

OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 2013

# Real Farmer

FOR EVERYTHING FARMING AND FAMILY

Water  
pushes next  
generation  
forward

Your Local  
Christmas  
Country Fête

Arable Ys  
deliver to next  
generation of  
croppers

Family dry land  
project not blowing  
in the wind

Trusted co-ops working for farmers

**ATS**  **Ravensdown**

# From the CEO

In this edition of Real Farmer we get a behind-the-scenes look at New Zealand's longest-running fête, The Christmas Country Fête in Culverden.



Started by a group of North Canterbury farmer's wives in the early 1990s, the Fête has blossomed from humble beginnings to one of the events on the Christmas shopping calendar boasting over 200 stalls catering to every taste, attracting more than 6000 visitors annually.

Also in this edition we return to Mid Canterbury farming family the Mawles to catch-up on progress on their finely tuned, family-run dairy operation on the South Bank of the Rakaia River, at the foot of Mt Hutt, and the challenges they have faced since embarking on a new life here in New Zealand.

We also get to celebrate with the big winners at this year's third annual Ruralco Supplier Awards, which took place at a special awards dinner at the Hotel Ashburton in early August, celebrating their effectiveness in meeting and exceeding the needs of our Ruralco Cardholders. The Supreme Award went deservedly to Peter May Ltd, while it was Mitre 10 MEGA Ashburton that took out the coveted Members' Choice, as voted for by Ruralco Cardholders.

Other features include a look at the Foundation of Arable Research's "Arable Y's" initiative aimed at increasing the arable knowledge and skills of "Gen Y" farmers as they pick up the reins of their parents. One such farmer is Sheffield cropping farmer Marty Skurr, who returned to his family farm three years ago. He shares his story on page 18.

The value of customer service is explored in more depth on page 7, while the importance of selenium in pastoral farming systems and animal metabolism feature in the regular sections.

Planning is well underway for this year's Ashburton and Canterbury A&P Shows and as usual we look forward to catching up with our Ruralco Cardholders in our marquee.

Neal Shaw, Group Chief Executive

## Upcoming Events

### October

DairyNZ and Beef + Lamb—  
Wintering for Success

4 October—Culverden  
Balnabreich Farm,  
758 Long Plantation Road,  
Culverden

8 October—Waimakariri  
456 Burnt Hill Road, Oxford

15 October—Mid Canterbury  
Maronan Ealing Road

For more information contact  
Virginia Serra on 021 932 515 or  
virginia.serra@dairynz.co.nz or  
Ian Knowles on 027 496 8496 or  
ian.knowles@beeflambnz.co.nz

### 18 October

Ballance Farm Environment  
Awards Field Day, Canterbury

For more information contact  
Jocelyn Muller at  
jocelyn.muller@ecan.govt.nz.

22 October & 19 November  
Farm Safety Manual and Training  
for Ruralco Cardholders

For more information or to RSVP, call  
Unique Solutions on 03 423 2273  
or RSVP online at [www.ats.co.nz/farmsafety](http://www.ats.co.nz/farmsafety)

### 22 October

National Ewe Hogget Competition  
2013 Winner's Field-Day, North  
Canterbury

For more information, contact  
Ian Knowles on 027 4968 496 or  
email [ian.knowles@beeflambnz.com](mailto:ian.knowles@beeflambnz.com).

### 28 October

Labour Day

### 1 & 2 November

Ashburton A&P Show

### 13–15 November

Canterbury A&P Show

### 15 November

Canterbury Anniversary

### 5 December

Ruralco celebrates Christmas

More information coming soon

[www.ruralco.co.nz](http://www.ruralco.co.nz)



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#### FRONT PAGE PHOTO

Marty Skurr on his Sheffield  
farm



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# Family dry land project not blowing in the wind



As a 2,000 litre colostrum tank blew down the laneway like an air hockey puck in flight, John Mawle was standing in the family's semi completed dairy farm, and had a strange sense of déjà vue.

BY RICHARD RENNIE

Dairying up the Rakaia gorge, John and his family are all well familiar with the strength of winds. But seeing the colostrum tank drifting towards him in September's storm took him back three years earlier. Then he had also been standing in a semi completed dairy shed, watching two 30,000 litre water tanks fly across the landscape in high winds, un-tethered and eventually smashed to pieces.

"This time, I think the colostrum tank ended up hitting a tree near the neighbours, and fortunately we had not bought the water tanks in yet, or history really would have been repeating itself!" he observed ruefully.

Between these two memorable storms the UK migrant family have overcome plenty of other challenges, but also overseen some major developments and advances in their family dairy operation.

**"I am quite sure there will be some healthy brotherly competition there when it comes to comparing production figures at the season's end."**

The family were first visited by ATS back in February 2011, in the first season of their first dry land dairy conversion, milking 1,150 cows on the ex-deer unit they settled on in the summer of 2008. That came after an exhaustive search for the right farm—John was clear in his mind about what sort of place he wanted, and does not regret the time spent on a search that looked at 45 potential properties.

Now almost four years later they have embarked on their second conversion, to be operated by son Rob, while his twin brother Tom continues running the first conversion property. That sense of déjà vue John feels is also reflected in the prospects of a high milk solids payout this season, just as it was when the first dairy was being built.

"It suggests maybe we should build another after this, just to keep things that way!" he jokes.

There is every prospect a dry stock block purchase will be made in coming years for daughter Ellie, as John and wife Jean aim to provide an equal opportunity for all their children to leverage off the investment their parents have been able to make into the land. In the meantime Ellie continues to run a 100ha



ABOVE: Jean and John Mawle

OPPOSITE: John Mawle with sons Tom and Robert

seed potato operation with her husband Tim, and keep a close monitor on the family operation's costs and income by doing the company accounts.

"That has been the other major change in the last couple of years, all the kids are now married to their partners, and we even have three grandchildren running around."

On the conversion block the latest dairy is a duplicate of the last, a 60 bale Waikato rotary platform, a 200t below ground grain bunker and 100t above ground silo.

The conversion has been made possible in part by the opportunity to lease 116ha of neighbouring land, taking the total milking area to 614 effective hectares. Three hundred cows are returning from a lease agreement around Christmas time, and heading straight onto the new block that Rob will be running, with around 1,000 cows being run by each of the boys.

"I am quite sure there will be some healthy brotherly competition there when it comes to comparing production figures at the season's end."

Other projects on the go over the past three years have included the construction of 10 houses across the property, now home to family and staff.

The complete pasture area has also been re-grassed, including the new lease block, using a variety of types including AberDart, AberMagic high sugar ryegrasses, Trojan Extreme or Bealey, with Kopu and Sustain clovers for the dry land operation.

All fences on the property have been upgraded, while laneways have been capped in a stable clay that doesn't blow off in the strong nor'westerly wind.

Because it's a dry land system the Mawles have been able to leave most of the trees and shelter intact around the property, something John was grateful about as they moderated the very worst of the most recent blast the farm received. He was doubly grateful they were not left having to pick through the wreckage of irrigation systems, an insurance nightmare that has affected some farms on the Plains in the storm's wake.

The storm had wind speeds of up to 250kph on Mt Hutt, "virtually straight up" from the farm, which itself received speeds of up to 150kph.

When the Mawles went dry land dairying down Blackford Road there was some scepticism about how one of Canterbury's most westerly dairy units would perform. However three seasons and a second conversion are testimony to the family's confidence that the district provides reliable rainfall in the 45-55 inch range consistently enough to deliver grass growth when it is needed.

"And when it grows, it really takes off, it requires a close eye to anticipate the growth, and to manage it to get the best either for grazing, or for silage making."

The driest the farm has been was last summer when things got tight for a few weeks, nevertheless they still finished the season averaging 435kgMS a cow, down slightly on the 450kgMS a cow achieved the year before.

This year John is confident production will top the 450kgMS a cow mark. These are impressive production figures for a dry land operation anywhere, with a moderate stocking rate of 3.2 cows a hectare, and equally moderate inputs of supplement, amounting to 800kg a cow. This is usually half haylage and half locally sourced grain.

The gorge location, while bringing some howling winds, also helps moderate the tough winters that could be expected at the farm's 450m altitude. The warm nor'westerly funnelled down the gorge floor helps keep growth rates up, and the deposit of westerly sourced rainfall across the property arrives with it at opportune times.

**The difference however, is dairy farmers in the UK are having a tougher time, with intense domestic supermarket milk competition forcing many out, or to consolidate.**

While competition for land has become tighter in Canterbury, John believes there is still more rural land for sale in NZ than in the UK, and prices sit relatively similar once exchange rates are allowed for.

The difference however, is dairy farmers in the UK are having a tougher time, with intense domestic supermarket milk competition forcing many out, or to consolidate.

But even here in NZ over the past three years the Mawles have been exposed to the extremes of payout, and John remains cautious about how long the predicted high payout will last. He sees the United States as a clear and present danger to NZ's supply position for powder exports, tracing it back to the huge reserves of cheap natural gas coming on stream there, and its effect on US energy policy.

"Thanks to fracking there are big reserves of natural gas being unlocked. With that I would expect to see the possibility of extra grain being available to shift from ethanol production to food production, resulting in grain costs dropping back, making their milk and beef production for export a lot more competitive."

This is from a country already now exporting 18% of its dairy production, up from only 5% five years ago. Meantime an easing in Chinese and Indian growth should also be of concern. He also believes the land and water plan proposals will see some constraints around what conversions can be done where in coming years.

Here NZ has noticed the higher costs to operate a dairy unit have to be managed closely against the environment of greater milk price volatility.

**"With the hard work of the past five years behind them and a solid production platform to advance from, John remains grateful to the people who supported the family..."**

"Once you are operating at costs of \$4-4.25/kgMS, with servicing costs on top of that, you don't have to be a great mathematician to know margins are quite tight at times." He has been surprised at some of the cost components New Zealand farmers face, particularly around building materials and components.

Since 2010 the family have also observed the howls of protest around foreign land ownership, but he rightly defends his family's day to day involvement as a far greater commitment than simply a distant investment. In the UK large tracts of farm land are being bought up by both local and foreign families, simply to protect capital than for any compelling desire to own and farm land.

"The land can't be taken away, and we have done our best to improve what we have here and we feel committed enough to even be supporting the All Blacks, we are becoming more Kiwi every year."

