involving more than 7,500 individually-recorded animals.

Earnsclough Station runs south from the southern side of Lake Dunstan in the Cromwell Gorge to Fruitlands on the main Alexandra-Dunedin highway and back over the Old Man Range to join the Southland boundary.

When he was younger, Alistair had a list of the farms he wanted to own and Earnsclough was at the top of the list.

"What attracted me was its scale, that it was extremely good merino country and the fact it had very little arable land so it wasn't a machinery

and other buildings. Duncan has built a new house in a more central position, which is close to the new eight-stand woolshed used for the first time in late July.

"We're trying to set up the farm around a new hub on the hill and creating laneways in all directions to help run the place a bit more easily," Duncan says.

He adds forced irrigation changes in the future will also be a big change and a big cost. Irrigation efficiency is to come under the microscope in 2021.

"We use flood irrigation at the moment on 100ha of flat and there's 500ha of land that's hilly and rock tor under the water race so we may get 50 percent of that with wild flood. It works for us though with the merinos. They can get clover and grass from those areas when they want it and they can go and stand on the dry areas as well. The pain with sprinklers is that it becomes a monoculture and merinos aren't fans of monocultures. They prefer to browse and have a bit here, there and everywhere."

"We're not sure where the rules are going to take us with this one," adds Alistair. "It's a wait and see process at the moment."

TOP: The new eight stand woolshed on the station

LEFT: Alistair checking their merino product

BELOW: Duncan checking the sheep measurements for tracking

OPPOSITE: Alistair Campbell (on left) and son Duncan with his children Holly and Blake





Alistair and Judith Campbell started the Earnsclough Station venture with four Dunedin-based business partners in 1981 and bought them out by 2003.

In 1996 it was one of the first properties to get through tenure review. They freeholded 16,600ha and 4,200ha was left in special leases (marginal country with regular monitoring). A further 2,574ha was sold to Perilya Mining. The balance was mostly arid rabbit-prone country.

At the same time public access ways were set aside and marginal strips laid off on waterways.

Earnsclough Station now also incorporates a 65ha irrigated farm at Fruitlands bought in 2007 and the 3,038ha Obelisk Station bought in 2008. About 450ha is irrigated, 7,500ha is aerial oversown or direct drilled and there is 100ha of dryland arable pastures in lucerne or grasses. The balance is native grasses and annuals up to 700m above sea level, native grasses and silver tussock to 1,200m and above that is snow grass, blue tussock, and alpine herbfield.

The Earnsclough Merino Stud was established in 1988, followed by an Angus stud in 1997, Earnsclough Composite cattle stud in 2000 and polled merinos in 2000. The Te Akatarawa Hereford Stud, established in 1977, had previously been renamed with an Earnsclough prefix when the Campbells bought the station in 1981.

The horned part of the Hereford stud was sold in 2011 and the 2012 sale offered all polled bulls.

Angus numbers have been built up from dispersal sales. One of the latest purchases, complete lines of one and two-year-old heifers from the Rowallan dispersal, have a strong Te Mania influence.



"We initially moved to introduce another breed because we weren't selling enough Hereford bulls to justify the time required and there wasn't a market for that number of bulls. The introduction of the Angus and then the Composite enabled us to push the number of bulls being sold up to the 100 mark and they're all compatible. The Composites are an easy crossbreeding option for many farmers who don't have time for complicated breeding systems or don't have the set up to keep cattle apart. We're doing the crossbreeding for them."

Earnsclough Composites are a four-way cross of Hereford, Angus (red or black), Simmental and Gelbvieh. The Campbells aim to maintain at least 70 percent of maximum hybrid vigour by introducing first cross, four-way cross genetics at regular intervals and using unrelated pedigrees when mating.

"Hybrid vigour is a free lunch with extra performance over purebreds in all traits and especially the lowly heritable traits like fertility," Alistair says.

Earnsclough Station runs 665 stud cows, 155 one-year heifers, 170 one-year bulls and 16 sire bulls.

On the sheep side of the business, there are 2,300 stud ewes, 7,950 superfine ewes, 2,000 ultrafine ewes, 7,650 hoggets, 4,850 wethers and 160 rams.

The Merino Stud incorporates both fine, superfine, ultrafine and poll families as well as specialist gene mobs. Alistair says the station's ultrafine flock has been bred up over 25 years using objective measurement from mid side samples taken off prior to shearing. These tests are used for wool classing and sheep selection.

They were foundation members of the Ultrafine Company (JV Ultrafine) and five years ago purchased the flock.

A lot of the Earnsclough clip is sold through forward contracts with the NZ Merino Company. The mixed-aged ultrafine stud ewes are producing a 4.7kg fleece at 14.71 micron while the fine and superfine stud ewes produce a gross fleece weight of 5.48kg at 16.78 micron. The aim is for their wool type to be a free growing, deep

LEFT: Earnsclough station in the picturesque Central Otago

BELOW LEFT: Shearing at Earnsclough is now a high tech operation

BELOW: The Campbell's have invested in technology that gives access to all wool data

crimping style wool, while pushing length and crimp frequency right up to the limits dictated by the Italian market for superfine and ultrafine. The fine wool is used for Icebreaker contracts.

Alistair says there has been a massive change in the past five or six years away from superfine horned rams to 60 percent polled rams with emphasis on more carcass traits and more fertility. "Only the ultrafine part of the stud will be horned within the next 10 years," he says.

"We established a poll Merino stud in 2000 and then got really serious in 2005 with the aim being high fertility and increased muscle as well as establishing a separate flock incorporating the Inverdale, Loinmax and Myomax genes. These genes are being introduced via crossbred rams and then we will breed back to Merino. A separate family within these ewes is being maintained with 10 percent crossbred influence to supply smart wool contracts."



Earnsclough was the first registered Merino stud in New Zealand to generate estimated breeding values (EBVs) and also first to have their breeding values generated by Merino Select Australia (Lambplan). In the latest results based on micron, 99 of the top 100 two-tooth rams were from Earnsclough Station.

The Campbells have invested in electronic identification technology (EID) that gives access to all the wool data gathered at shearing plus liveweights, lambing data, muscle scans, faecal egg counts (FEC) and scrotal measurements, as well as EBVs for these traits, along with production indices, footrot and cold tolerance DNA scores, pedigrees, the fate of offspring and visual scores. It means shearing is a high tech operation. Each sheep's fleece is weighed on the table with the



bluetooth scanner automatically pairing the weight with the EID number of the sheep. A range of measurements from a mid-side sample is entered into the computer software programme, Macrostud, where the animal's individual visual fleece scores are entered.

Earnsclough is classed every year by Sandy MacKirdy from Hamilton, Victoria.

"The Australian sheep classers travel around stud and commercial flocks and give an overview of what the stud is doing in terms of phenotype, physically sound and checking our breeding decisions. It's great—we talk merino solidly for a week," Alistair says.

"They see a lot of sheep in a year. It's a valuable outside opinion on what we're doing."

Duncan runs the farm with the help of Alistair, four shepherds and another odd-job man, not to mention a great team of dogs. Duncan qualified a dog for the national dog trials this year and Alistair qualified two.

"You can't really work here without dogs," Duncan says. "You can make a day turn out really bad without a decent dog."

LEFT: Breeding merinos on Central Otago's dry hills is a way of life

BELOW: The Earnsclough Station landscape



Winning the war against rabbits

Keeping rabbits at bay will always be the number one management priority for the 21,000 hectares of Earnsclough Station.

Due to rigid control, numbers have been low since the late 1990s and owner Alistair Campbell is determined to keep it that way.

"Rabbits are our biggest risk by far and that doesn't change," he says. Technology hasn't come up with new management solutions for the problem, but he says traditional methods are working well – trapping and shooting.

In 1990 the Government's Rabbit and Land Management Programme aimed to reduce rabbits to a manageable level so it could withdraw from subsidising rabbit control. It was successful on Earnsclough Station despite some initial problems and a total cost of over \$2 million (\$800,000 being paid by the station itself). Rabbiters are now employed under contract to the station.

"We've been lucky with the two rabbiters who got them under control for us and one other since then, Bill Linwood, who has been here for about 10 years," Alistair says.

"The success of it revolves around the reliability and honesty of the guy doing the work. It would only take someone to be slack and we'd come unstuck again pretty fast."

He says it's not only budgeting for the cost of controlling the rabbits, but the management of the pastures because of them.

"We maintain dense cover on low altitude country because rabbits like it short. Longer grass also pushes them into colonies so you know where they are and don't have to cover as much country to get rid of them. On the low altitude arid land we have half-carrying capacity on the dark places and destock the sunny places in the spring to keep cover on the ground."

One previous owner employed 32 men for five months to kill 250,000 rabbits (when skins and meat were in demand for export) but with the aid of permanent rabbiters and RHD (rabbit haemorrhagic disease), rabbit numbers have now been kept low for almost 20 years. Native and exotic grasses have seen a dramatic recovery. However, the weed hieracium is an ongoing issue on unimproved country, particularly country that doesn't carry stock in summer when it seeds.

"Where the country is good enough to top dress, we keep in touch with it." High-altitude country is monitored and enclosures have been built to help

measure the effects of grazing (stock numbers are adjusted if necessary). Photo points have been established on low and mid-altitude country to observe changes in cover over time.

"We're pretty hot on knowing what state our land is in," says Alistair.

For the past six years the station has paid a scientist to monitor its land types so they have an exact measure of the improvements to their land.

"We're hoping in the long run this will lead to a contract for our wool where the treatment of the environment is important to the buyer. But that aside, it has been extremely interesting. We've had photos and measurements taken in the same spots for those six years.

"The country is steadily improving apart from one or two blocks with hieracium. Everything else has a lot more native grasses coming back in, such as wheat grasses and blue tussock, since the demise of the rabbits. Natives in general have improved, biomass and bare ground has improved. It will certainly be an interesting databank in 20 or 30 years," Alistair says.

The Campbells are proud to have won the livestock awards and the Otago Regional Council's Sustainable Resource Management Award in the 2013 Otago Ballance Farm Environment Awards.



