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FEBRUARY / MARCH 2016

A man with short brown hair, wearing a blue button-down shirt and dark shorts, is crouching in a field of lush green leafy plants. He is smiling at the camera. In the background, a large center pivot irrigation system is visible under a clear blue sky with some light clouds. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

**Kintore
takes tough
times in stride**

**A berry tasty
business**

**Have
your say**

**Trip produces
spectacular
South Island
farming scenery**

**Using more of
OVERSEER's horse
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Trip produces spectacular South Island farming scenery



ON THE COVER:
Mid Canterbury farmer
Nick Hoogeveen

Kintore takes tough times in stride





Two consecutive low dairy payouts are forcing Canterbury operators to look hard at their farm businesses and make some rational decisions about how to keep them profitable, and sustainable.

BY RICHARD RENNIE

Kintore Farm is no exception and under the guidance of general manager and equity partner Nick Hoogeveen has made big strides to preserve profitability, without sacrificing the farm's future earnings potential.

For Nick who has dairy farmed all his life and is happy doing so, the current environment is simply a dip in the payout landscape that has to be negotiated. Thanks to a series of well targeted decisions he is confident Kintore will emerge in even better shape once things improve.

Overall his focus has been on lifting farm profitability, revisiting that ahead of production which is easily chased in higher payout years with more inputs and supplement fed. Now the aim is optimising the per cow production, whilst minimising the cost of inputs to achieve that.

"Last year we dropped about 60 cows out of the herd, and are already another 90 down this year, 40 at the outset and another 50 'passengers' that emerged."

He says Macfarlane Rural Business Advisor Jeremy Savage had long suggested a lower stocking rate could prove beneficial, dropping poorer performing cows and instead focussing on those who deserve more status than mere passengers in the herd.

At the same time the focus has gone back on greater utilisation of grass across the farm.

Modelling the season using Farmax pasture planning indicated the farm was using about 3.6-3.8t of dry matter a cow a year, when the optimal intake was 3.7-4.0t of pasture dry matter harvested per cow per year. Last season they achieved a utilisation rate of 4.0t a cow.

"We have become more focused and put systems in place to ensure cows never go hungry for grass, now it is forming a greater part of their intake whereas before we were more focused on residuals and balancing the diet with supplements."

"We realised if you keep cow numbers the same, and every year you are adding more efficient, higher genetic animals, you are effectively increasing your stocking rate, as they will want to eat more to match their greater potential increasing supplement demand without us realising it. So lowering the number of cows is now recognising that."

His management practice had always been to ensure regular weekly farm walks and cover calculations, so the adjustment has not proven to be a major one for his staff to make.

Meantime Nick has moved to increase the source of lower cost supplement by growing fodder beet on the milking platform.

Last season they planted 9ha, and this year will be planting 15ha. The area in beet also helps increase the stocking rate over the remaining

pasture area, making control of strong spring-early summer grass growth easier. The beet provides a valuable supplement source over April-May as grass growth slows, supporting shoulder season milk production.

"It has proven very popular with the herd – you will see them running to the break before the afternoon milking. Feeding them on it means they are fully transitioned before they go to the run off over winter."

With yields of 22-23t dry matter a hectare, the beet are proving a highly cost effective and energy rich supplement in tough budgetary times.

While also paying a close eye on day to day operational costs, Nick says system changes such as stocking rate and feed inputs prove to be the big drivers behind achieving a more favourable profit outcome in tough times.

He anticipates this season the farm will produce 800,000kgMS, compared to 827,000kgMS last year.

"But we are not trying to push production now, it's looking at what profit we can get for the money spent."