For the family the next two years will see the home farm operations consolidated with the new conversion up and running. For John, along with entertaining grand children he is





excited about the prospects of pursuing his interest in Black Limousin beef cattle. This year 44 embryos he imported resulted in 20 calves on the ground.

With the hard work of the past five years behind them and a solid production platform to advance from, John remains grateful to the people who supported the family in their decision to go dairying up the gorge. That includes farm advisor Bob Englebrecht, Jonathan Davies for dairy advice, Charlie Brown of Rhodes and Co, accountants Chris Heffernan and Julie Inwood of Leech and Partners, and Westpac bank managers Don Chamberlain and Dave Whillins. Of course he also recognises the “solid service” delivered by ATS staff as a trusted supply source.

“They have all really contributed so much, and we can claim them as good friends now, they helped make the move that much more seamless.”

LEFT: Tom and Robert Mawle

ABOVE: The Mawles on their family farm

RIGHT: John Mawle





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\*The 9¢ is the current discount as at 1 July 2013 and may be subject to change. The card cannot be used in conjunction with other fuel discount offers.



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**-ATS-**



# Service not an extra, but an essential

The waiter who just glares when you tell him your meal is cold, the plumber who leaves the tap dripping more than when you called him, the contractor who failed to tell you about the strainer post he knocked over on his way out the gate.

NEAL SHAW, GROUP CEO

They are all “experts” you have engaged to do a job. Yet their poor service delivery not only leaves you with more of a problem than when you started, you know you’ll never have them back—or in the case of the waiter, be back.

Ruralco farmer shareholders deal with a multitude of different service and product suppliers in the daily course of farm business. No doubt many will have had an experience similar to the ones above, either in the course of business or leisure.

Over years of working in the rural service sector I have learned farmers can be a relatively forgiving bunch, but less than patient when poor service leaves them with more of a problem than when they engaged the service provider.

In the competitive rural service environment today, farmers have less reason than ever to stick with a poor provider—farm businesses are often too finely tuned and short of time to tolerate the inevitable delays and run around that occurs when their problem suddenly becomes your problem.

There is plenty of research available to highlight the impact poor service experiences can have on a business’s relationship with its valued customers. Work carried out in New Zealand by CTMA World indicates a drop in customer satisfaction as a result of poor service can lead to a proportionately greater drop in customer loyalty. On average a drop from a customer being “very satisfied” to “somewhat satisfied” can represent almost a halving in loyalty. The mistake many companies make is to bundle all of the “satisfied” customers, both “very” and “somewhat” together, to boost their measure of satisfied customers. What they fail to realise is that chasm between “very” and “somewhat” represents people unlikely to return.

Research by the same company also confirms the old adage that good news stays at home while bad news does the rounds. Depending upon the industry being studied, 5–10 people will be told about a bad service experience by the customer who had that experience.

Add in the amplifying effect of social media and the ability to review companies online, that experience can be broadcast far further and faster than ever imagined only five years ago. It is one situation when a company most definitely does not want to “go global” with its brand.

At Ruralco many of our cardholders’ positive experiences revolve around what they don’t see. Because of the multiple number and type of outlets that accept the Ruralco Card, technology plays a big part in keeping the purchase and billing process seamless and timely.

**“On average a drop from a customer being “very satisfied” to “somewhat satisfied” can represent almost a halving in loyalty.”**

Investment has been made in state of the art technology and software systems to ensure invoices arrive early in the month so cardholders know what to expect when it comes time to pay later in the month.

On the other side of the purchase equation, our valued suppliers need to know they are going

to be paid, and have a clear outline of their card transactions through the month.

We know any issues around software and billing are something cardholders and suppliers don’t want to hear about - we know not to make a Ruralco problem your problem.

But it is not all about computer software. When it comes to recruiting people to service our Ruralco suppliers and cardholders we seek “customer centric” individuals. They often have a strong knowledge of agriculture, but just as importantly appreciate the value of offering good service—they take the time to know our stakeholders by name, know their business needs and even something about their families and interests.

At the end of the day our Ruralco staff remember they too are customers, and know how they wish to be treated when they are on the other side of the counter.



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# Thoughts from across the rivers

We were signing papers at the lawyers when I noticed that the space requiring our occupations had already been filled.

BY ELE LUDEMANN

My farmer's said farmer, mine said married. "Why is his occupation an occupation but mine's a marital status?" I asked.

The lawyer looked a little discombobulated and said, "Do you want to be a farmer too?"

I don't object to being called a farmer but it's not an accurate description of my occupation.

**"The lawyer looked a little discombobulated and said, "Do you want to be a farmer too?"**

If I'd married a surgeon no-one would expect me to wield a scalpel, if my husband was an actor it wouldn't qualify me to be on stage and marrying a man of the land hasn't turned me into a farmer.

Some women are farmers in their own right or as active partners in the family business but I can't claim to be either.

I had rosy visions of how that might happen when we first married but had overlooked the fact that my farmer had been farming for more than a decade by himself and had no need of an unskilled assistant.

He did ask for my help occasionally, but it wasn't always successful. Take the day he needed a hand drafting ewes before lambing.

It sounded so simple—he'd send the sheep up the race and if he said empty I was to let them go straight ahead and if he said full they had to go to the right.

Even a fool could cope with that, and I did at first. Full, full, full, full, empty, full, full...

Then three came at me at once and when I'd sorted them out there was another bunch running at me. In the heat of the moment I got a bit confused about which was which and where they were to go.

That's when my farmer started shouting and I replied, "Woof, woof, woof!"

We've both grown up since then and I have helped in the yards again—but we're both more relaxed when he's on the drafting gate and I'm hunting the sheep up the race.

I've also milked a couple of times, helped with feeding out and mustering and routinely do the things you do to help when you live with someone who lives on the job.

**That's when my farmer started shouting and I replied, "Woof, woof, woof!"**

I'm sometimes called on for advice and have an input into decision making—sometimes even before the decision is actually

made—but I can't in all honesty claim to be a farmer.

So what do you call yourself when your paid work is only part-time and that in a variety of occupations with at least as much time devoted to voluntary pursuits?

**When I get the "what do you do?" question in social situations I generally just say I'm a bitser—I do bits of this and bits of that.**

When I get the "what do you do?" question in social situations I generally just say I'm a bitser—I do bits of this and bits of that.

Official forms don't usually appreciate creativity so I call myself a writer when filling them in. But next time I was at the lawyers, I noticed the space after occupation had been filled in with director.

Ele Ludemann  
homepaddock.wordpress.com



# Ruralco Supplier Awards



Ruralco Suppliers converged on Ashburton to celebrate business growth and development, marketing and customer service at the annual 2013 Ruralco Supplier Awards in August, with top honours going to Peter May Ltd. BY ANNIE STUDHOLME

It's only the third year the awards have been held, and each year they are gaining in reputation and prestige amongst Suppliers.

This year four main awards and 17 business and growth awards covering a variety of categories were presented at an awards dinner held at the Hotel Ashburton on August 8. The Supreme Award deservedly went to Peter May Ltd, with Mitre 10 MEGA Ashburton picking up the coveted Members' Choice Award. United Travel received the award for Excellence in Marketing, while Style Footwear took out the Emerging Business Award.

Local business owners Peter and Toni May thought their night was over as the award winners were read out, never once stopping to think they might win the prestigious Supreme Supplier Award. "It was totally unexpected and an absolute thrill," says Toni May.

Peter May Ltd first joined ATS as an exclusive supplier in 1998, and their business has been growing and evolving ever since. It specialises in the custom design and manufacture of canvas, PVC and protective products, as well as offering marquee and event hire solutions to fit every need.

Peter May Ltd are common sight at almost all supplier events, not only setting up visually appealing sites but helping with the organisation and the smooth running of events they attend.

"We are so lucky to receive this award. We are probably indicative of a number of small business suppliers who are utilising the unique Ruralco partnership the best they can, making the most of the Ruralco logo and being proactive in promoting Ruralco to their customers and the community."

Toni says the Ruralco relationship is an integral part of their business, and crucial to their overall success. "You have to look beyond the discount that you are giving away. It's just so easy. Like many small businesses we don't have a huge marketing or analysis team in our business, but we get that through Ruralco."

She says the move to Ruralco couldn't have come at a better time as they look to enter another new phase of expansion. "We are just buzzing about it. It gives us confidence to move forward with our business plans."

The other prestigious award on the night is the Members' Choice, which is awarded to the supplier receiving the highest number of nominations from Ruralco members. Members

were asked to consider exceptional customer service, value for money and a willingness to go beyond the call of duty.

Previously won by Todds of Ashburton and Neumann's Tyre Services, this year it was awarded to Mitre 10 MEGA Ashburton.

"We are very excited about winning the Members' Choice Award, and quite proud of our achievement, not to mention being grateful to members for voting for us. It has been a huge team effort and it's great to receive that kind of acknowledgement," says managing director Simon Lye.

"We knew we had a good relationship with our Ruralco members and this award reiterates that - they are a big part of our business. We see this as a prestigious award and to win it confirms we must be doing something right."

Mitre 10 MEGA Ashburton has had a lengthy association with ATS, and now Ruralco, and the wider mid-Canterbury community for more than 125 years from the days of W.H Collins & Co through to becoming Mitre 10 MEGA in 2006.

Simon says they have invested a great deal of time and money into staff training but perhaps the biggest thing was the staff themselves, many of whom had been with the store for more than five years through to its longest-serving staff member, Brian Glassey, who was in his 46th year of service.

"They genuinely love working with people and gain great satisfaction from helping solve problems for clients. They are also passionate about the different areas of the shop they work in, and customers benefit from that," he says.

Guests were left inspired and thoroughly entertained by guest speaker Brett Rutledge. A communications expert, key advisor and confidante to some of the best-known faces in business, Brett was the youngest ever World Champion of Public Speaking in 1998. He used humour and his uncanny ability to change his voice and approach in more than 150 ways, to convey some key messages in successful communication.

Brett says the primary thing people need to achieve is being genuine. Beyond that, it's about structure, not personality. "Be yourself, you don't have any other options; you're just not good enough." He says effective communication is not about what you need to do as a communicator, but revolves around the listener/audience because ultimately they decide if it's effective or not. "It's about what

they have to do. There are actually four things that have to happen—they have to understand you, they have to agree with you, they have to care about what you are talking about, and then they have to do something as a result."