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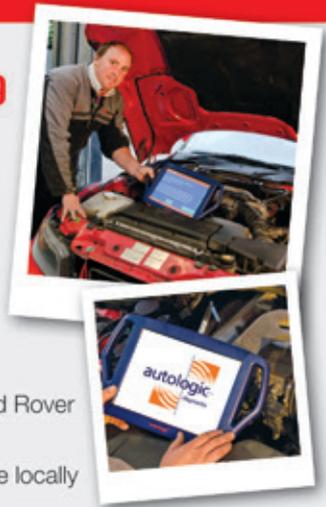


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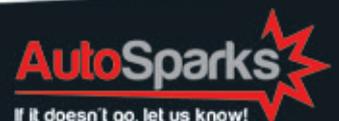


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Reputation for problem solving

Good auto-electricians are a bit like hen's teeth—hard to find in this day of complicated auto wiring and computerised systems.

BY LINDA CLARKE



Tony and Megan Houston and their team at AutoSparks in Ashburton have carved out a specialist niche in the field and are proud of the skill and experience they can offer.

They have been known as AutoSparks since 2011, though Tony had been trading as Tony Houston Auto Electrical since going out on his own in 2004. The Ashburton lad learned his trade at Newlands and then Smallbones before starting his own business, primarily aimed at spreading trucks.

Now the team deals with vehicles of all shapes and sizes, carrying out not only auto-electrical work, but hydraulic and mechanical. And in the not too distant future, they will operate a WOF service designed to eliminate queues and return trips.

Megan says the business has grown quietly, responding to changes and demands from its rural and urban customers. From a one-man band working from their Tinwald lifestyle block in 2008, AutoSparks has grown to a team of 15, working from customised workshops on Alford Forest Road in Ashburton. They have absorbed competitors, attracted and retained top staff and are about to open a new mechanical workshop featuring technology to diagnose and deal with faults in European cars.

MAIN IMAGE: AutoSparks Automotive Centre in Ashburton

The mechanical department is run by the experienced Brian Hurst, who joined the AutoSparks team in 2011; he is one of the three qualified mechanics working on repair and servicing jobs.

It's been a hectic few years—Megan runs the financials and admin side, and Tony uses his auto-electrical skills where they are best needed in the field, and they have taken on Kevin Pooke as manager to co-ordinate work and developments, and deal with customers.

Kevin's latest project has been overseeing the development of the mechanical workshop, which will deal with a range of auto servicing and repair jobs. Megan said it made sense to expand the business to include mechanical and hydraulic work as electrical issues sometimes involved or masqueraded as problems in those

areas. Having all three arms to the business under one roof meant jobs were finished quickly and in a cost-effective way.

Kevin said the new workshop, a member of the Auto Super Shoppe network, would feature three hoists and have the latest technology, including an Autologic scan tool able to electrically scan and diagnose problems in BMW, Audi, VW and Land Rover vehicles. The Auto Super Shoppe network runs the length of New Zealand with 70 workshop members all subscribing to a premium service philosophy, offering motorists a broad range of quality services for a fair price.

The Autologic tool is unique to Ashburton. "You just plug it into the vehicle's ECU, which is its computer brain, and it brings up all the information. If a vehicle has a fault, it will come up on the Autologic scan tool. If there's a problem with the air flow meter, it will say so. The information can also be sent electronically to Australia or England for diagnosis."

Kevin says a new warrant of fitness service should also be a winner and customers will be able to book their vehicles in to avoid waiting. AutoSparks can also pick your car up from a workplace or home and put it through the WOF process.

He said Tony and Megan had built a great team, based on Tony's widely appreciated skills. "Customers describe him as intelligent and clued up. They breathe a sigh of relief when they see him."

While the business has grown and diversified over time, Tony has made sure spreaders and sprayers remain his speciality. Electrical issues can be complex and his experience and expertise means he can almost always get to the bottom of faults and fix them. AutoSparks is also a Topcon dealer, advising and fitting electronic gear for use in agriculture.

AutoSparks is part of the Battery Town group, a group of like-minded auto-electrical businesses that meet regularly for training, networking and collegial support. Battery Town members are currently operating free battery inspections for vehicle owners worried winter might have taken its toll on car and truck batteries.

Kevin says the business was built on Tony's great reputation and the team around him prides itself on trying to keep up with him.



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Biomax Nitro-gib-S is created by a New Zealand owned and operated company Pacific Ag, a specialist fertiliser company that has been operating since the mid 1980's. Pacific Ag are leaders in providing New Zealand farmers with scientifically advanced fertiliser products, which are developed by company founder and engineering chemist Jung Wen Chiang.

Biomax Nitro-gib-S has been tested and designed especially for New Zealand climates and farming practises to ensure they are easily absorbed by plants and supported superior nutrient cycling and nutrient availability in the soil.

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Photo: Gary Harrison and Doug Sheldon

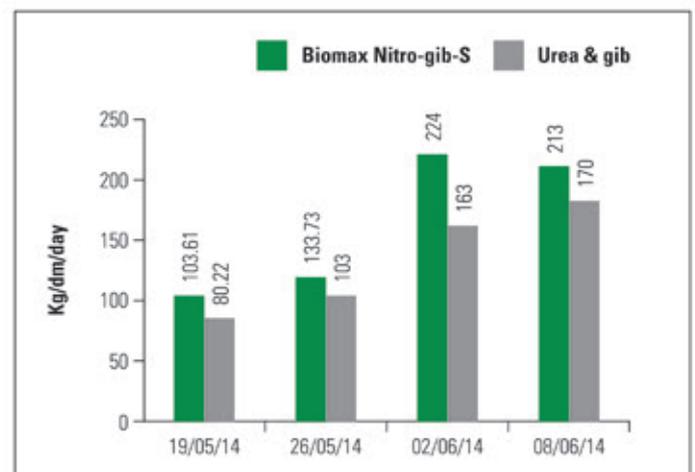
"In my farm management plan I use BIOMAX Nitro-Gib-S to produce grass when ground temperatures are in the 3 to 6 degree Celsius range. I use this product on the shoulders of the season, spring and autumn. It will produce good quality dry matter within 20 to 25 days of application. I would recommend BIOMAX Nitro-Gib-S to other farmers who require quality pasture when pasture growth is in short supply".

Steve Schmack, Wavell Dairies Ltd

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as seen in the
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Biomax Nitro-gib-S trial data



The trial above is a comparative trial between Urea (at 75kg/ha) and a common gibberellin product applied to the same area and Nitro-gib-S applied.

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Helping grass grow

Grass is the key ingredient in the diet of most dairy cows and Mid Canterbury spraying contractor Gary Harrison is spreading the word about a popular liquid fertiliser that can make it grow better.

BY LINDA CLARKE

Harrisons Spraying Services has been spreading a liquid nitrogen-gibberellin mix, Biomax Nitro-gib S, that stimulates growth, especially on the shoulder of the season when temperatures are cooler, and is more easily controlled to prevent it leaching.

Gary says dairy farmers watching their spending carefully should consider it as a farm management tool with both economic and environmental benefits. He is promoting some great deals on Biomax Nitro-gib S, which could be applied this spring to boost pasture cover ahead of the season.

Dairy farmer Martin Early has been using this form of liquid fertiliser for three years on the 395ha dairy and dairy support farm at Carew where he runs 920 cows. While he uses solid nitrogen under irrigation during the milking season, he prefers the liquid fertiliser on the shoulders of the season when soils could be wetter and more vulnerable to leaching.

"We are trying to minimise our nitrogen use, especially when there is a high chance of leaching. The nitro-gib works when soil temperatures are low. It is a more suitable and sensible product at that time to stimulate growth and increase pasture cover."

He said because the soil could be wet in spring and autumn, Gary applied the liquid fertiliser in a special rig with fat tyres that did not damage paddocks. And if it was not wet, you didn't need rain to get into the plants.

"It is all about increasing the amount of grass at a difficult time of the season and I have been using Gary since he started spraying eight years ago. I enjoy working with him; he's prompt and does a great job."

Gary and his wife Sheryl started Harrison Spraying Services eight years ago, and have built up valuable knowledge and experience, using the latest technologies.

They undertake all crop and pasture requirements and use precision tracking with GPS to ensure there is no overlap between passes. Work is also able to be stored, along with paddock-by-paddock instructions and a detailed farm map.

Gary says Biomax Nitro-gib S is gaining in popularity and more dairy farmers were using it as a management tool in the shoulders of the season in spring and autumn.

It works in temperatures as low as three degrees celsius and promotes growth with its unique combination of nitrogen, sulphur and gibberellic acid.

"I've been dealing with the fertiliser company for eight years and if it didn't work I wouldn't



ABOVE: Gary Harrison in discussion with dairy farmer - Martin Early a regular user of liquid fertiliser
MAIN IMAGE: Gary applies liquid fertiliser in a special rig with flat tyres that did not damage paddocks

be promoting it. I'm confident in this product because I've seen the results with my own eyes," Gary said.

PacificAg's Doug Sheldon said the Canterbury plains soil responded well to the addition of sulphur and Biomax Nitro-gib S was another farming tool dairy farmers worried by the falling milk payout could consider.

"It grows grass and grass is still the cheapest form of feed they can buy. It is available to the plant within two hours of application."

Farmers report seeing physically improved pastures within ten days. "There is no residue and cows find the grass sweet, because it retains the feed value like protein, sugars and ME."

Gary said with the extra dry matter per hectare produced, it was excellent value for money.