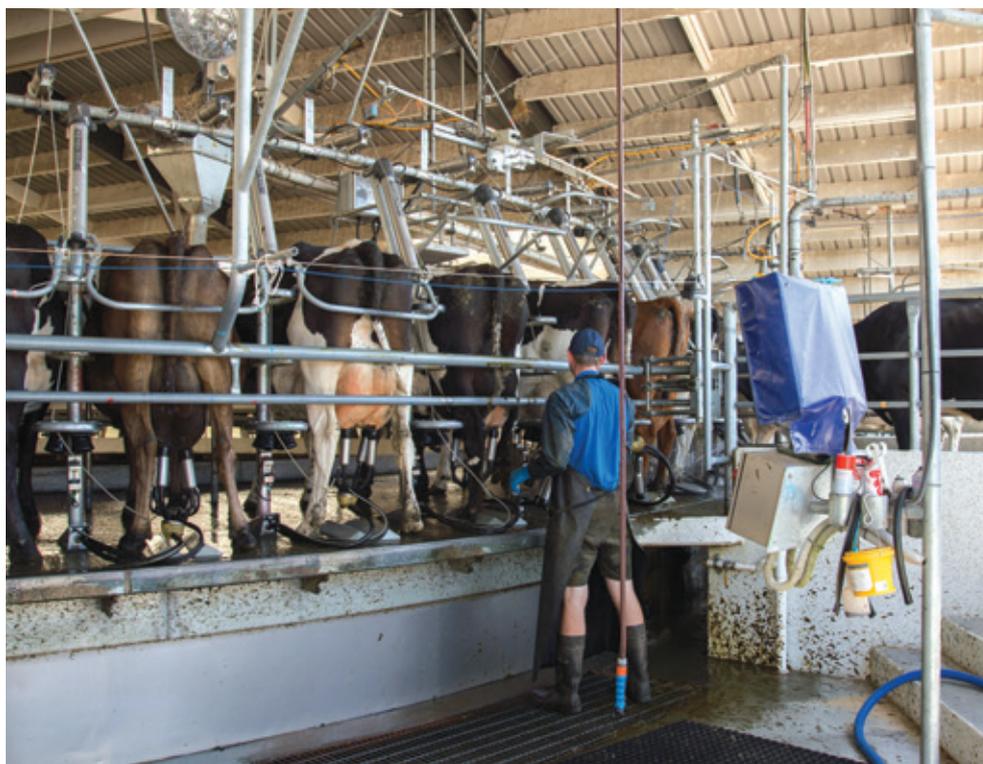
Nick is adamant that achieving the farm's goals require staff willing to engage with management, and be part of the farm's overall success, regardless of payout conditions.

To enable him to step back from daily operational demand and focus on pursuing new, innovative solutions to the farm's challenges, Kintore has invested significantly in improving how staff interact and work together as a team.

This has come through using the Coach Approach mentoring system to help develop staff with a greater awareness of how personalities interact in

ABOVE: The focus has gone back on greater utilisation of grass across the farm

BELOW: The aim is optimising the per cow production, whilst minimising the cost of inputs to achieve that
OPPOSITE: Nick, his wife Demelza and their children Brianna (5), Camille (3) and Mikayla (8)





ABOVE: An increase in tree planting is aimed at increasing bird populations and bee pollination sources
BELOW: The aim is optimising the per cow production, whilst minimising the cost of inputs to achieve that

the workplace, and understanding team mate's approaches to tasks better.

"Really it helps them to develop a level of emotional intelligence. It can be hard to get your head around this sort of stuff, it can seem a bit touchy feely.

"However it does help people to better understand that just because someone does something different to the way you may do it, it does not mean they are wrong."

The approach helps set team rules for engagement and discussion, helping for more constructive handling of difficult situations, removing a level of personality from the issue.

Nick has found staff are accepting of the approach, and he can point to a crew that is relatively stable with only one change this season among the nine full timers and five seasonal staff. The relatively intensive coaching work has helped establish some "Kintore House Rules" that provide a pathway for dealing with one another, and situations on farm.

They include giving feedback directly if there is an issue, making time for important people in individuals' lives and helping each other stay "above the line." Kintore's definitions of "below" the line include finger pointing, ignoring issues, finding excuses and buck passing.

"We have learned that when you try to build a team culture in your business, you have to keep working at it. How new people would fit into the personalities we have, and the culture we have is now a key focus of recruitment for us."

While technical skill requirements are a given in a candidate, it is matching the personality to the existing team that can be the tricky part.

Overall as a father of three he appreciates the challenge of balancing staff needs and personalities on a large farming operation.

"In fact it is a bit like being a parent."