## Ruralco 3rd Annual Supplier Awards

**SUPREME SUPPLIER:** Peter May Ltd  
**Runner-Up:** Neumann's Tyre Services

**MEMBERS' CHOICE:** Mitre 10 MEGA Ashburton

**EXCELLENCE IN MARKETING:** United Travel  
**Runner-Up:** Tinwald Canvas & Upholstery

**EMERGING BUSINESS:** Style Footwear  
**Runner-Up:** The Toolshed

### BUSINESS GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT AWARDS

#### Off-farm Categories

##### Accommodation and Travel:

United Travel Ashburton

##### Clothing, Footwear and Accessories:

Denim Den Clothing Company

##### Health and Beauty:

Body Treats 4 U

##### Home, Garden, Cleaning and Waste Disposal:

Spiderban Ltd

##### Restaurant and Liquor:

Braided Rivers Restaurant & Bar

##### Retail:

Ballingers Hunting & Fishing

##### Supermarket and Butchery:

FreshChoice Geraldine

#### On-farm Categories

##### Animal Feed, Animal Health, Livestock, Canvas & Upholstery:

Veterinary Enterprises Group

##### Building, Hardware and Fencing:

Allied Concrete

##### Chainsaws, Mowers and Motorcycles:

Honda Country Ashburton

##### Consultants, Insurance, Employment and Training:

AsureQuality Seed Laboratory

##### Contracting and Dairy Services:

Stocker Dairy Services

##### Electrical, Plumbing, Gas and Water:

Mico Plumbing & Pipelines

##### Engineering, Machinery, Repairs and Maintenance:

McMullan Enterprises Ltd

##### Farm Merchandise, Fertiliser and Seed:

Mainland Minerals Ltd

##### Office Supplies, Subscriptions and Communication:

Telecom (Landlines)

##### Vehicle and Tyres:

AutoSparks



1. Peter and Toni May, Peter May Ltd / 2. Lynn Church, Mitre 10 Mega Ashburton / 3. Kevin Crequer, United Travel Ashburton / 4. Brian and Melissa Shimmin, Style Footwear / 5. BACK ROW: Kevin Pooke, AutoSparks; Shane Stocker, Stocker Dairy Services; Ian Hodge, VetEnt; Cheryl Stocker, Stocker Dairy Services; Brendon Price, Honda Country; Mike Ward (Spiderban); Andrew Ross, Mainland Minerals; Peter McMullan, McMullan Enterprises; Carolyn Crequer, United Travel; Peter May, Peter May Ltd; Willa Barker-Pocock, Telecom; Andrew Cleverly, Ashburton Trust; Brian Shimmin, Style Footwear; Justin Pickford, Tinwald Canvas and Upholstery; Roger Cornwall, Mico Plumbing; Allan Neumann, Neumanns Tyres. FRONT ROW: Michelle Price, Honda Country; Kevin Crequer, United Travel; Toni May, Peter May Ltd; Lyn Church, Mitre 10; Melissa Shimmin, Style Footwear; Brendon Patrick, Tinwald Canvas and Upholstery

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# MITRE 10

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## Our local spiderman

There are no flies on Mike Ward, literally. The Ashburton pest-buster also deals to spiders, rodents and unwanted insects in all shapes and sizes.

BY LINDA CLARKE

Mike owns and operates Spiderban, an Ashburton-based professional pest service with clients from all around central Canterbury, and a database of customers from the West Coast to Queenstown. He uses a specially formulated synthetic pyrethroid to rid homes of flies, spiders and other creepy crawlies.

From around \$150, he will spray the exterior of a house to keep spiders and their unsightly cobwebs at bay for up to 18 months (with a free cobweb removal service).

Mike hails from Christchurch and realised during a 10-year period as a commercial window cleaner, that cobwebs were a big problem with a lot of clients complaining only a few weeks later that the cobwebs had returned.

In 1995 he set up Spiderban and the business quickly grew, with urban and rural clients. The chemicals used to treat spiders and other insects have changed dramatically since then.

In the early days, the treatment often marked interior and exterior surfaces, and was an irritant for some people. This was especially true when applied incorrectly and often put people off having their homes treated, Mike's professionalism has helped to change this view.

"Now we use a synthetic pyrethroid, a third generation micro-encapsulated chemical. It is a surface treatment, so as the insect walks over the surface that has been sprayed it breaks the tiny capsule and dies. The chemical is odourless and a non-irritant."

Mike eventually sold the business and moved to Ashburton (wishing he had done so years before), starting up Spiderban in Mid Canterbury. He has two vans up and running from Ashburton and is now training a new technician to operate to his high standards.

He says staying up to date with developments in the industry is crucial, in terms of the health and safety of both himself and customers. His National Certificate in Urban Pest Management and Approved Handler in Pest Control help to achieve this, as do advancements in technology meaning the chemicals are less irritant and toxic only to their intended audience.

The treatment for the interior is applied by a battery-powered motorised backpack sprayer that applies it in droplets just .25 microns in size. When applied by an experienced and qualified operator like Mike, there are no runs or streaks on walls or windows.

Mike says he gets a lot of calls from stressed parents, worried about white-tail spiders they have seen and wanting protection for their family. Post-treatment, they call back, full of praise for a bug-free household.

It's not only homes that can benefit from a Spiderban treatment. Mike started cleaning dairy



ABOVE: Mike receiving Spiderban's Business Growth and Development Award at the 2013 Ruralco Supplier Awards.

MAIN IMAGE: Mike standing with his two vans.

sheds two seasons ago and says the results are astonishing. He has before and after photos to prove the point.

He says sheds where grain is fed to cows while they are being milked are dusty and cobwebs highly visible. He washes down the shed roof and spider-proofs it.

The service has taken off with 25 sheds the first season and 46 this past season. The work is carried out while the cows are dried off and the shed not in use; he uses a chemical free washing process and then spider proofs with a dairy approved chemical.

No matter the season, there's always a problem with pests. Mike says the mild winter means spiders will be active earlier than usual—time to give him a call.



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# Selenium critical to metabolism

BY IAN HODGE. BVSC., MACVSC. VETENT RIVERSIDE.

**In Greek mythology, Selene the Moon Goddess was said to be a continual source of radiant light.**

In the 1800's Selenium was discovered as a by-product of acid production. Its colour was deep red and because of its similarity to another element named after the Earth, Selenium was named after the Moon.

Why do we place so much importance on selenium in pastoral farming systems?

Selenium is a critical part of many enzyme systems that prevent oxidative damage to cells and cell membranes. Oxidative damage results from tissue metabolism waste products, and the selenium-dependent enzymes are well known as free-radical scavengers mopping up these harmful tissue substances. Selenium is also part of an enzyme that assists in the formation of iodine so it has a role in an animals' entire metabolism. Selenium and associated enzymes also play a role in supporting the immune system by assisting white blood cells to locate and kill ingested bacteria and viruses.

In New Zealand, selenium deficiency is frequently diagnosed in all grazing species. Sheep are frequently affected by white muscle disease or nutritional muscular dystrophy, especially in Canterbury. My last experience with this was in lambs that were spending a great deal of time lying down rather than grazing. A post mortem examination soon revealed the white streaky calcifications so

characteristic of this condition seen in the deep muscles of the thigh.

In cattle, ill thrift is a common symptom of selenium deficiency. Young, weaned calves are often affected. They have dry staring coats, pot bellies, various infections and diarrhoea. The daily live-weight gain in these animals is almost nil. In older cattle, ill thrift, anaemia, retained placenta and mastitis are commonly diagnosed conditions associated with selenium deficiency. The fertility of selenium deficient stock is also affected as abortion can occur in chronic selenium deficiency.

In the South Island there is a marked selenium deficiency along the East Coast and in Southland. This is contributed to by the sandy coastal soil type and some stony soils. Selenium deficiency is also associated with improved pasture species and better pasture and fertilizer management as selenium concentrations in pasture can be diluted by rapid pasture growth.

Selenium absorption from the diet is improved by feeding diets high in protein. The amino acid methionine is important as it ensures seleno-methionine is converted to seleno-cysteine for incorporation in to selenium proteins.

Monitoring the selenium status of animals is very important. Whole blood, serum and liver can be used depending on which test is being used and what level of selenium supplementation has been



given. Supplementation includes treating animals directly with pour-ons, injections and drenches, and indirectly via water supply and through fertiliser applications. Since supplementation changes the concentration of selenium in red blood cells and these have a limited life span, certain tests are more appropriate than others and your Vet should be consulted before you start any testing.

Selenium deficiency takes on critical importance in cows that have recently calved, in calves that have recently been weaned and in lambs. The significance of selenium deficiency is that these animals will fail to grow and thrive and many will die if left un-treated. Dairy cows affected by retained placenta, uterine infections and mastitis are at increased risk of failing to become pregnant early in the mating period and may contribute to reduced overall herd fertility.

Next time you see a full moon think of Selene, the Goddess of Light and arrange to have your stock tested for selenium!

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# Water pushes next generation forward

The Sheffield district is experiencing something of a renaissance within its arable farming community with the return of the next generation of young farmers, as committed to cropping as they are to Canterbury. BY RICHARD RENNIE



One of those keen croppers is Marty Skurr, who has been back on the family property for the past three years. After completing a Diploma in Agriculture and Farm Management at Lincoln and working in Australia, he knew on the land was where he wanted to be.

"I have always enjoyed machinery and making things and spent some of my school holidays working in an engineering workshop, but realised that was not going to be for me, that it was farming I really wanted to be doing."

Exchanging the gloom of the work shop for the wide open spaces of the plains is not something he's regretting, and Marty is looking forward to taking the family's 253ha (168ha owned and 85ha leased) to the next stage. It's a rewarding prospect to be building on the hard work of what his parents, Helen and Stuart, put in over their younger years.

Central to the next stage is the major irrigation installation Marty is overseeing. In early September he was anticipating the arrival of three centre pivot irrigators, due off the ship "any day". They mark a big step for the dry land operation, one that has the full support of his parents, and particularly his mum Helen.

While the deep, heavy silt on the farm's terraced country is good cropping country, dry land wheat and barley crops are not without their

risks, particularly given the farm's exposure to the drying nor'westers.

"We always have had that risk that you can have a good crop, anticipating 8–10t/ha, and then get toasted by the nor'wester and have it only be around 6t/ha." Irrigation will provide greater certainty that the inputs like fertiliser applied will deliver the yield intended.