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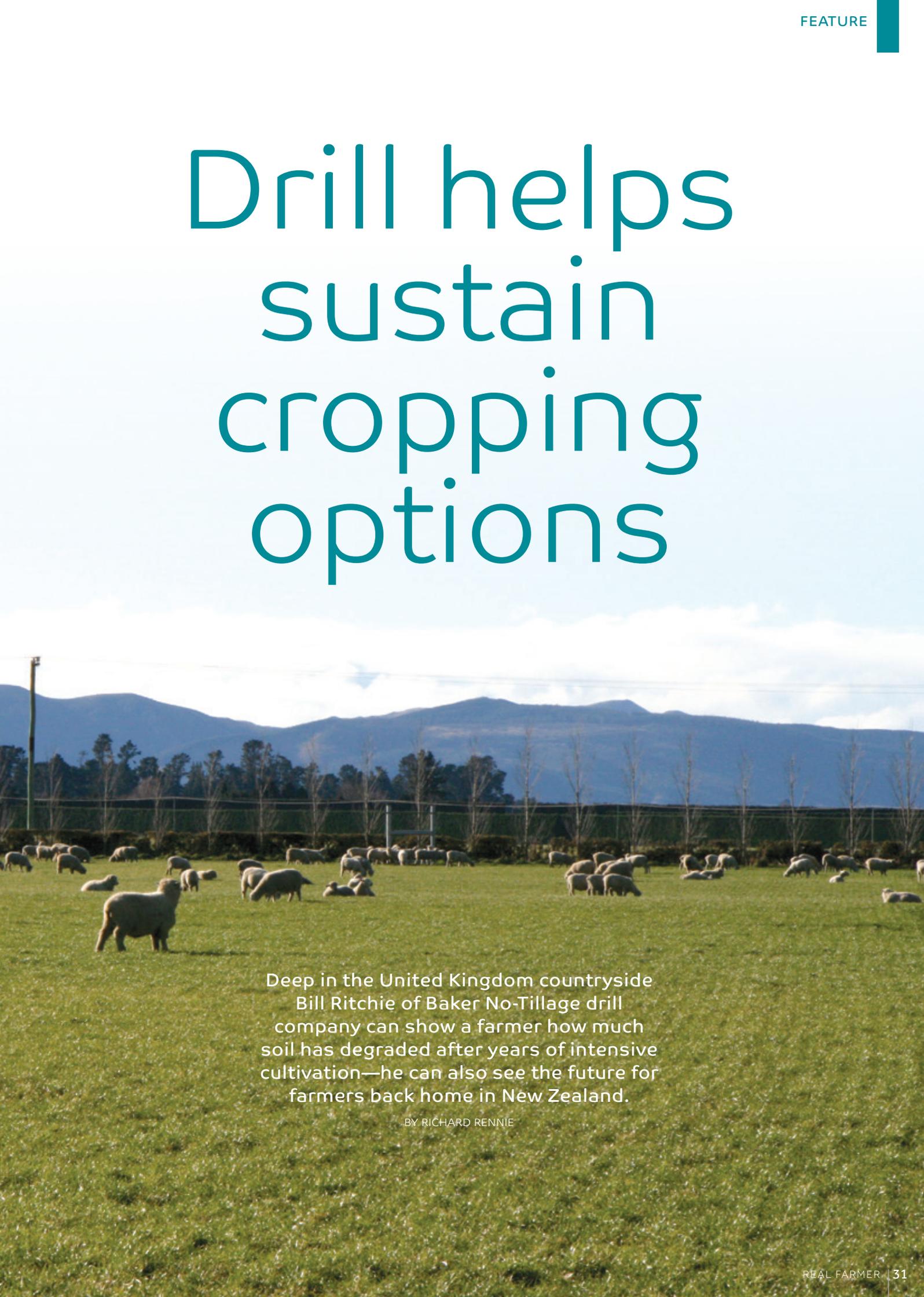
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Drill helps sustain cropping options

A wide-angle photograph of a lush green field filled with sheep grazing. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains under a blue sky with light clouds. The scene is peaceful and rural.

Deep in the United Kingdom countryside Bill Ritchie of Baker No-Tillage drill company can show a farmer how much soil has degraded after years of intensive cultivation—he can also see the future for farmers back home in New Zealand.

BY RICHARD RENNIE

Bill is General Manager of the small Manawatu drill company that is taking much more than an innovative well-built piece of kit to farmers around the world.

The company's Cross Slot® drill also embodies a philosophy of low impact, minimal tillage agriculture that holds the key to unlock soil productivity, while preserving its quality and sustainability in a way that many recent innovations have not.

The irony for Bill when he hears descriptions of the Cross Slot as being "innovative" and "new", is that the company has been around for 20 years, and is founded on research work even older again. Work done at Massey University back in the late sixties had Baker No-Tillage's founding staff all working together as scientists and researchers on approaches to minimal cultivation techniques to reduce soil erosion, machinery use and fuel costs for farmers.

Bill agrees that in some respects he and his colleagues may have been almost ahead of their time. Soaring fuel costs in the early seventies helped reinforce the value of minimal passes. But increased inputs including sprays, nitrogen fertilisers and ever larger broad-acre equipment meant many in the arable sector scaled up, but did not necessarily opt for a lower tillage approach.

However in recent years the landscape of agriculture has changed. Greater research into erosion has put some startling metrics around the amount of top soil arable agriculture is responsible for losing.

The United States alone is estimated to lose 7.5 tonne of topsoil per hectare per year, and global soil degradation is exceeding replenishment rates, with almost one third of the world's cropland abandoned because of soil erosion and degradation.

"New Zealand farmers have the advantage of farming on relatively young soils, still with a reasonable level of carbon and structure, and we are only just starting to be more aware of the need for greater sustainability in our practices upon them."

However in countries like the UK where soils have been cultivated for hundreds of years the conversation between scientists and farmers has moved beyond sustainability to soil regeneration.

"The new phrase is 'regenerative agriculture', employing new practices in an effort to restore soil structure, carbon levels and with it earthworms and microbial activity."

A recent talking tour by Bill there on the benefits of no-tillage had him show a farmer the quality of the soil around the two metre "set aside" area on the paddock boundary, compared with the middle of the heavily cultivated paddock.

"They soon appreciate the value of lowered cultivation and its impact upon the quality of what is the same soil in the same paddock, it's like chalk and cheese."

Baker No-Tillage is enjoying increasing success in the United Kingdom with its Cross Slot® drill,



and Bill attributes it not only to these simple examples, but also to Nuffield Scholars who visited here last year.

"Their use of social media has spread the word about what can be achieved using less cultivation. It resonates with farmers there who know they have not unlocked all the potential that better seed genetics, new fertilisers, and sprays are supposed to have delivered in the past 10–20 years."

With countries like the UK and United States being forced to address their soil quality, Bill believes NZ still has some way to go to accepting a machine with technology patented at the ground contact point, and fiercely protected by its directors over the years.

The Cross Slot® single pass method helps reduce fuel costs by 60–80%, also applying fertiliser effectively in the same pass placing the fertiliser in proximity to the seed, delivering rapid, effective nutrient uptake.

The seed also benefits from the slower release of nutrients from residual crop breakdown, rather than a rapid, early mineralisation and release that occurs when the ground is ripped up. Early mineralising of these nutrients requires fertiliser to be broadcast later on to restore the lost nutrients, and maintain crop growth.

Overseas the appreciation of slower mineral release, less top soil loss and lower disturbance is being appreciated across generations.

"We are finding many of our clients are farming fathers at or near retirement, and sons who are

ABOVE: Farmer Bevan Lill is a second generation user of the Cross Slot® drill

OPPOSITE: Mark Scott of Untill Ltd at work

picking up the farm business—many of these fathers appreciate that the way they used to farm is not the way they can continue, and the sons are keen to pick up on a new method without bearing the full cost of a 'new' method on their own."

Bill admits he is surprised at the lower level of drill usage in the Canterbury region, given its continuing dominance of NZ's arable cropping area.

"While Wairarapa would have 60–70% of all crop planted using Cross Slot®, Canterbury would be only 6–7%, usually through contractors like Mark at Untill Ltd."

But those who have opted for Cross Slot have proven its value, rarely switching away and increasingly taking the podium as award winners in their farming arena.

The past few years have had 12 national and regional environment farming award winners across NZ, Germany and USA, including three as Ballance Farm Environment Awards.

"And those who have Cross Slot see the drill as more of a tool for a broader farming philosophy, and the exchange of ideas between owners every year on our trips to northern and southern hemisphere farms is phenomenal. We have seen our early research at Massey multiplied many times over through this exchange between users out in the field, it's a fantastic culture."



No tillage a sustainable option for Canterbury croppers

The lower level of Cross Slot drill use in Canterbury surprises director of Baker No Tillage Bill Ritchie. Bill believes the method and the machine delivering it is well suited to Canterbury's varied soils and cropping needs. But drill agent and contractor and Ruralco Supplier Mark Scott of Untill Ltd at Methven is confident about the future of the Cross Slot in coming years.

Mark says the Cross Slot's design and technology mean it can cope with a variety of soil conditions and types while its ability to effectively sow a variety of seeds from fine high value vegetable crops to brassicas and cereals mean it fits well into Canterbury's varied cropping profiles.

Howling nor'westers in Canterbury typically bring the signature brown tail of dust signalling topsoil loss, a major cost on lighter fragile stony country in particular that undoes the gradual build up in organic matter grass pastures are helping establish in the region. Using the Cross Slot® almost eliminates this economic and environmental cost with its no tillage technology.

On particularly light stony soils the drill is also proving highly capable of handling stone obstructions, resetting itself immediately after striking rocks with little loss of seeding continuity.

Many more farmers in the Canterbury region have moved to lower tillage in recent years and no tillage is an option for all or part of their cropping plans.

This is even more so with the changing land use in Canterbury over recent years. With fewer sheep operations and more dairy support units, there is a demand for a drill that can quickly sow brassicas without undue cultivation expense.

"You only need to look at the results of several brassica competitions in recent years. In most the Cross Slot® has been the drill responsible for sowing those crops."

The success has been supported by Ballance trials revealing the most economic and greatest yields come from brassica crops when fertiliser is applied next to the seed at sowing.

"This is particularly so for crops like kale which is a lazy feeder, the closer you can get the fertiliser to the seed, the better," says Mark.

Highbank cropping and sheep farmer and Ruralco Cardholder Bevan Lill is a second generation user of the Cross Slot® drill, owned by Mark.

Overall between a quarter and a third of the family property is sown in a variety of crops using the Cross Slot every season.