Triple bottom line brings benefits beyond farm gate

Kintore Farms also maintains its "triple bottom line" approach to business through more challenging economic times, continuing to hold equal value not only to economic profit, but also environmental/animal welfare, and social values.

A triple bottom line approach to business is not a new philosophy, and has become even more credible in dairying as environmental constraints come into play. However Nick says at Kintore it was a philosophy already held by all the shareholding families and was only written down as policy well after it was already in play.

One of the shareholders, Andy Macfarlane has had a long held focus on the environment, and is well known for his efforts on his own Pencarrow property integrating tree planting with a high productivity dairy unit.

Nick himself spent plenty of time in the bush growing up as a kid on his home farm, chopping out exotic weeds to give the native trees a chance to grow better.

Fertiliser, irrigation and nutrient management are all key parts of the farm's environmental "bottom line" management.

Nick is a self-confessed technology seeker who enjoys identifying farm issues and using technology to deal with them.

The light stony soil of Kintore Farms benefits greatly from a little water often, and the farm was a Beta user of a new variable rate irrigation system developed by IQ Irrigation.

Initially on one centre pivot, three variances on the light soil were identified, and variable rates of application are being established. Still a work in progress, the technology will also require moisture monitors in each of the three zones to determine application rates not only based upon the soil type, but also current moisture conditions.



“We are finding the technology is coming down in price and we can adjust or add the components as it does.”

Two of the farm’s four Rotorainers are also now kitted out with GPS systems that enable them to “talk” to each other. It means they can now work as a tag team irrigating, with the first one shutting down after completing its run, sending a message to staff to shift it, and to its counterpart to commence irrigation.

Time is saved having them run one after another, and the tracked history enables Nick to get an overview of their operation, and point out to staff any areas that can be made more efficient and effective with better application.

The arrival of the smartphone has not gone unnoticed by Nick and he identifies an irrigation app as a favourite that he has come to use frequently. Developed by Regen, the app effectively balances soil moisture levels and application.

It takes data from water meters, translating it into the amount applied via the centre pivots. This is aligned with NIWA data on evapotranspiration rate losses and calculates the ideal timing and amount of water application required.

“It will keep you out of the top 10% of soil moisture holding levels, at between 50-90%, so if it is going to rain, you will not lose that rain as runoff because the soil has been overwatered earlier.”

The app indicates five days ahead when to and when not to irrigate, depending upon upcoming weather conditions automatically gathered from MetService forecasts.

“We are limited to a certain amount of water each year, so this ensures we don’t waste it, and can get an optimal level of application that will not run off, or leach through the profile.”

The tracking technology concept used on the Rotorainers is also used to ensure efficient fertiliser application at Kintore.

Using Tracmap fertiliser placement ensures no doubling up or misses when nitrogen is applied, either just before or just after grazing.

Kintore employs a driver to apply fertiliser at a cost of about \$4/ha who refers to the Tracmap for his jobs. Farm managers enter an application job into Tracmap, and that is picked up by the driver to apply.

Meantime precision tracking technology provides proof of placement in terms of timing and rate.

“Both pieces of technology help us optimise our driver’s time, and ensure that we are not missing some areas, or doing others too soon. We only budget a certain amount of nitrogen each year, and this technology optimises our use of it.”

Additional nitrogen input comes via effluent applied through the centre pivot irrigation system.

All the optimising technology at Kintore has also been matched by some old fashioned tree planting aimed at increasing bird populations and bee pollination sources. The emphasis has been upon native trees, planted around all the houses and buildings, and started to be planted down the farm road sides.

“We have also planted 35 specimen trees and are well on the way to getting shelter belts along every second paddock.”