**"It's surprising, when you have water on the way, people are knocking on your door and we don't even have it up and running yet."**

Getting the water for the development has been no simple feat, with much of the allocated water in the region gone, and the Central Plains scheme still due to come on-stream with stage one possibly starting late this year.

The Skurrs are shareholders in that scheme. But with the property located at the other end of the scheme and the property bounding the Waimakariri, it was decided to lease CPW and water and put in their own infrastructure to make use of the consented water until the scheme comes through in the future.

To get a handle on how the farm might perform under irrigation Marty scoured Trade Me for a

high volume diesel pump, some second hand hard hose and a travelling boom, set up on one of the farm's terraces to cover 30ha.

"We grew barley and peas, and things went pretty much as expected. We would consider storage in the future, but I just want to see how the Central Plains scheme goes before making that next step." Once up and running, he intends to fine tune the irrigation systems by adding in technology like moisture sensors and looking at variable application options.

He is also looking forward to the wider variety of crops the heavy soil, with newly introduced water, could support. The traditional crops of wheat, barley grass seed, peas and pasture will be diversified—this year he is growing hybrid kale, radish and clover seed, and the traditional crops.

"It's surprising, when you have water on the way, people are knocking on your door and we don't even have it up and running yet." Even in early September he had decided to sign up to lease some land for seed potato production, and would consider other vegetable or processing crops in coming years.

The shift to irrigation also meant Marty had to apply for a land use consent under the new land and water catchment regulations. This included completing a farm management plan, and highlighted some of the challenges other arable operators will face when submitting plans.

IMAGE: Marty Skurr on his Sheffield farm



“The programme does not handle arable farming that well, and the variety of crops you might be planting. Under dry land we came well under the limitations, irrigating certainly brings it up, but I can understand what is trying to be achieved here, it’s just hard to get an accurate idea based on the current model being used.”

Marty is not perturbed by the growth in dairying around the district, and like many successful arable operators appreciates the opportunities it brings. This includes even supplying his dairying neighbour with straw and other cropping by-product through the season. He’s not sure dairying would be an option on the family property, given the heavy, unforgiving nature of the terraced silt loam.

The presence of more dairying in the district has also helped those farmers choosing to remain arable operators to focus harder and be smarter about how they operate.

“There are fewer of us, but with that competition from dairying there is greater incentive to get smarter about how you run your farm, and what you can grow on it.”

He also appreciates seeing some of his peers coming back to the family cropping operations. After being one of the few of his generation only three years ago, he welcomed a few more younger faces around the community, indicating there are others who have not abandoned tractors and crops for grass and cows.

And while committed to cropping, he appreciates



dairying could provide an equity pathway that could help him buy his family out of the farm.

For Marty, the challenge of arable farming is the multiple skill sets every crop requires—no two are prepared, planted and nurtured in the same manner, and each has their complexities that demand attention.

“I like the challenge of starting from scratch with each crop. With irrigation I will at least have some certainty around moisture, that’s one less variable, and we will have just that many more options in front of us when it comes to crop type.”



ABOVE: Sheep grazing on the farm  
TOP & LEFT: Major irrigation installation underway

# Arable Ys deliver to next generation of croppers

A new generation of arable farmers demand new ideas for their farm businesses, and part of the answer has come from Foundation for Arable Research (FAR)s “Arable Ys” initiative.

BY RICHARD RENNIE

Arable Ys is aimed at increasing the arable knowledge and skills of the “Gen Y” arable farmers as they pick up the reins, often from their parents. Co-ordinator Jen Linton admits Arable Ys has run longer than originally anticipated in the Ashburton district.

“We have worked hard to continue getting younger people come through who are arable farming, but also getting industry people who want to know more about the arable sector, which has proved an excellent way for them to meet with the farmers they are often dealing with,” says Jen.

What FAR has found from talking to its younger growers is that many university courses don’t have a large arable component. That means that even Ag graduates come away with big gaps in their knowledge around grain and seed production. Arable Ys works hard to fill those knowledge gaps.

The group meets on the third Wednesday of every month at the Ashburton Hotel, and in a relaxed social atmosphere a wide and relevant range of knowledge is exchanged. That usually includes

an hour on a broad farm issue, for example health and safety, and then another on an agronomy related issue.

Jen says the value for many younger farmers is not only the knowledge exchanged, but the network that they build up.

“It introduces them to others in the same sector, and they then have someone they can contact if they have a problem, it could be a weed or a crop issue, and see if they can help them out.”

Marty Skurr has been attending Arable Ys for the past three years and believes it has done an excellent job to fill in the gaps around the broad arable curriculum he had at Lincoln.

“I realised when I got back to the farm there is a lot to know about arable farming. The Arable Ys helped out with things like weed identification and plant growth stages. A lot of it was also about networking with other young guys in the sector.”

With around 40 people attending each session interest is strong, and day time farm visits also prove popular.

Marty intends to go on one of the group’s overseas farming trips in the future. This year Arable Ys visited the United Kingdom and Europe.

“It gave an excellent insight to the regulations and restrictions faced by farmers in Europe and a chance to visit Cereals, the premium cropping field days,” says Jen.

ATS is a key sponsor of the Arable Ys group, and the support is appreciated given the strong Ashburton focus of the group, and the part ATS plays in many of the farmers’ businesses.

The co-operative has also invested in sending one of its staff to Australia with the group, and regularly makes presentations on the role it plays in the industry.

Group CEO Neal Shaw says Arable Ys provides a means for the co-operative to link up with the next generation of progressive farmers wanting to advance an invaluable sector of Canterbury’s rural economy.



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ABOVE: The Vet Technician team at work using Vetlife's Teat Seal Crate, led by Head Vet Technician Steve Burrowes (facing camera)

# Vetlife moving with the farming landscape

The change in farming patterns in Canterbury over the past 10 years are some of the most extensive and rapid ever seen in New Zealand's farming history.

BY RICHARD RENNIE

The evolution of the Vetlife business to become an extensive veterinary service covering the central South Island is one that matches that rapid change in land use.

With its origins in the South Canterbury Veterinary Club founded almost 50 years ago, Vetlife has grown by absorbing other clubs including North Otago Vet Services in 2006.

Today Vetlife is a locally owned practice network that has captured much of the central South Island region with its strategically located, integrated clinics.

The veterinary shareholders personally manage Vetlife and work in the business as veterinarians, helping create a network containing a deep set of veterinarian skills. Knowledge is easily shared around the clinic network that extends from Waikouaiti in the south to Rangiora in the north.

Vetlife's Mid Canterbury Practice Manager Raylene Clement says Vetlife's reputation has evolved as much from the level of veterinary and technical talent attracted to the business, as its scale with Vetlife providing careers and employment for 165+ local people and families. In keeping with the local theme, all business proceeds are invested back into the business locally.

Matching the growth in dairying through the Canterbury region, Vetlife has attracted some key dairy veterinarians who bring specific skills to some of dairy production's critical areas.

This includes Hazel Foley in Ashburton, specialising in infectious diseases, and Craig Trotter who focuses on nutrition management.

Also in Ashburton, dairy vet Susan Geddes can claim to understand farming from both sides of the fence,

with her and partner Richard Pearse winning the supreme award in the NZ Dairy Awards for farm manager of the year.

Vetlife has also developed some key services around the skills of its experienced veterinarians, designed to make life simpler and deliver better animal health outcomes for clients.

This includes the heifer monitoring programme with vets working closely with dairy graziers, monitoring weight gain and conducting regular blood tests and health assessments to ensure young dairy stock reach their critical weight points.

Client success in the critical area of herd reproduction is also enhanced, thanks to a number of Vetlife veterinarians being accredited to the DairyNZ InCalf programme. They can provide timely and valuable information on getting better reproductive gains from herds.

Access and understanding of client MINDA records has proven invaluable in getting "under the hood" of clients' herd performance to offer effective consultative advice before it is too late. Increasingly Vetlife veterinarians are being used by farmer clients to provide advice and animal health plans, meaning they are less likely to be the "ambulance at the bottom of the cliff" at busy times of year.

Vetlife has also built a skilled core of veterinary technicians around its vet base, and their enthusiastic team approach to big jobs like administering Teatseal to heifers often provide welcome extra help for such skilled, labour intensive operations.

Vetlife has not forgotten the "roots" of its business in the surge of dairying experienced in recent

years. Vetlife staff have recently completed a series of road shows to sheep farmers, with skilled veterinarians like Craig Trotter delivering entertaining, informative presentations on key aspects of sheep production. All Vetlife clinics also have their own small animals clinic, and offer a full range of nutrition and pet care products in each.

Raylene has welcomed the development of the Ruralco Card from its ATS Card legacy, and looks forward to seeing more clients from beyond the immediate Canterbury region making use of it, and the discounts it delivers. "We look forward to people coming to recognise that it does not matter where they are farming, they can use their Ruralco Card. If they moved farms from Oxford right down to Oamaru, they can still use the same card, at any of our clinics—it's business as usual for them."

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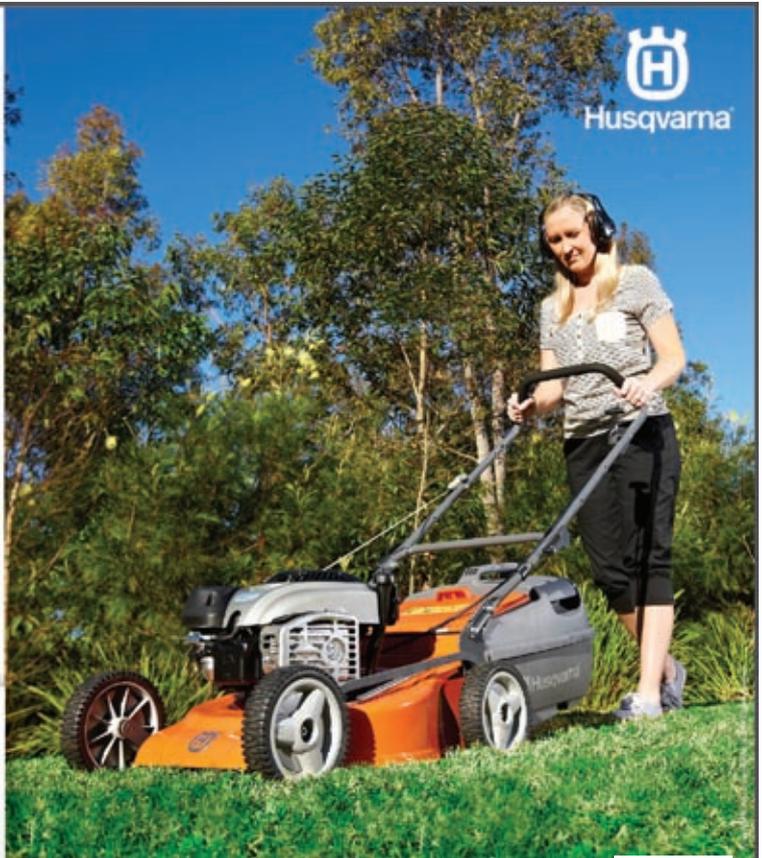
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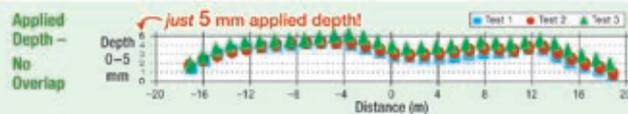


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# Single electricity buyer no quick fix

Labour's announcement in April to bring a whole new model for electricity distribution and sale in New Zealand threatened to push a hole in National's efforts to float the Mighty River Power boat at that time. BY RICHARD RENNIE

For those retail electricity companies already floated like Contact, the changes put a chill through investors, with Contact share prices having almost 10% knocked off them after the announcement.