"Dad had tried various types of direct drilling and over time found the Cross Slot® was the most suitable tool, particularly for moving from rye grass seed crop to other crops like lentils, linseed or radish crops."

The concept of minimal tillage has extended to other crops sown, even when the Cross Slot is not used, including the establishment of the rye grass seed crops in spring time.

"There is a massive cost to do a full ploughing preparation, and I am not personally keen on spending hours sitting on a tractor," says Bevan. He says the Cross Slot® delivers significant reductions in fuel and time spent cultivating, and it also addresses longer term sustainability issues.

"At Highbank we are very mindful of losses through wind erosion on the nor'westers, and along with that the loss of moisture that happens with full cultivation at spring time. Direct drilling cuts that loss well back"

While he has not measured it, Bevan believes the farm's soil organic matter levels are rising, and with it earthworm populations.

"Using a Cross Slot® does require a change in your management approach, ensuring you take care of pests like slugs that can arise, but they are easily dealt with."



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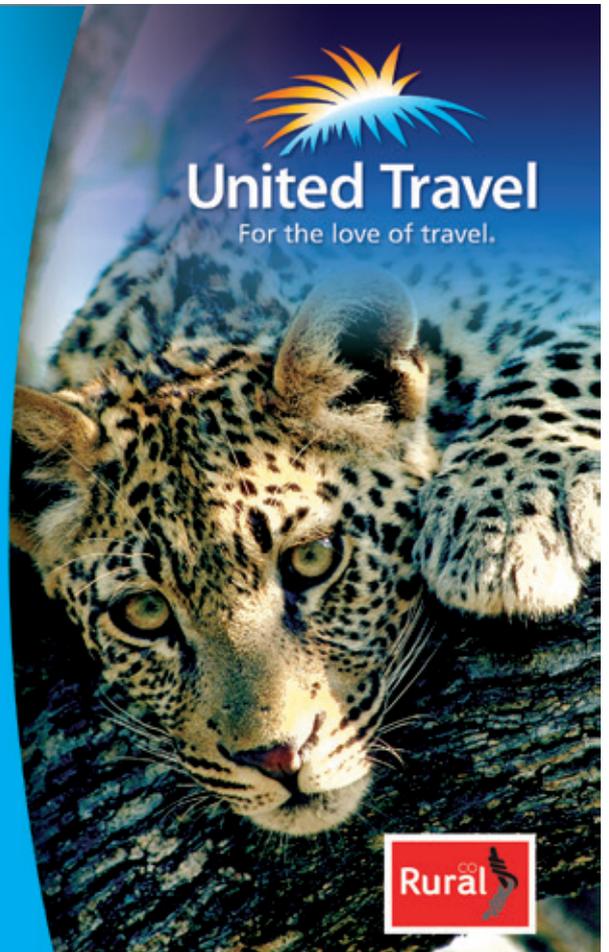
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A good diet: more than ME?

The production potential of any animal is influenced by a range of factors, including its genetics, its disease burden, water availability and of course, its feed.

ARTICLE SUPPLIED BY SEALESWINSLOW



When it comes to feed, there are two main considerations: is there enough feed for the animal, and does the quality of that feed meet animal requirements?

"In New Zealand, because we're pasture based, we typically estimate feed quality by the metabolisable energy [ME] level," says SealesWinslow's Animal Nutrition Specialist, Paul Sharp. "But that doesn't tell the whole story."

ME is a measure of the gross energy in a feed minus the estimated losses that occur as the animal processes that feed—the energy that is lost in dung, urine and as gaseous by-products of the fermentation process (mostly methane and carbon dioxide).

"ME certainly has its place when you're calculating the value of feed," says Paul, "but it's not the

only part of the story. If we're concerned about optimising production or animal growth, then we need to focus on creating a balanced diet that contains all of the components needed to achieve our goal. To do that, we need to consider quality as well as quantity."

A high-quality diet has several characteristics. It provides a high yield of nutrients per kg of dry matter (DM); it has an ideal ratio of all of the various components required to achieve the production or growth goals; and it allows the animal to eat a high volume of the feeds.

"The feed intake of stock is critical," notes Paul. "We know that animals regulate their feed intake and we think there are two key reasons they stop eating—one, when they have met their energy or nutrient requirements, and two, when

continuing to eat causes them more discomfort than not eating."

"If an animal has a bulky, low-energy feed, then it can only eat so much before the rumen is full and the animal feels discomfort. It might still be hungry, but the discomfort from the rumen outweighs the discomfort from not having consumed enough energy, so the animal stops eating, even though it has a nutritional shortfall."

"When we look at creating a high-quality diet for farmers to feed their stock, we're trying to minimise the discomfort factors that will stop an animal eating. Our focus is on getting the animal to voluntarily eat as much as we need it to."

Feedstuffs that are rapidly digested help to maximise the voluntary intake of stock, because the rumen takes longer to reach fullness. One of the keys to this is readily degradable structural fibre—the more quickly fibre can be broken into small pieces, the more quickly it will move through the digestive tract, so the less likely the animal is to stop eating. The diet also needs to have high concentrations of readily fermentable carbohydrates (sugars, starch, pectin), protein that is slow to degrade in the rumen, and sufficient macro and micro-nutrients to meet the animal's needs.

"At some times of the year, pasture quantity is actually the limiting factor in an animal's diet," says Paul. "In early spring, for instance, pasture growth rates can struggle to keep up with animal demands—which can be quite problematic at a time when we're trying to drive up production and growth rates. At other times, it's pasture quality that limits the overall feed quality. The season, management practices, pasture species and fertiliser strategies will all influence the nutrient composition of pasture, and the only way to know what you're feeding your stock is to get your pasture analysed."

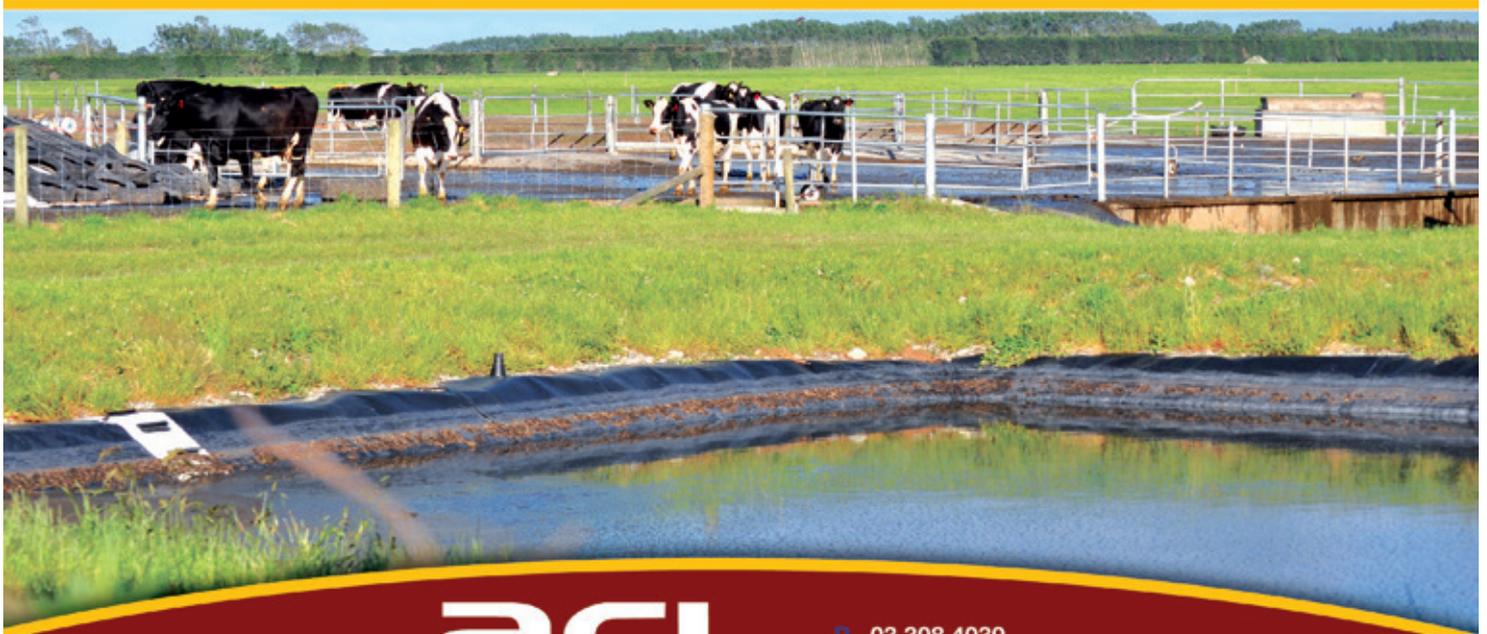
"Use pasture as the base of your animal's diet, but supplement that as needed to create a diet that will drive production. That might be additional pasture; forage, mineral supplementation or specialist feeds like Starch Blend, which is particularly useful in spring dairy diets, when pasture protein levels are high."

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Plant type important to help achieve best beet results

With fodder beet now part of many New Zealand farm feeding systems it is important to understand the different plant types within the species. ARTICLE SUPPLIED BY SEED FORCE

Farmers nationwide are utilising both fodder and sugar beet as a high energy, low cost feed option to help lift production and profitability. Beet is being utilised in a range of systems; from the typical dairy wintering scenario through to beef finishing systems. Harvested beets are being used to help fill potential feed deficits or to replace more expensive energy supplements in many systems.

David Walsh Seed Force's Central South Island Territory Manager explains; "because of beet's versatility in our feeding systems it's important to consider your likely end use as this will help determine what type you should be planting. This should be part of the planning process of growing beet. As there are different plant types within the species it is important that growers understand the differences between them."

"There are four distinctive categories within 'beet'. They are determined by plant type, dry matter percentage and the intended end use. At one end there is the traditional grazing type, referred to as a mangel. This type has a dry matter percentage of 13% or below, enabling it to be utilised easily by any age and class of stock. The only mangel type is SF Brigadier which also produces the highest proportion of bulb above

ground, ensuring easy utilisation by stock. This is an important factor especially for growers that are feeding young stock and for systems that want to start feeding their beet relatively early. The easy access to the plant by grazing animals and its excellent utilisation are some of SF Brigadier's key attractions.