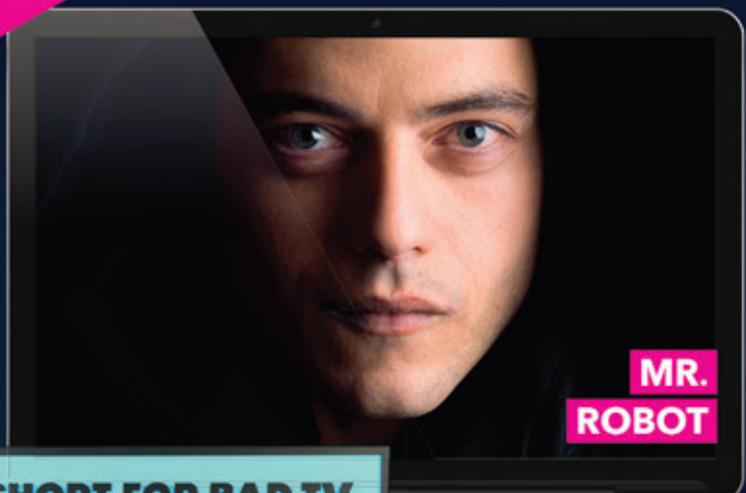
ABOVE: Fertiliser, irrigation and nutrient management are all key parts of the farm’s environmental “bottom line” management
BELOW: Planting has also continued around the houses buildings and yards



Kintore Farms Profile

LOCATION	Carew, Mid Canterbury
SIZE	450ha
HERD	1,500
STRUCTURE	2 separate dairy units (Wainui and Katoa), 2 run off blocks (Newparks, Broadfields)
OWNERSHIP	Waddington, Macfarlane, Hoogeveen, Rodwell families
GENERAL MANAGER	Nick Hoogeveen.
KEY FEED INPUT LEVELS	4.0t DM/cow/year grass, 570kgDM mixed including maize silage, wheat, PKE, molasses, 178kgDM fodder beet, 94kgDM balage
PRODUCTION ESTIMATE 2015/16	800,000kg MS
IRRIGATION	4 Centre Pivot irrigators, 4 Rotorainers
SOURCE	Mayfield Hinds Irrigation, with on farm storage capacity for 7–8 days

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New opportunity for farmers to be heard

The Real Farmer magazine has a history of providing readers with relevant and useful information on the issues that matter to you, the members of our rural community.

NEAL SHAW, GROUP CEO

We are continually striving to deliver stories on industry issues and innovation, various farming operations, the families who run them and other agricultural businesses and ventures.

This is your magazine and to ensure we continue providing the information you want to read, we are always keen to hear your thoughts on suggested content ideas. Now we are taking this a step further by giving you the opportunity to have your say.

Some of you may have noticed the palm kernel article in the last edition of the Real Farmer on page 35. The article looked at Fonterra's recommended 3kg per day restrictions and consequently there was some feedback from our readers. As a result, we decided we would like to offer readers the chance to have their say on any farming or agricultural-industry related topic they would like to share their thoughts on.

This won't be a "Letters to the Editor" type format, but rather a platform for constructive comments aimed at encouraging debate and discussion. We think it will be refreshing to have this sort of feedback in a print situation instead of the more common anonymous on-line debates which have become the norm these days.

This month Mid Canterbury Federated Farmers Grain and Seed Chairman; South Island Federated Farmers Grain and Seed Vice Chairman; and Mid Canterbury Maize Growers Committee member, David Clark is our first contributor and he is responding to some of the comments made in the PKE article. This article (page 35) has not been edited, and as with the piece in last month's issue, views are not those of Ruralco and/or ATS.

If you think you would like to put pen to paper and contribute your thoughts, please get in touch with our Ruralco Marketing Manager, Marloes Leferink at marketing@ruralco.co.nz. Please be aware there is a lead time for producing this bi-monthly publication, so if you want your comment to appear in the next issue (April/May) we would encourage you to make contact as soon as possible.

Information sharing goes both ways, and we know you are always interested in how Ruralco is trading. By the time you receive this magazine, we will have completed the first six months of this financial year. Early indications show a continued, steady increase in transactions and the business is continuing to grow.

This has occurred through on-going development of the Ruralco Supplier network

throughout the country, with cardholders outside of the Mid Canterbury region recognising they too can take advantage of discounts from a variety of suppliers, including ATS Farm Supplies. This creates the best of both worlds with farmers having ready access to a farm supply store which isn't passing on the costs of expensive overheads inherent with running a network of stores. Reduced overheads means ATS Farm Supplies is well positioned to provide a wide variety of products at the best possible price.