The plan, should Labour come to power, is to install a government sanctioned buyer, NZ Power, for all wholesale electricity generated.

This price is to be based on the actual cost to each generator of producing the electricity, plus an allowance for depreciation, maintenance and inflation.

It has been likened by supporters as a "Pharmac for power", referring to the government sanctioned sole buyer of pharmaceuticals, generally attributed to delivering lower cost medications to the public.

But generators have reacted with dismay at Labour's announcement and even supporters of cheaper power to businesses and consumers have questioned if it is the best model to achieve that.

Contact Energy also voiced its concern at the ability of companies to upgrade plant, should the "cost plus" scheme go ahead, and doubted the \$2.5 billion invested in plant over the past five years would have happened under NZ Power.

At present, electricity generators' price received from their retail customers is determined by the marginal cost of electricity production for the most expensive producer.

However, Labour has claimed this has created a level of "super profits" within the ranks, particularly for large hydro generators operating at the lower end of the cost scale using dams well paid for, and costing a minimal amount to run.

Labour has pointed to the 2009 Wolak Report written for the Commerce Commission, as evidence that companies made supernormal profits of around \$4.3 billion over a seven year period to 2008.

By enforcing a single buyer of wholesale power with pricing based on cost, Labour's argument goes, consumers and businesses could expect to save around \$400 million a year for households and almost as much again for businesses.

Consumers are estimated to save \$200-\$330 a month, an enticing amount to potential voters in tough economic times.

The irony which National government officials have pointed out is the highest rate of electricity price inflation coincided with Labour's time at the government reins, from 2001 to 2008, averaging 8% a year increases.

The Labour government took \$3 billion in dividends from power companies over that time. The Commerce Commission noted in 2009 companies had charged 18% higher than they should have over that period had they been generating in a truly competitive environment.

In pitching the NZ Power model, Labour leader David Shearer has quoted the \$4.3 billion figure frequently as the potential saving. But author of the Commerce Commission report, Professor Frank Wolak has not suggested a single authority is the way to curb electricity price increases.

Professor Wolak returned to NZ in August, and noted NZ's generation-retail regulations were "too light handed".

He urged NZ to "man up and regulate" its generator-retailers where no competition can occur. He included Transpower's management of the national grid and local electricity distribution networks.

Wolak said the companies were not "evil" because they generated super normal profits, they were simply working on the behest of their shareholders, including the government. He said it was up to government to decide if those extra

costs justified being regulated out in the interests of consumers.

He agreed with the aim of the Labour-Green goal to deliver lower prices to consumers and businesses, he did not agree with the method.

He described a single desk electricity buying company as a "bad weapon", and a complex job to calculate the cost for every generator at every power station in NZ.

NZ sits in the middle of the pack of developed nations with electricity prices at 27c/kWh.

There are examples of low charging rates in countries with a single desk buyer, such as South Korea at 11.2c/kWh, but also high, with Italy being one of the most expensive in the world, at 35c/kWh.

With NZ's vertical integration of generator-retailers, he believed there were too many places for operators to hide the true cost of generation, operation and retail, and a better approach was to have far stricter enforcement and regulation on this stage of the electricity market.

Wellington economist and electricity market observer Geoff Bartram has also called for a regulatory authority to oversee generators' pricing methodology.

He points to statements made in 1999 by Max Bradford, the minister overseeing reforms, that consumers would be delivered "real lower prices."

At present any concerns held by the industry over the NZ Power model are tempered by it being dependent upon Labour being in power.

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# LessN: Putting the spring back in your pasture

Canterbury farmers are well into the season and for many this is an important time of the year for milk production and getting the cows in calf again. Farmers will need as much grass as possible to feed their stock, so why not use a proven solution which also saves you money?

BY MONTY BAMFORD, DONAGHYS AGRONOMY MANAGER

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Excellent pasture growth results have been proven using the LessN system, particularly in Canterbury. Trial results found that on irrigated land in the Canterbury region, the average nitrogen response rate using the LessN system was more than double that of using 40kg/ha of urea. Trials on dry land in the same area showed similar results. This shows that using the LessN system can provide farmers with a higher pasture yield than spread urea.

**“Since using LessN, we have halved our nitrogen use without affecting production. We have noticed stronger clover content, more even growth and a thicker and denser pasture sward.”**

*ATS Member Matt Ness—Winchmore, Canterbury*

October is also the time to start planting crops such as turnips and silage maize that may be required for feeding the cows in late summer. A number of trials, including ones based in Canterbury, have been conducted on brassicas (kale and turnips) as well as silage maize and other crops. While not statistically significant, LessN increased the dry weight in two trials in Canterbury on turnips by 16.9% and 17.8% respectively (compared to turnips that did not have LessN applied). LessN applied on maize silage at V4 during a trial in Ashburton in 2011 showed an 11.3% increase in dry matter and good results have been seen on kale crops in Canterbury where LessN has been applied as a foliar spray in conjunction with dissolved urea. LessN is marketed as N-Boost internationally and through numerous independent trials, has been proven to increase yields in many different crops. Donaghys have also developed a “mixing station” where urea can easily be dissolved in water by agitating the solution. The LessN and dissolved urea is then sprayed onto the pasture with a

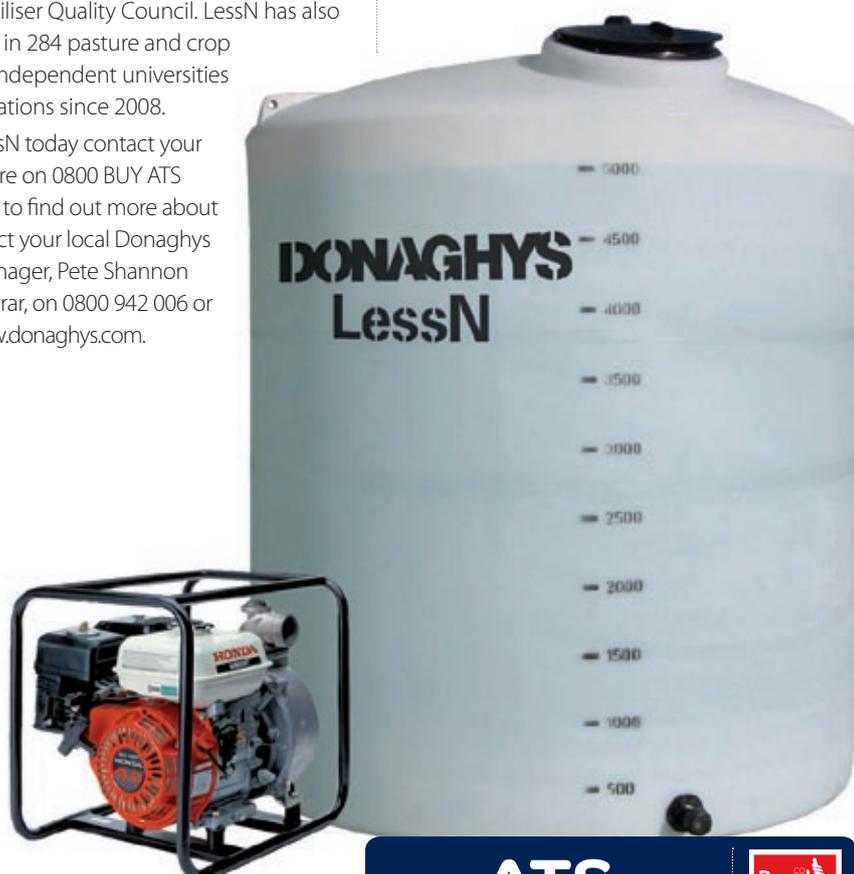
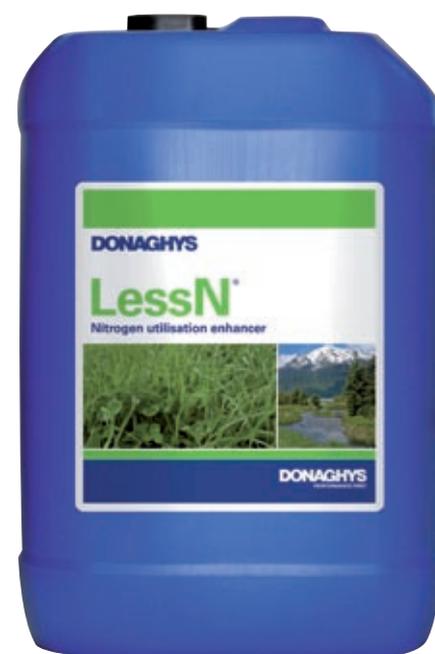
conventional boom sprayer or boom jet. The mixing station (5,000 litre tank and pump) is offered free by Donaghys with a purchase of 1,000 litres of LessN. A 25,000 litre tank and pump is available for purchases of 3,000 litres of LessN.

The cost of dry matter production can be reduced when using LessN. Currently, with a urea cost of \$700.00 per tonne delivered on farm, it costs 11 cents per kilo of dry matter self-applying LessN, while it costs 14 cents per kilo of dry matter self-applying spread urea.

LessN is a highly versatile product as it can be used in conjunction with pasture products such as Gibberellic acid and a number of agricultural chemicals. Farmers only need to add the extra products to the tank mix before spraying on their pasture. By doing so, farmers can save time, money and resources which can be used in other areas.