Secondly we have the low to medium dry matter fodder beet types which have a DM content of between 15-17%. They are versatile enough to be harvested but are often more suited to grazing. They can have a lack of bulb uniformity, meaning they are not ideal for mechanically lifting.

The third fodder beet group are varieties that have a medium to high DM of between 17-19%. Often more uniform in appearance, they are typically used for harvesting although some varieties are versatile enough to be grazed in-situ. One such variety is SF LIFTA, it combines reliable high yields together with good leaf retention, enabling it to fit into a range of feeding and harvesting situations. By combining the ability to graze in-situ, self harvest or mechanical harvest adds to the variety's appeal and flexibility of end use.

The final type of beet available is sugar beets, which have the highest dry matter capability. Due

to its growth habit and dry matter, sugar beet is ideally used for mechanical harvesting, helping ensure the longest storage ability and potential for the highest harvested bulb yields. SF SUGA is a true sugar beet type and is widely used in mechanical harvesting situations. "It's even crown height helps ensure ease of harvest and the maximum harvest yield", David says.

Regardless of fodder beet plant type one recent application that is finding favour with a number of farmers is the ability to self harvest fodder beet using specialised 'beet buckets'. We have seen a range of uses of this self harvested beet and it really adds to fodder beets versatility. One of the key benefits it can help with is making adequate space in a paddock to enable easier transition. By giving animals sufficient room at the start of in-situ feeding is a crucial factor when transitioning onto the crop.

By considering plant type as part of the planning process in growing beet can help ensure the best possible result for your specific feeding system. Ensure you talk to ATS Seed or your ATS Arable & Pastoral Representative on 0800 BUY ATS (289 287) to get thorough advice on growing the beet type, best suited to your requirements.

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Take a load off your power bill with ATS

Many ATS members in recent years have expressed a growing level of discontent at the ever rising cost of their electricity. For farmers in Canterbury heavily reliant upon irrigation this is not a small amount. Looking back over farm cost trends for the past decade the two greatest rises have been in rates and electricity.

ARTICLE SUPPLIED BY ATS ENERGY

Respectively they have experienced rises of 6.5% and 5% a year, compared to all average farm expenses rising only 3.5% a year. Back in 1990 electricity cost 9.1c/kWh, but by 2013 that had tripled to 27c/kWh.

That ever creeping cost rise, and the greater reliance of more farms in the region for electricity to power irrigation schemes, means that power bill is getting more scrutiny than ever before from my ATS members.

It is a bill many Canterbury farmers and members find increasingly hard to swallow, knowing that overall electricity demand has been almost flat, and even declined slightly in the past year.

Farming within or near one of the biggest national hydro schemes in the world makes swallowing that bill even harder for Canterbury farmers in particular. New Zealand generates 78% of its energy from renewable sources, and the bulk of that comes from those hydro schemes.

As generation technology has advanced in recent years more than a few members have approached me wanting to look harder at how they could integrate a farm based electricity system, often powered through irrigation channel flow, into their own supply.

It may be little comfort, but New Zealand sits midway in the price range for developed nations.

Irrigators continue to benefit from a significantly lower commercial rate for their power than other commercial users. It also seems an earlier generation of New Zealanders got to benefit from abnormally low power prices that in no way reflected the full cost of hydro scheme construction, with charges sitting well below the cost of supply for years, and only now matching the true cost.

ATS Energy wants to help ATS members get the best deal possible for their electricity spends. Energy is no longer a "small change" expense for Canterbury farmers, and the complexities of electricity billing and contracts demand the expertise that ATS Energy bring, taking the hassle and stress out of the relationship with an electricity supply company.

Contact Tracey Gordon, ATS Energy Account Manager on 0800 BUY ATS (289 287) to get your electricity billing and supply sorted today.

ATS Instore Days 2015—our biggest and best yet



Firmly cemented as one of the major events on the Canterbury agricultural calendar, the ATS Instore Days continues to bloom with thousands of members braving cold conditions to flock to this year's event.

BY ANNIE STUDHOLME

Unique to the co-operative, the 21st ATS Instore Days brought together almost 100 ATS and Ruralco suppliers under one roof to showcase their products and services to members over a spectacular two-day event.

Committed to lowering farm input costs for its members, the ATS Instore Days play a key role in realising the co-operative's goal. It not only provides members with the opportunity

to interact with suppliers, ATS and Ruralco staff and fellow members, but to take advantage of the hot deals and discounts available.

Newly appointed ATS General Manager Robert Sharkie was delighted with the success of this year's event. "It was marvellous," he said.

"It was a very successful couple of days with sales and transactions well up on last year. We try to get a good mix of sheep and beef, arable



and dairy to ensure all areas are represented, and I think we achieved that. From what we saw farmers were spending on what they needed or what was required. Sales weren't in one particular area but all over really."

"But for me, it's not just about ATS; it's a true partnership," said Robert. "Those businesses that attend this event with us are committed to ATS. The support we receive from businesses is quite humbling."

He estimated more than 800 meals were served each day, with the change to a more traditional menu finding favour with diners. Minor changes to the layout, which included moving the catering area, to remove dead spots, increase vision and flow also proved popular with stall holders and members alike.

Robert commended his staff for their efforts, both on the days, in the lead-up and following the event. To pull off an event like this was a mammoth undertaking which required meticulous planning and dedication. "It's a huge team effort, and everyone played their part in its success," said Robert.



Robert also commended exhibitors for the standard of their exhibits noticing a significant improvement across the board, which made this year's Best Site Awards all that more difficult for the judging panel.

Judged by long standing ATS members and farming representatives Richard Loe, John Leadley and Annie Studholme, the awards went to:

ATS Supplier Winner:
Purina

ATS Supplier Runner Up:
Seales Winslow

Ruralco Supplier Winner:
Ashburton Licensing Trust

Ruralco Runner Up:
The Tool Shed

ATS Business Partner Winner:
Ballance Agri-Nutrients



ATS Instore Days Site Holder Comments:

Mark Shand, Canterbury Territory Manager Ballance Ag Hub

"It has been great. It gives you a chance to see and talk to a lot of farmers over the two days who want to organise their orders early and see what's new at Ballance, such as Ag Hub, an online farm data management program, and Seales Winslow."

Matt Reynen, South Island Sales Manager, Allied Petroleum

"The numbers this year have been pretty impressive. As a partner on the fuel-side, it's a great for us to meet their customers and to engage with them one-on-one, putting a face to the name, as well as the staff that work here at ATS. It also gives us a chance to deal with any problems or issues directly."

Natasha King, National Agri-business Manager, Meridian

"The continued loyalty of ATS customers is outstanding and the belief in the co-operative is enlightening to me. It's always lovely to

catch up with those long-term customers. It continues to prove to be a really good forum for us to engage with ATS staff and Shareholders and everyone has a really good day with some good deals to be had."

Blair Watson, Managing Director, Electraserve

"The layout seems much better this year and it's great to see so many people coming through; there seems to be a really positive feel with a lot more interaction. It's always great to be able to meet and greet our client base, so much so that I decided to do it myself this year so I get that one-on-one time."

Alan Neumann, Director, Neumann's Tyres

"It's not all about sales; it gives us a way to talk to our customers in a controlled environment, meeting and greeting them. It's a very important part of our business, and each year our site gets bigger and bigger. We wouldn't miss it."

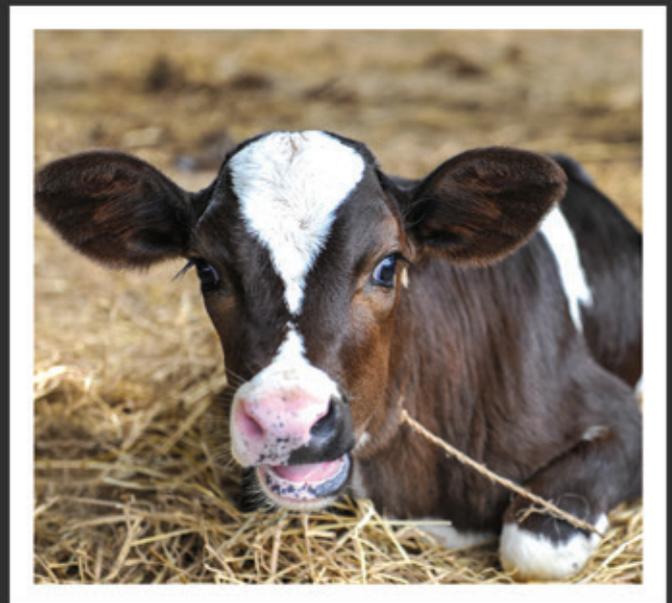
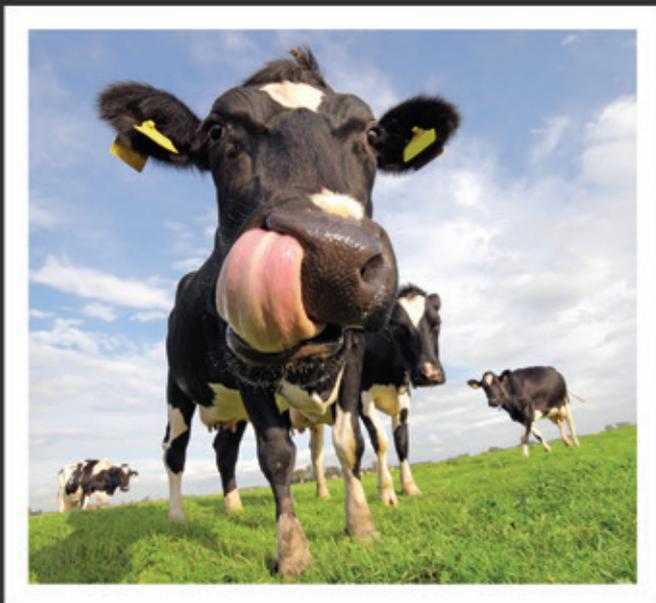
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Murray Hydes & Nicky Hogg; Allison Fleming, Annette Watson & June Barraclugh; Maddison & Rebecca Johnson

OPPOSITE TOP: Inside the ATS Instore Days Marquee

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Andrew Letham



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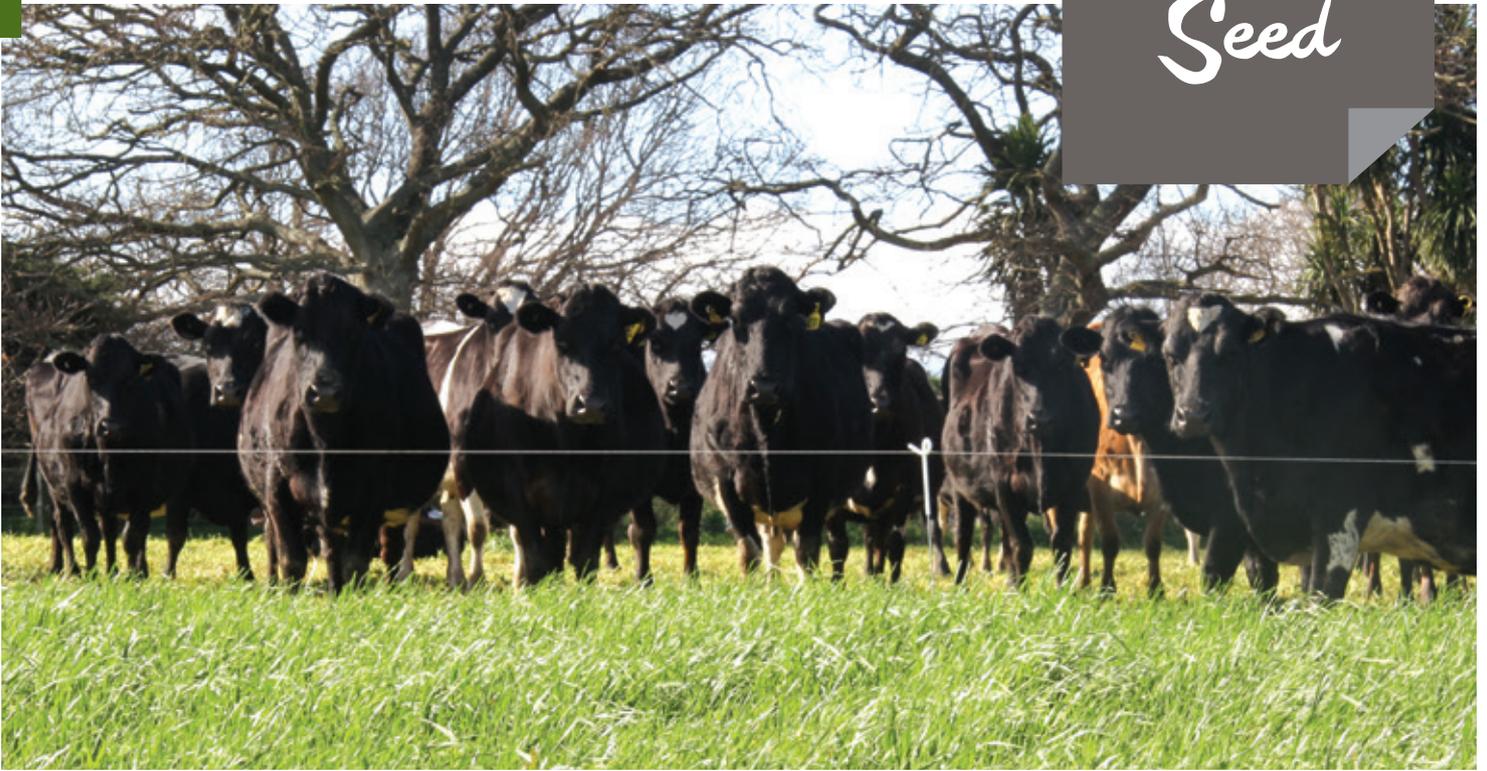


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Positive, profitable pasture advice for a tight spring

Good news about dairying is a rare commodity at the moment but one big supplier is aiming to buck that trend with a positive approach to the start of another lactation.

ARTICLE SUPPLIED BY AGRISEEDS

The latest publication from Agriseeds highlights practical, easy ways for farmers to set themselves up for success this season, no matter what their budget or where they farm.

Pasture systems specialist Graham Kerr says it's all about looking at the glass as half full rather than half empty.

"We're not suggesting it's going to be an easy spring, by any means. What we are suggesting however is that there is a really positive opportunity on most if not all farms to improve profitability this season even against the backdrop of a low payout."

The answer lies in a new booklet which provides a set of tools to help farmers get more out of the resources they already have.

Graham says it took shape when Agriseeds began focussing on farmers' biggest challenges this spring.

"Budgets are tight, but cows still need to be fed, and fed well, if they are to generate income.

Pasture is one resource that every farmer has, which can be improved strategically - through renewal—as well as across the board, through management."

The positive economics of well-planned pasture renewal form the bulk of the new booklet, and there is also strong emphasis on the potential gains to be had from sharper pasture management during spring.

The result, Graham says, is a helpful, timely toolkit which can be used by all farmers to head into spring on the front foot.

The first task is to get cows to eat more of what's already there.

"Industry research has repeatedly confirmed the amount of pasture eaten per ha is the single most important factor influencing farm profitability."

"The statistics show cows leave behind 30% of the DM grown on the average New Zealand dairy farm. That figure drops to just 15% on the best farms."

"By taking steps to improve pasture utilisation, farmers will harvest more milk from their existing land for less cost."

Cue the DairyNZ spring rotation planner, which is free, easy to use and designed to take the hard work out of making good feed allocation decisions during the high-pressure, time-poor weeks of spring.

"The reason this is so important is that grazing management in the first two months after calving largely determines MS production through to Christmas and also how well fed the cows are at mating," Graham explains.

Focusing on post grazing residuals when conditions are dry is equally important, he says, because the secret to optimising pasture intake is leaving a consistent post-grazing residual, day in, day out.

This means farmers achieve both high pasture utilisation from the current grazing, and set up pasture quality for the next grazing so the cycle will repeat itself in the next round.

"In other words, the most important person on the farm in spring is whoever moves the cows – they set both the cow feeding level, and pasture quality for the next grazing."

In the big picture, meantime, renewing pastures remains essential to maintain DM yield and feed quality on any farm.

"This spring the question is not 'can I afford to renew pasture?', but 'can I afford not to?' If pastures are not renewed, farm productivity and profitability run down, affecting both farmers' bottom line and overall resilience," Graham says.

Implementing the right renewal programme in a tight season entails good planning and analysis, so the new booklet walks farmers through this process from start to finish.

"We've included all the steps that are required to get the right return on pasture investment, from quantifying the economic benefits of new pasture to identifying the right paddocks, setting a date and picking the right seed mix."

For more information, or to obtain a copy of the new booklet, contact ATS Seed today on 0800 BUY ATS (289 287).

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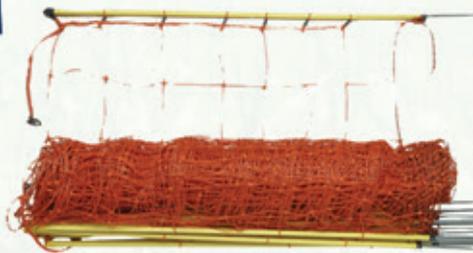
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Dry times ahead under El Nino

Farmers in drought stricken North Canterbury will find cold comfort in latest weather predictions from Met Service and local forecasters tracking the development of an El Nino weather pattern. BY RICHARD RENNIE

As many farmers grapple with the challenges of bringing capital stock back home, and how to feed them once back, predictions are that things are going to get tougher over coming months.

This is being driven by the strengthening El Nino event, one which Met Service meteorologist Georgina Griffiths describes as the most intense since the 1997–98 event. Anyone who farmed through that event will recall the devastating effect felt down the east coast of both islands, while more southerly and western areas experienced

continual cool, persistent south westerlies through summer.

The economic impact of that event was measured in hundreds of millions, with estimates over 1% of our GDP or \$700 million was shaved off NZ's economic production that year as a direct result of drought.

"We would estimate this event is surpassing the event of 1997–98. Last year it never really got going, the conditions in the atmosphere and ocean did not line up. However Cyclone Pam in early March was the kick-starter to this event, and after that it was all on," says Met Service meteorologist Georgina Griffiths.

El Nino's presence is measured through the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI), which reflects pressure differentials in the tropics, with a negative value indicating a movement towards El Nino.





By late July the Met Service's SOI index had adopted a definitive El Nino pattern with a sustained "negative" trend, with a five month running mean of -1, and the latest weekly reading in the extreme level of -2.0.

"We are now seeing a warm tongue of water extending from Central South American coast, right across to the International Date Line, and this typically accompanies an El Nino pattern.

"This has now surpassed the 1997-98 event." As the year continues expectations are the event will intensify further before its traditional peak at year's end.

"We are already seeing the impact of El Nino this winter with the wash of cold southerlies we have been experiencing across the entire country. This is the first winter for several years we have had pure southerlies, rather than sou'westerlies through winter."

Under a typical El Nino pattern temperatures overall will be cooler than normal through winter and spring and the wind patterns will continue to blast from the south for the next few weeks.

Georgina says drought stricken North Canterbury is also an area that has

benefitted little from the southerly winds, with them bringing little moisture. In many eastern districts it had only been localised thunderstorms keeping moisture levels up.

"Looking ahead we see southerlies and cold conditions continuing for the next four weeks, with little likelihood of any break in that, it is going to be tough."

"The likelihood of sustained dry periods doubles under El Nino conditions."

ATS consulting meteorologist Tony Trewinnard of Blue Skies Weather is advising farmers to brace for conditions that are more than likely to get drier than wetter over the next six months.