LessN has been peer reviewed by esteemed scientists and institutions such asASUREQuality and the Fertiliser Quality Council. LessN has also been tested in 284 pasture and crop trials by 43 independent universities and organisations since 2008.

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# Urea levels in milk

Milk urea analyses are now available from most dairy companies. BY JAMES HAGUE

Urea is more familiar to us as a fertiliser but a small amount is present in milk. These milk urea levels can provide a useful insight into the nutrition of the cow, but do require careful interpretation.

Urea from the diet is one factor that can affect milk urea levels. Some protein eaten by the cow is digested in the rumen. This is termed 'effective rumen degradable protein' (ERDP). Some of this ERDP is present as ammonia and is used by the rumen bacteria to form microbial protein.

The bugs can only use this ammonia if they have enough fermentable energy (FME) available, which is mainly from starch and sugars.

If the quantity of ammonia produced in the rumen is too much for the rumen bacteria to use, this surplus ammonia will be absorbed into the bloodstream. It is then transported to the liver, where it is converted to urea and again circulates through the bloodstream and is returned to the rumen via saliva. Any uncaptured urea will be filtered by the kidneys and excreted in the urine as a waste product. Whilst the urea is circulating in the blood it will also diffuse into the milk in the udder. Taking samples of milk urea therefore gives an indication of the level of blood urea that is currently present.

There are other sources of urea that are not directly related to the protein in the diet, urea from the cow's body can also have an effect on levels. In addition to the urea resulting from surplus ammonia in the rumen, the lean tissue (muscle) in the animal is constantly being broken down and repaired to maintain healthy muscles. When muscle is broken down, protein and other

"nitrogen containing compounds" are released and are converted to urea by the liver. These add to the total amount of urea circulating in the blood. This perfectly normal process results in a low level of blood urea always being present, irrespective of diet. When cows are under pressure, for example in early lactation when they mobilise body reserves, milk urea levels increase as more lean tissue is mobilised.

So what should milk urea levels be? Each farm is different and milk urea levels are best interpreted over time. Most herds typically run in the mid 20s, but this will depend on calving patterns and a number of other factors.

Lower limit values indicate a low overall protein level in the diet and there could be a milk yield response to feeding more protein. Check the cows' dung for undigested feed and a light colour.

High milk urea values may indicate surplus protein in the diet, but could also indicate excessive weight loss. Check protein levels in the diet as high milk urea on a 'normal protein diet can indicate excessive weight loss.

If milk urea levels are low, feed additional rumen degradable protein using products such as cottonseed or canola, or even the limited addition of some feed-grade urea to the diet. Both are good sources of ERDP. Check with your nutritionist and/or contact SealesWinslow for advice.

If milk urea is high and cows are losing weight in early lactation, with a ration check showing that overall protein is not in surplus, then correct the energy deficiency by supplying high-energy feeds. Buffer feeding will increase total dry matter



and energy intake in wet weather.

If milk urea is high and cows are not losing weight, the high urea will not cause any particular problems, but is wasteful in terms of protein nutrition. It can also require extra energy to process the extra protein. Reduce the amount of rumen degradable protein in the diet, and/or feed products low in protein and high in FME, such as starchy and sugary feeds.

It is useful to plot your urea levels on a chart, so that changes in the levels can be easily seen.

Not all herds will have the same levels throughout the year and it is useful to establish a benchmark for your herd. An easy way to do this is to use SealesWinslow's Tracker system—ask your rep for more information on how this can help optimise your farm production.



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When it comes to products many don't realise that FMG has two options of cover; the loss to growing crops caused directly by fire or lightning (nil excess), or expanded perils which include such things as frost, windstorm and hail. Your choice largely depends on what suits your needs but factors such as location, previous losses and types of crops grown will influence your decision.

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ABOVE: Nick Macklin, Rural Manager

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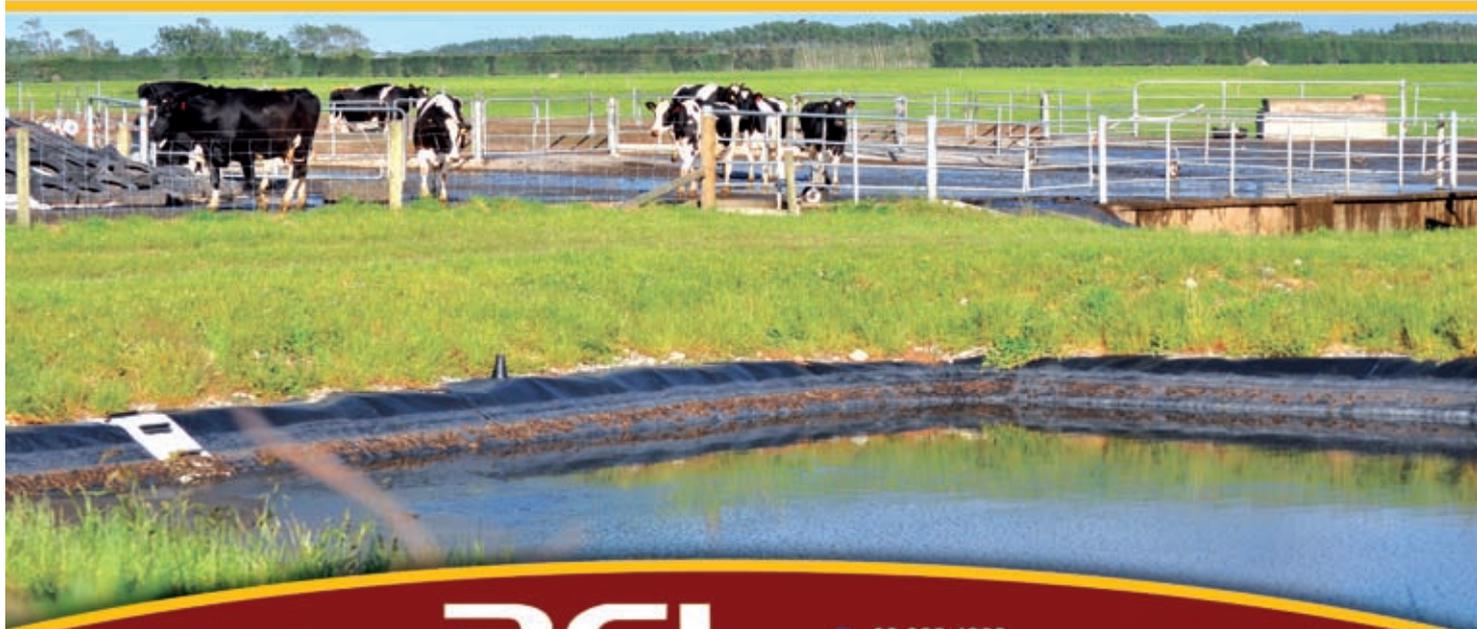


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FROM LEFT: Lou Davison, Sue Gardner, and Fiz Rutherford



Guests enjoying the Fete

# Your Local Christmas Country Fête



A stallholder at the Fete



FROM LEFT: Flicka Davison, Charlotte Gardner and Blaise Davison

## In the depths of rural North Canterbury every October a bare paddock on the Davison's farm is transformed into a shopping mecca overnight, attracting people from far and wide for the annual Christmas Country Fête.

BY ANNIE STUDHOLME

What started out as a small-time venture by four North Canterbury farmer's wives to lift themselves out of the doldrums following the farming downturn of the 80s is now a mainstay on the rural calendar.

It's the last Thursday of October, and the traffic is backed up for miles as people from all over the country converge on the annual Christmas Country Fête, near Culverden.

Commonplace in rural England, country Fêtes were a relatively new concept to New Zealand in the 1990s when Sue Gardner, Fiz Rutherford, Jossy Davison and Lou Davison joined forces to organise the first Fête. Together, the women saw it as a valuable way they could contribute in the years when their children were growing up.

Following a simple recipe, its initial success relied on the fervent community grapevine, a majestic rural setting, some interesting stalls, fine weather and for people, town and country alike, to turn up in their droves. They embarked with small aspirations, taking it a year at a time, never for a moment stopping to think it would be still going strong all these years later.

Now, 22 years down the track, the Fête is easily the largest in the country, boasting more than 200 stalls including everything from homeware and clothing, to children's items, books and stationery, and delectable food and wines. While many of the old favourites return, every year new and exciting stallholders are added and competition from other Fêtes ensures the bar is constantly lifting. New ideas have been incorporated over the years to add another dimension, from the addition of a food and wine area to live music, and demonstrations.

After months of planning, the inaugural Fête was held at the historic Leslie Hills homestead in 1991, with about 30 stalls dotted around the garden. It attracted around 600 people, most of whom were family and friends. "It was hard work. Everyone was roped in to help; mothers, mother-in-laws, husbands, even the children. It was a team effort. We provided all the lunches ourselves," explains Lou.

For the first seven years the Fête moved from one property to the next, but while each had its merits, long-standing Ravensdown clients Tim and Lou Davison's Wynyard on the northern side of the Amuri basin became its permanent home in 1999. After Jossy pulled out due to expanding family commitments, Lou, Fiz and Sue were left to organise the Fête on their own. As the size of the event grew, so too did the mountain of man-hours required to pull it together, but in true Kiwi can-do fashion they just dug in and got it done, each with

their own area of responsibility—Fiz was in charge of finances and ticketing; Lou, media and PR; and Sue, stallholders.

Doing it single-handedly would have been difficult, but with each other to lean on it was pulled together almost seamlessly, year in, year out. "Our families have always been so supportive. We couldn't have done it without them or the community at large," says Lou.

By its tenth year in operation, stallholders had reached 200 and visitors numbered in excess of 6000 annually, and it's been that way ever since. The open-air sites of old have been replaced by a myriad of tents and marquees, and the lunches have since been farmed out to White Tie Catering.

Renowned for its unique family feel, the Fête has become a destination; a meeting place, where people can treat themselves, catch up with friends and enjoy a day out, while making an early start on their Christmas shopping.

Last year the Fête celebrated its 21st birthday, and with it signalled a changing of the guard, as all but Lou made room for the younger generation to take charge. Fiz and Sue have now stepped aside and been replaced by Blaise Davison (married to Lou and Tim's son Dan), Charlotte Gardner (Sue's daughter) and Lou's daughter, Flicka. But with so much to offer, neither has been able to step away entirely with Sue on-hand throughout to help Charlotte manage stallholders.