He says colder than usual sea temperatures are also exacerbating the El Nino effects this winter-spring.

"Development of anticyclones in the south Tasman, make for a double whammy with the cold south westerlies we are experiencing."

He is also concerned over the fact NZ is

overdue for a La Nina event.

"There is that transition from the El Nino peak to the trough, the intensity of that drop would make me nervous for Canterbury conditions, pushing dry conditions out further."

More immediately Met Service expectations are that typically stormy spring weather will deliver moisture to south Canterbury and North Otago over spring time.

"However the risk of a dry summer increases significantly after that point, from December onwards," says Georgina Griffiths.

Prospects of moisture over spring will at least help recharge aquifers and storage systems including the severely reduced Ophua dam reservoir. By mid-July it had achieved 55% capacity, but was still below the historical average of 66%.

The likelihood of sustained dry periods doubles under El Nino conditions.

"Typically with El Nino we can expect to see the drier places become drier, and this will become more pronounced as we move into early December."

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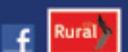


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Winner
2015

The annual Ruralco Supplier Awards has become a significant opportunity to showcase excellence within the supplier network and this year's winners are testament to this. BY ANITA BODY



ABOVE: The winning team from Newlands, Peter Wood, Robert Newland, Karla Newland, Jeff Naish & Rhys McPherson

The Supreme Supplier Award winner must demonstrate significant business growth, exceptional customer feedback, and strong ties with Ruralco. In announcing this year's winner, Ruralco National Sales Manager, Lester Chambers said auto electrical business, the Newlands Group, had done this and had delivered excellent customer service which had led to repeat business.

Newlands Managing Director, Robert Newlands said they were very proud to be the recipient of the award. "It certainly came as a surprise. We had some pretty formidable competition from established and reputable firms." Newlands provides automotive air conditioning, batteries, two way radios and power tools in conjunction with workshop machinery and servicing, and on-site servicing.

"We are very fortunate to have had a long association with ATS and more recently Ruralco, dating back to the late 1970s—in excess of 30

years. It is a very strong relationship and we look forward to continuing this long association with the Ruralco brand."

"One of the benefits for us and clients is the use of the card which can be used at our three locations (Ashburton, Rolleston and Timaru) and with our mobile technicians. It makes processing accounts very easy. It means customers don't have to apply for an account and they are assured of getting a competitive discount." He describes it as a 'win-win' situation. "It also gives our electrical and battery suppliers a good avenue to sell into."

"We have made a conscious effort to drive our marketing activity within Ruralco and we have built a strong relationship with our Partnership Services Representative." He said this had assisted in further developing the business while also looking at ways to improve its offer to Ruralco members.

"We are really lucky with the staff we have—30 across our three branches with 300 years

collectively of service to rural Canterbury. This award is recognition for their efforts."

Another long-standing supplier to come away with a major award was Ashburton based, ElectraServe, which won the Excellence in Marketing category.

Managing Director Blair Watson said the electrical business had worked hard to ensure everyone was aware of its relationship with Ruralco and its card. Every opportunity to include the Ruralco brand in advertising and signage had been taken, and the business continued to make great use of advertising options in all Ruralco publications and mail-outs. Blair said the Ruralco partnership was important to their business, and one of the first questions asked of customers was what their Ruralco Card number was for billing.

"For us it is about showing that we have that strong relationship in the community and the rural sector," he said. "We have pushed the logo as



much as we have been allowed to." ElectraServe won the Supreme Award last year and had taken the opportunity to publicise this achievement wherever possible. "It was fantastic for putting our name out there."

Every year Ruralco recognises an outstanding newcomer and this year the Emerging Business Award was won by Methven Advanced Feed, which provides customised animal feed options for livestock including dairy cows, calves, sheep and deer.

While the Methven based mill has been in operation for about 10 years, a change of ownership 18 months ago saw a group of locals take control of the operation and seek Ruralco Supplier status.

General Manger, Peter Westaway said it was something the business had wanted to achieve for some time, and was a good fit as they were "a local company supplying locals."

"A lot of hard work has been done over the last 12 months regarding marketing strategies to raise awareness of our business and our products," he said. This had ensured the business had gone from strength to strength.

The business displays a spot pricing list on its website which shows where the market is really at. "We are always looking for the most advantageous pricing for local farmers." And it is Feedsafe accredited (a New Zealand Feed Manufacturers Association programme designed

to enhance the quality assurance of New Zealand-produced stockfeed).

"We have also been working closely with Tim Dale of ATS Seed on sourcing locally grown seed and grain to supply our local farmers."

"Most of our production is for customised feed. We have to meet both the nutritional and financial needs of our customers and we have to come up with smart options. It has to be about what the farmer wants, not what others think they have to have."

Customers have the opportunity to vote for their favourite supplier, and this year the Members' Choice Award went to Mitre 10 Mega Ashburton. Managing Director, Simon Lye said the whole team was absolutely thrilled to have picked up the award for the second time. "It is one of the best awards to win as it is voted on by the members." The business also won the award in 2013.

With a staff of close to 100, it was a real achievement as it recognised our team's excellent focus and attention to customers and their needs. Simon said it helped many of the staff have a first-hand understanding of the rural community and so understood their customers. Being locally owned and actively involved in the community also helped.

"It (the award) really acknowledges the strength of partnership we have with the rural community in our business and we are very grateful of this."

SUPREME SUPPLIER

- Winner Newlands Group
- Runner Up ElectraServe & Tinwald Canvas and Upholstery
- Nominees Autosparkes & Neumanns Tyres

EXCELLENCE IN MARKETING

- Winner ElectraServe
- Runner Up Jeff Marshall Motorcycles
- Nominees Newlands Group, Autosparkes & Neumanns Tyres

EMERGING BUSINESS

- Winner Methven Advanced Feed
- Runner Up Aaklands Chemicals

MEMBERS CHOICE

- Winner Mitre 10 Mega Ashburton
- Runner Up Mobil Ashburton

IMAGES CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
 From left, Allanah Watson, Brendon Patrick, Blair Watson, Tasha Jackson, Lyn Church, Peter Westaway, Robert Newland & Jeff Marshall
 From left, Blair Watson from ElectraServe, Lyn Church from Mitre 10 Mega Ashburton, Robert Newland from Newlands Group & Peter Westaway from Methven Advanced feeds
 From left, Geoff wright and Jim Hazlett from HRL with Peter Wood from Newlands Group
 From left, Mel Brooks & Chris Wylie from BNZ along with Marty Amos from HRL

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Connecting rural Canterbury to the world

The age of the internet video is here. And you don't have to miss out if you live in the country or a long way from an urban fibre-optic network.

BY LINDA CLARKE



Rural gamers and those loving their online TV programmes can tune in with the help of Christchurch-based Ultimate Broadband.

The modest little telco has its own wireless network in Mid and South Canterbury and is in the business of delivering high-speed broadband to farming and rural folk.

Mike Smith and his technically talented team have more than doubled their network and customer base in rural Canterbury over the past few years and are busy improving and expanding their broadband internet services to cater for the growing trend of online viewing.

Ultimate Broadband offers RBL wireless broadband on Vodafone's 3G and 4G network nationwide, EA Networks fibre broadband and has its own expansive wireless rural broadband network in Mid and South Canterbury with partners in other parts of the province to deliver services in Central and North Canterbury. They have 42 micro-sites around the district and more on the way.

Their existing internet speed allows customers to watch television on demand and compares favourably to many urban or DSL speeds.

"It is a high-speed broadband network and we are expanding it and increasing capability in the next 6-12 months for even faster speeds. Our

network is capable of 10Mb per second right now but by 2016 we plan to offer 30Mb per second," Mike said.

Ultimate Broadband is also seeking funding from the Government's Rural Broadband Initiative to further develop the existing network and connect those left out in the internet cold.

Mike said the biggest challenge facing the industry was coping with the huge and growing demand by users wanting high-speed internet access for gaming and to watch movies and television shows (on and offshore).

The challenge for rural internet service providers without fibre-optic infrastructure was meeting that demand. With a current trend of town and city people moving to jobs on dairy and other farming operations, new employees expected the same access.

"We have worked hard to improve access and meet demand by buying more bandwidth on the international broadband pipe. Everyone wants to use Netflix and our bandwidth went up 25

percent as most content viewed is not from New Zealand servers. As an ISP we have to keep abreast of that."

Mike said both installation and customer service teams had grown and Ashburton-based Daniel Tew was now operations manager. The whole team was focussed on connecting people, farms and rural businesses to the internet so they could live and work as they wanted.

They run a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week help line; they don't expect their customers to be IT experts and staff go the extra mile to restore connections and smooth out the odd problem.

That means deciphering computer and internet speak to make it easy for the average user to understand and being flexible.



ABOVE: There is an increasing demand for fibre-optic infrastructure on farming operations

MAIN IMAGE: Mike Smith installing high-speed broadband to the rural community

As a smaller telecommunications company, Ultimate Broadband is also able to more easily adapt to trends and patterns of use, and help customers use their technology smarter.

The business was started by Mike and wife Joanne in 2009 and has outgrown the one-room office it was previously based in, with six staff now working from a three-car garage converted to business premises. Two installers are on the road setting up physical connections.

Mike said aside from internet access for social media, they were also installing micro-sites on farms, which allowed farmers and their employees to be connected in the homes and around the farm, to accommodate the latest smart farming tools, from checking the weather to ordering irrigation water.



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Tech Tips

BECOME TECH-SAVVY WITH RURALCO'S TOP TECHNOLOGY TIPS

Astutely App

An introduction to some great app's available on smart phone. This edition we focus on health apps.

All apps are FREE and available on Iphone and Android smartphones.



Healthline—My Symptoms

The Healthline Symptom Checker lets you enter your symptoms on a body map or search from a list of symptoms, eg. 'knee injury'. Once the symptoms have been found, courses of action are suggested. Based on the type and severity of the illness, that could be to call an ambulance, see the doctor within 24 hours, or advice on how to manage the condition at home. This app compliments the telephone service and gives people a convenient way of accessing health information & advice.