"The timing was right," says Lou. "We've been doing it for a long time and it was ready for an injection of youth. It's very exciting. They haven't made heaps of changes, but there is definitely a little more youth and vitality attached with it this year. The stallholders are slightly different, as is the music, and who would have ever thought we'd get someone like Dr Libby in our FMG Demonstration Tent!"

The three girls bring with them an envious array of skills. Charlotte is an interior designer with a clear eye for detail, while Blaise worked in event management in London having studied marketing at Otago University, and Flicka currently works as a graphic designer in Sydney having had seven years of experience specialising in branding and spatial design in London, Melbourne and Sydney.

Without fail, all three have served a lengthy apprenticeship having been involved since they were kids and are only too well aware of the huge amount of work and community support involved in making it a success, says Blaise, whose mother was a stallholder in the early years.

"It has been a big learning curve for the three of us 'youngies' joining the team. We each have our own strengths and it has been great to combine them, however we have been really careful to ensure that we retain aspects of the Fête the Mum's created and that everyone loves. They have been doing this a long time and know what works and what doesn't, and hopefully we can build on that."

As the day draws closer the excitement is rising, but so too are the nerves, says Blaise. "It is a huge event and we only have one day to show everyone why they can't miss this event again!"

### For more information:

The Christmas Country Fête  
Wynyard, 272 Lowry Peaks Road, Culverden  
Thursday, October 31, 2013

Gate sales available on the day; cash only. Twelve minutes from Culverden. Held wet or fine.  
Tickets and lunch sales: [www.thefete.co.nz](http://www.thefete.co.nz)

## The Homegrown Garden Tour

### Mayfield Playcentre in Mid Canterbury has established the Homegrown Garden Tour.

Attendees can visit five fabulous Mid Canterbury gardens in the Mayfield and Ruapuna districts then browse stalls and relax at the country fete. Get inspiration from the wonderful gardens on tour or wander around the plant stalls at the Fete to pick up treasures for your own garden.

The garden tour includes the gardens of Stonehaven owned by Liz and Warren Scott, Whetstone owned by Margaret and Don Ingold; Carr Garden owned by Glenys and Greg Carr, Montalto owned by Nicky and Mark Morrow and finally Gumleigh owned by Kay and Morris King with this location also lending itself to the Fete. The Fete includes stalls of food, garden art, homewares, woman and children's fashion, jewellery and gifts. The Homegrown Garden Tour is a great day out for the entire family.

The Homegrown Garden Tour will be held come rain, hail or shine on Saturday 12 October 2013 10am to 4pm. Tickets are \$20 for pre-sales, \$25 on the day or \$10 for the Fete only. Tickets are available from Lushingtons, Reflections, Terra Viva, Kaiapoi Florist, Jossh Ltd and ATS Stores.

Email [thehomegrowngardentour@gmail.com](mailto:thehomegrowngardentour@gmail.com) for more information

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# Best practice to achieve target brassica yields

A considerable amount of time, effort and cash goes into growing brassica crops and sometimes the results do not meet up with expectations.

ARTICLE SUPPLIED BY BALLANCE AGRI-NUTRIENTS



However, according to Michael Keane, Ballance Science Extension Officer, if all farmers carried out a structured programme they would be well on the road to growing a great crop. He recommends following these steps:

- Soil testing first
- Determining any nutrient requirements
- Applying base fertiliser, if required, and then starter fertiliser
- Adding nitrogen post-emergence
- Checking for nutrient deficiencies.

Michael says, "The first thing we ask farmers is what yield they want to achieve, and then we look to supply the crop with the nutrients to achieve that yield." He says the process for growing a crop should start well before sowing, with soil testing to measure the levels of the major nutrients, including available nitrogen, and also the trace element boron. Ballance has developed a soil testing regime specifically for brassicas, which will measure all of these important nutrients.

Michael notes that Ballance reps always encourage farmers to soil test well in advance of planting, at least six months before the crop goes in the ground. This will give them enough time to correct any soil fertility issues they discover, in particular pH. For brassica crops, a pH

between 5.8 and 6.2 is the goal. Lime additions will take around six months to a year to work and during this time base fertiliser can be added if other nutrients need amending.

Once the soil test results are in, any nutrient deficiencies can be identified and an economical and effective fertiliser strategy developed. Your ATS or Ballance representative can help you with this process.

When it comes to starter fertilisers, Michael recommends cropzeal DAP boron boost. He says, "It's a good product choice as boron is needed early in the plant's life to ensure plant health. In kale it prevents stem lesions and hollow stems, for plants like turnips and swedes it is important for skin quality and internal health. The granular formulation of cropzeal DAP boron boost ensures boron is spread evenly. It works particularly well down the drill, especially if the Olsen P is low (less than 20 if you are direct drilling), as it ensures that P is close to support developing seedlings."

The next step is applying nitrogen side dressings. Michael recommends the use of Sustain Green. He says, "It is a great choice in Canterbury, as you can't guarantee the rainfall when you apply your first side dressing in December, at 4-6 weeks after sowing, and it is also a better option for those people who are

putting on higher rates of N to achieve bigger yields under irrigation."

Any nitrogen additions will be affected by target yields and by the levels of nitrogen already in the soil. Michael says, "One side dressing of about 150 kg Sustain Green/ha will suit people growing a dryland crop and expecting a yield of around 10 t/ha, but those expecting higher yields will require either 1 or 2 further applications of SustainN. Depending on the autumn growing season farmers should keep an eye on nitrate levels at grazing time to make sure they don't develop stock health issues.

"Another thing we are encouraging farmers to do is herbage testing at the end of January. Then if something is starting to affect the crop we can correct it before it decreases yields. We are looking for deficiencies in boron, which can develop if you haven't put enough on. Crops can also get molybdenum deficiencies if lime has gone on late and the pH didn't come up as far as we wanted. Other times it might be an unexpected sulphur deficiency. There are ways to cure all these issues, but they need to be caught early."

At the end of the day it is about having the right strategy to produce a great crop, Michael says, "If we could get all farmers to follow these steps it would be great!"

For specialist advice on the best fertiliser strategy for your brassica crop talk to your local ATS or Ballance representative.



FIGURE 1. The steps to meeting brassica crop nutrient requirements.



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# Making rural connections

Internet provider Ultimate Broadband is quickly but quietly growing its network with connections around rural New Zealand, including remote high country stations and coastal nooks and crannies.

BY LINDA CLARKE

The company is run out of Christchurch, but owners Mike and Joanne Smith are focussed on improving broadband access for rural people, at the cheapest price possible, no matter where they live. They have a network of partners throughout the country along with their own team in Canterbury.

Mike said their coverage had grown largely through word of mouth as rural customers compared notes about their traditionally poor reception and access to internet. Increasingly farmers and their staff needed reliable and fast broadband to run farming software and be part of social networks like Facebook.

Ultimate Broadband can provide a connection anywhere the Rural Broadband Initiative is available, or arrange with partners in other areas. Packages are for phone or internet, or both, with special deals for Ruralco customers.

Distance is no object and issues can be sorted remotely in most cases. The company prides itself on its customer service and runs a personalized seven-day-a-week helpline; they don't expect their customers to be IT experts and will go the extra mile to restore connections and smooth out the odd problem.

Mike said a key element in growing their wireless broadband network in Canterbury was the number of farmer clients choosing to install their micro-sites, effectively becoming mini internet providers for staff. This set-up is proving successful on large and small farms, and in some areas individual farmers have banded together to install a site.

Farmer owners pay for the initial capital cost of the site, but staff pay Ultimate broadband for their internet access.

Mike said people were more willing to embrace new technology and having fast and reliable internet access was a definite attraction for employees. It also allows wireless connectivity around the farm, to accommodate the latest smart farming website tools, from checking the weather to turning on irrigation. Additionally with the ever increasing compliance requirements, high speed, reliable internet is crucial. Being able to keep connected at the dairy shed or more efficiently in the farm office increases productivity and eliminates wasted time.

"The more micro-sites we install, the more the network expands and the stronger the service. We have really tried to make it affordable and clients who have it, love it. It is a huge growth area for us."

Ultimate Broadband has multiple wireless broadband sites around Canterbury and wireless connections either via their own wireless network



or the RBI wireless service are a great alternative for those not close to fibre-optic or DSL networks.

"We use our network to provide broadband access for clients in small pockets. We are looking at a site in Lyndhurst at the moment that would service 30–40 homes with a fast connection. We are really working with communities."

Ultimate Broadband also runs a site in the remote Rangitata Gorge that allows otherwise isolated households to have reasonably-priced access to the internet.

Mike said many rural people complained about the speed and cost of their rural internet connections. Ultimate Broadband could improve connection speeds and service reliability whilst offering great value packages.

He says surveying the countryside is a bonus part of his job and he gets to see some beautiful rural spots. "I do a few miles on the road and get the odd helicopter ride."

Mike and wife Jo have joined forces with Ashburton-based business partner Daniel Tew, who is also an installation technician. Mike



ABOVE: The Ultimate Broadband team, (from the left) Daniel Tew, Mike Smith and Joanne Smith  
MAIN IMAGE: Wireless broadband site looking out to Mayfield and the plains towards Hinds and Carew

learned his trade with Telecom a decade ago, but saw a need to provide special services to rural folk and branched out on his own.

As a team, they are a rural life-line.



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# Getting the right forage brassicas for your farm

**When considering your forage brassica options this spring it's hard to go past the range offered by Seed Force.**

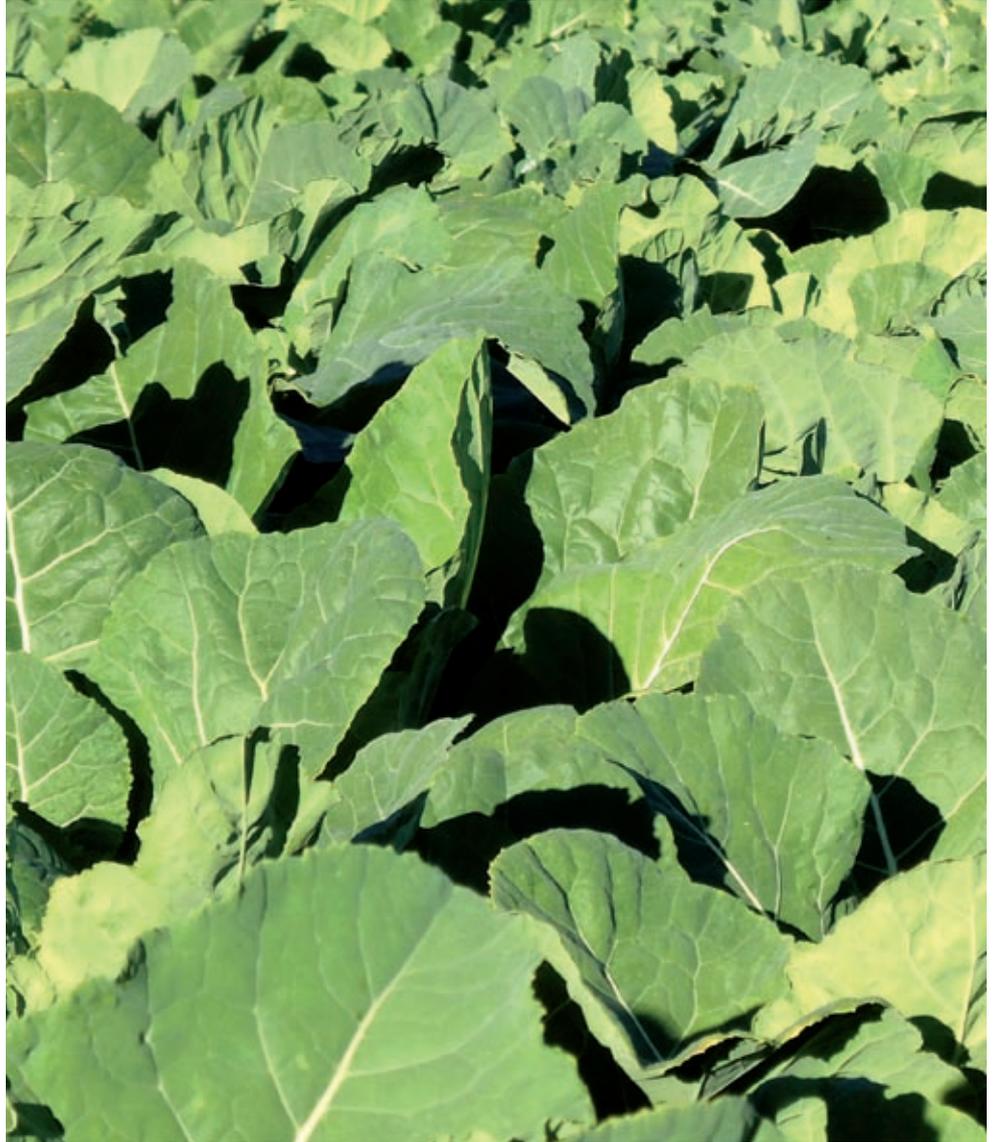
ARTICLE SUPPLIED BY SEED FORCE

With one of the few active forage brassica breeding programmes in the world, Seed Force has proven varieties for any feed situation. ATS Seed can provide you with the full range of Seed Force forage brassica options and along with the ATS Arable Key Account Managers can supply you with informed recommendations as to which crop and cultivar would best suit your farm system.

Seed Force Central South Island Territory Manager David Walsh explains; "we offer growers a full portfolio of forage brassica options to suit a range of grazing requirements. From fast maturing and multiple grazing options through to winter hardy kales and rape, Seed Force has all the bases covered".

For versatility and performance, SF Greenland forage rape is a stand out variety. From the breeders of Winfred, it combines high production with the grazing versatility only a forage rape can offer. It's a leafy crop, helping ensure stock do well on it and it has the benefit of being very late flowering, important when pushing the crop into a winter feeding situation. It's an intermediate height forage rape offering a high proportion of leaf compared with the taller giant types. This leaf component combined with soft palatable stems helps ensure SF Greenland has very high utilisation with little residual left behind post grazing. With forage rape being a relatively small seeded species, sow SF Greenland between 3–4kg/ha as a straight crop and between 0.5–2kg/ha if it's being included in a mix with other species. For the highest potential yields, ensure essential nutrients are not limited during crop growth and control any insects or weeds.

Seed Force also has kale varieties to suit any winter feed requirement. SF Voltage is a medium height/leafy variety, bred with animal performance in mind. It offers a high leaf to stem ratio and is a marrow stemmed variety, meaning the stems are very palatable. Use where growing out young stock is the key requirement. SF Fuel is the one to pick when high yields and palatability are key drivers. It's an intermediate type that yields very well, while still offering soft/palatable stems. SF Fuel has a distinctive dark green colour with a high leaf proportion. It's an ideal winter feed



option for dairy cows or cattle, offering quality and reliable high yields. Sow both SF Voltage and SF Fuel between 4–5kg/ha into a fine and firm seed bed with adequate moisture. Ensure the crop's main nutrient requirements are met throughout the growing season to help ensure they reach their potential and address any trace element deficiencies, especially boron. It is also very important to monitor and control any insect pests and weeds, especially during establishment.

As with all Seed Force products, our forage brassica portfolio is thoroughly tested throughout New Zealand in comprehensive on-farm trials. From these trials we can determine how the varieties perform in real world environments and the potential benefits they can offer over other varieties. This combined with the knowledge that New Zealand farmers are having great

results with Seed Force brassicas locally and nationwide, should help farmers decide to incorporate these products into their systems this season. With many farmers using the same varieties time and again, it's hard for them to gauge if they are using a variety that best suits their needs. By adding some alternative varieties into their farm system, they can gauge for themselves the performance benefits that are possible with new plant genetics.

If you require further information about how Seed Force's range of forage brassicas can work on your farm contact the ATS team today on 0800 BUY ATS (289 287).

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# Co-op News

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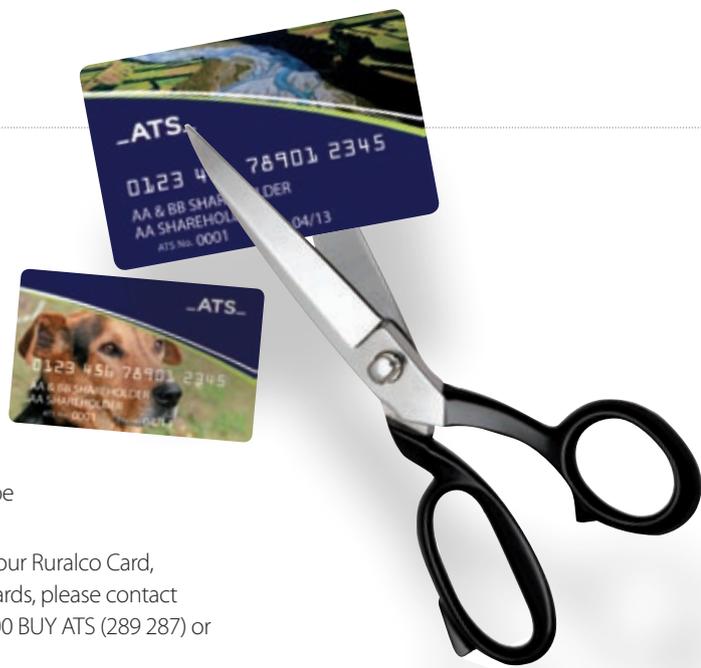
Make sure you save 5 December in your diary as something is happening. More information coming soon.



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## Travelling these holidays?

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## Southern Cross Insurance Premiums

Southern Cross wish to advise Ruralco Cardholders that from 1 June 2013 insurance premiums will be charged monthly instead of quarterly. This will allow any credits to members from Southern Cross to be processed more efficiently while spreading payments over 12 payment periods instead of four. If you have any concerns over this change, please contact ATS on 0800 BUY ATS (289 287).

## Who would you like to see become a Ruralco Supplier?

Would you like to have a say in which businesses become suppliers? As we expand our supplier network, we are looking to sign on the businesses from each community that are most valuable to you and your family. If you know a business in your community which would make a great Ruralco Supplier, visit [www.ruralco.co.nz/suppliers/suggestabusiness](http://www.ruralco.co.nz/suppliers/suggestabusiness) and let us know about it.



## Visit us at the Ashburton and Christchurch A&P Shows

ATS, Ravensdown and Ruralco will be attending the upcoming Ashburton A&P Show on 1–2 November. Make sure you bring along your Ruralco Card when you come to visit us.

Ravensdown and Ruralco will be at the Christchurch A&P Show 13–15 November, we're looking forward to seeing you there.

## New Ruralco Suppliers

The Ruralco network is constantly growing with more suppliers being signed up every week. For the latest updates on who and where these suppliers are, visit [www.ruralco.co.nz/newsuppliers](http://www.ruralco.co.nz/newsuppliers)

## Ruralco Supplier Awards 2013

This logo showcases suppliers who have put in a great effort for Ruralco Cardholders over 2012-13 and were recognised for it at the recent Ruralco Supplier Awards. Visit pages 10–11 to see the award winners and read more about the awards.



## ATS Seed Grain Information Evening

ATS Seed held a successful Grain Information Evening on Thursday 29 August, with over 40 Ruralco Cardholders attending to listen to some interesting and informative presentations on a range of topics around grain supply and product requirements. Speakers Khan Sayer from Glencore Grain, Mark Derriman from Seales Winslow, Daryl Moore from Pioneer Brand Products, Jamie Gordon from Five Star Beef Ltd, and Tim Dale from ATS Seed talked about a number of the latest requirements within the grain industry, bringing those who attended up to date with the current grain industry knowledge for this season. If you would like to know more about this event or have any feedback please contact ATS Seed at [atsseed@ats.co.nz](mailto:atsseed@ats.co.nz) or 0800 BUY ATS (289 287).



## Farm Safety Training for Ruralco Cardholders

Today's farmers and land owners are required to actively manage all aspects of health and safety around the farm. To assist with this process Ruralco plans to provide cardholders with access to a farm safety manual and relevant training. Upon completion of the training, members will be able to apply for a discount on their ACC levies.

Training dates are the 22 October and 19 November 2013 for \$550 (GST and member discount inclusive). Seating is limited, so get in fast. For more information, please contact Unique Solutions on 03 423 2273 or email [cindy@uniquesolutions.co.nz](mailto:cindy@uniquesolutions.co.nz). Or you can reserve your spot online at [www.ats.co.nz/farmsafety](http://www.ats.co.nz/farmsafety).



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