MyFitnessPal

The My Fitness Pal sets you a 'target' of calories that you should be consuming over a day, depending on whether you are trying to loose, maintain or put on weight, and also dependent on age/height/weight. The app works on a daily target that is adjusted whenever you eat or are active. Plus the website and mobile apps sync automatically for your convenience.



MindShift

MindShift is an app designed to help adults cope with anxiety. MindShift will help you learn how to relax, develop more helpful ways of thinking, and identify active steps that will help you take charge of your anxiety. This app includes strategies to deal with everyday anxiety, as well as specific tools to tackle it.



FoodSwitch

FoodSwitch is an app which is designed to help you make healthier food choices. It works by scanning the barcode of the packaged food using the camera on your smartphone and you will receive immediate, easy to understand nutritional advice as well as a list of similar foods that are healthier options.

Be aware of the latest in Email SPAM

If you receive an email with cv.zip, resume.zip or invoice.zip as the subject, do NOT open the email, just delete it.

This is a spam email which defeats spam filters and multiple virus guards. If you open the email it will infect your computer. The attachment contains a krypto locker payload, which will encrypt/lock important documents and photos. .

There is no fix to restore the lost documents, therefore it is very important that you have all of your documents/photos etc. backed up on another drive. Restoring documents on your computer is an important task – don't take the risk of loosing everything.

This virus will also send out an email using your email account details to everyone in your contact list. This is clever, as you may receive an email from someone you know, and with a subject of resume, cv or invoice, so the email may seem very plausible. However if you do receive this, contact the sender before you open it, to see if it is legitimate.

This notice was provided by Ruralco Supplier Computing Solutions



Shortcut keys

Here are a range of computer shortcut keys which make your life a whole lot easier.

If you hold down "Ctrl" and the various other keys below, you will be able to control your computer without using your mouse, saving you time and hassle.

CTRL+ESC:	Open Start menu
CTRL+C:	Copy
CTRL+X:	Cut
CTRL+V:	Paste
CTRL+Z:	Undo
CTRL+B:	Bold
CTRL+U:	Underline
CTRL+I:	Italic
CTRL+A:	To select all
CTRL+O:	To open a file
CTRL+F or F3:	To find a word or words on a page
CTRL+S:	To save
CTRL+P:	To print

Lost or Stolen Cards?

If you are a Ruralco Cardholder and your card has been lost or stolen, you should contact Ruralco on 0800 RURALNZ (787 256) immediately.

In all cases, be sure to quote your member number—this can be found on your statement.

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Our team welcome your contributions, enquiries and letters.

Please post or email to:
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ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES:

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Co-op News

Keeping safe with ATS

ATS in conjunction with Unique Solutions are running Farm Safety Training Courses, designed to ensure you meet the new health and safety requirements due to take effect this year. The courses include relevant documentation and information on how you can lower your ACC levies. The next courses will take place in Ashburton on 18 August and 22 September and cost \$550 (GST and discount inclusive). Seating is strictly limited. If you would like to know more please call Peter Jacob on 0800 BUY ATS (289 287), or to book a spot on our training courses email book@ats.co.nz or visit www.ats.co.nz/farmsafety.

Charge your Spark account to your Ruralco account

Ruralco provides you with the convenience of charging your Spark account through your Ruralco Card. This means that you can simply pay your monthly Ruralco/ATS account and we handle the payment to Spark.

If you wish to charge your Spark account through your Ruralco Card, simply call 0800 RURALNZ (787 256) or email ruralco@ruralco.co.nz, you'll need to quote your Ruralco number and your Spark account name and number and we will organise for this to be set up for you.



Ruralco Invoices

If your Ruralco account was previously linked to a Ravensdown shareholding you will now notice that your statement comes from Ruralco, therefore the payment of this statement is to be made to Ruralco. If you previously had a direct debit set up with Ravensdown, you will need to fill in a new direct debit form to get this set up with Ruralco. To request a direct debit form, simply email ruralco@ruralco.co.nz or call 0800 RURALNZ (787 256).

There is no changes to those who have Ruralco Cards with their ATS account.

United Wheat Grower Winners

The 2015 United Wheat Growers wheat competition has once again been a great success. This year a record number of 85 entries were received over the four classes of Premium Milling, Milling/Gristing, Soft Biscuit and Feed Wheat's. This was a pleasing result after some growers experienced a poor harvest season particularly from dryland crops. The quality of the samples of wheat entered by growers and grain merchants was quite exceptional considering the growing and harvest season. High test weights, low screenings and good protein levels were a consistent feature of the winning lines of wheat in all classes. UWG and primary sponsor of the event ATS, want to congratulate the winners and acknowledge the support of the growers, grain merchants and sponsors. A prize presentation evening took place at the Hotel Ashburton on the 21 July.

	PREMIUM MILLING	GRISTING WHEAT	FEED WHEAT	BISCUIT WHEAT	FEED PROTEIN WHEAT CLASS
FIRST	David Redmond	William Davey	Dave Birkett	Andrew West	Paul Wilkinson
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THIRD	Ian Maw	Brian Fechny	Graeme Harris	Peter Hampton	

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To set up bulk fuel deliveries to your business, contact Ruralco on 0800 RURALNZ (787 256) and quote your Ruralco number. This can be found on the bottom right corner of your Ruralco Card.

**No volume limits. Discount as at 1 August 2015. Discount is GST inclusive and may vary depending on pump pricing, conditions apply. Refer to the Ruralco website for latest pricing, updated weekly.*



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Instore Days Prize Winners

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- AutoSparks battery lift – Dean Mconnell
- BNT chain bar lube – Brian Sandery
- G J Blacklows Rockboard Scooter – Hugh Saunders
- G J Blacklows G Shock Watch – Gerald Kidner
- Mirror Image gift basket – Jo Syme
- Mirror Image express facial – Sarah Watson
- Property Brokers gift basket – Sue Spencer
- United Travel hamper – Fiona Rushton

ATS RETAIL SUPPLIERS

- AHD Rain Jacket – Evan Chisnall
- ATS Seed \$1,000 Travel Voucher – Daniel Symons
- Castrol Ride On Lawn Mower – Gerard Ness
- Castrol Leaf Blower – Rupert Curd
- Castrol Line Trimmer – Paul & Sally Davey
- Castrol Hedge Trimmer – Dayle Lucas
- Castrol Hedge Trimmer – Richard Redfern
- Nufarm Charbroil Gas Smoker – David & Ruth Keeley
- NZ Safety \$500 Gift Basket – Du Toit & Danielle Bosch
- Orion \$1,000 Travel Voucher – Alastair & Shirley Clemens
- Purina Barbeque – Blair Sewell
- Strainrite Chainsaw – Graeme & Gillian Harris
- Zoetis Tool Box with Goodies – Chris & Carmen Hanrahan

KIDS STAMP THE MAP COMPETITION

- Thursday: Amy Stilgoe-Rooney
- Friday: Lily Hulme



Are you paying too much for your electricity?

ATS Energy can provide you with a free no obligation comparison from our energy partners so you can see if there are any potential savings to be had for your home or farm by paying your electricity accounts through ATS. Contact ATS Energy Account Manager Tracey Gordon today on 0800 BUY ATS (289 287).

Excise tax refund

If you're a business owner who uses petrol-powered equipment in your operations, you may be entitled to an excise tax refund of up to 69¢ per litre. This includes using petrol powered equipment to:

- Move about the land you and your staff work on (i.e. ATV's used by farmers);
- Work the land the equipment operates on (i.e. lawnmowers used by green keepers, hydraladas used by orchardists);
- Keep their businesses operating (i.e. builders using generators, chainsaws used in forestry).

Excise duty (\$0.69/L as at 1/7/2015) is unique to petrol and is New Zealand Transport Authority's (NZTA) way of getting the public to fund its roading projects. If you are in business and some of the petrol you use isn't used on the road, then you will likely be eligible to lodge a claim and have the excise amount refunded. This way NZ's backbone businesses aren't unfairly subsidising other road users.

To get your refund of fuel excise duty, contact Kerry Aldrich from the NZTA on 06 953 7021 or 0800 108 809 (Ext 7021), she will advise you on your claim, register your request and ensure you have the correct forms to fill out.

Keeping your farm and family on the move

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You are also able to track fuel spend per Ruralco Mobilcard on your monthly statement.

For more information head to www.ruralco.co.nz/fuel



Making sure your wet weather gear fits

Having correctly fitted wet weather gear is crucial over the winter months if you want to keep warm and dry. ATS will now arrange for either Line7 or Betacraft over-trousers to be altered free of charge. All we need to know is the amount you need taken off the bottom and we will order the corrected length. Both of these companies also offer free repairs on their garments. These items must be clean and dry before they are brought into ATS. Please be aware courier fees apply for items being sent away. If you have any questions call the Gift and Homeware shop on 0800 BUY ATS (289 287).



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Out & About

ATS Instore Days and ATS Federated Farmers Nutrient Management Seminar



1. Craig Osborne, James Cairns & Hartley Curd from Masterguard Security Cameras; 2. Charlotte Edmonstone & Rajiv Bambaran from Vetlife; 3. Tracy, Ash (10 months), Katarina (4) & Owen King (5); 4. Juliet & Fleur Kingsbury; 5. Tracey Gordon (ATS Energy Account Manager) & Leah Davies from Genesis Energy; 6. Marjorie Letham & Julie Lambie; 7. Patrice Hammond (ATS Customer Service Representative) & Judith Letham; 8. Ian Totty & Eddy Glass; 9. Nicholas (10), Kathryn & Ella McDowell (8)

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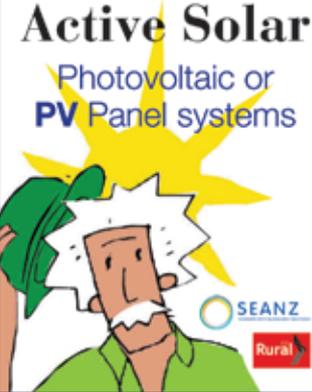


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