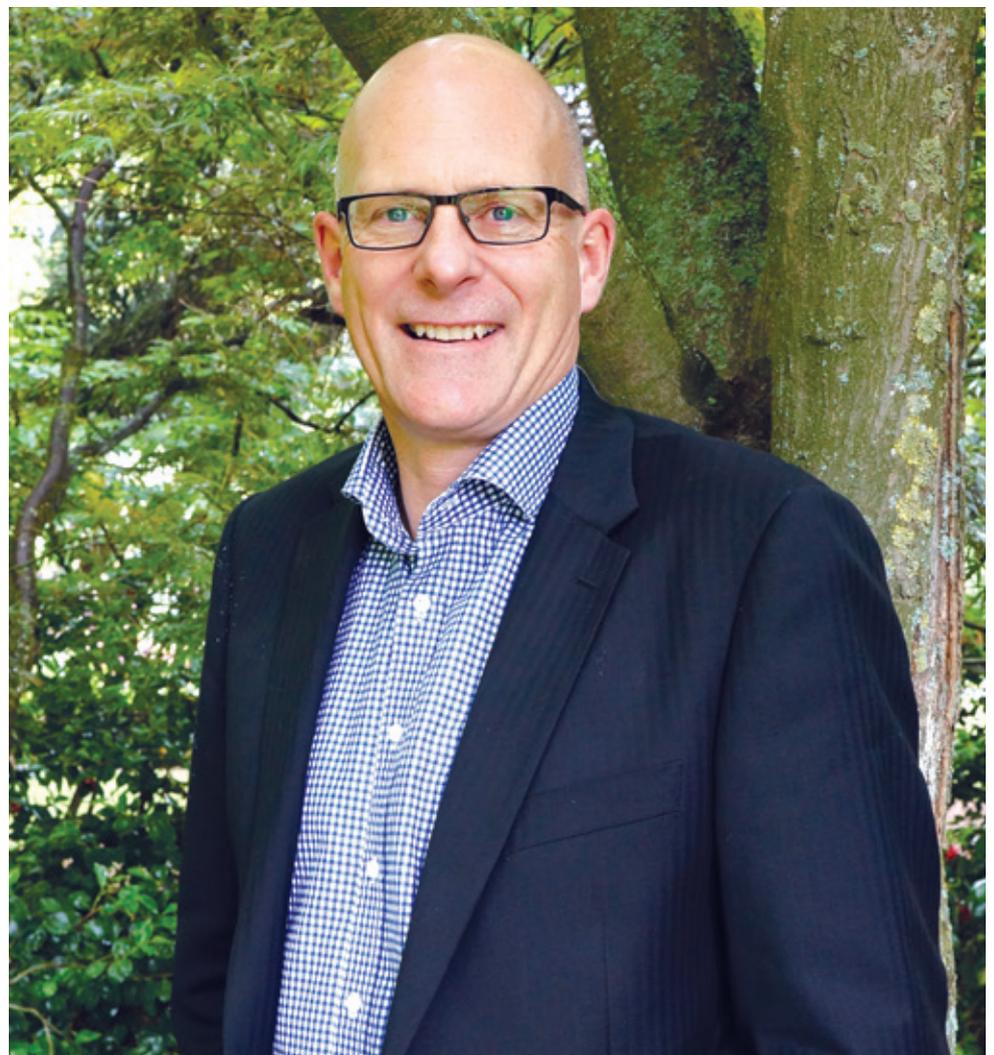
While farmers still look for the opportunity to interact face-to-face with shop staff, technology has changed the way we purchase our farm supplies, and many now take advantage of online options while others develop telephone rapport with Customer Service or technical reps. The ATS Farm Supplies team recognises farmers have their own ways of doing business, and so provide

options to meet these needs.

The Ruralco Supplier network shares this philosophy and these efficiencies. Importantly, this is also the key to long term survival in this competitive business environment and efficiency was always one of the drivers behind the creation of the Ruralco Card. Centralised billing and meaningful discounts without the complex structure of a store network all help to make life easier for farmers.

We are always interested in understanding more about our cardholders' requirements regarding the products, services & suppliers they want, and how they want to shop. Communication is the key to ensuring these varied needs are met and we look forward to hearing more of your suggestions.

BELOW: Neal Shaw, Group CEO



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Finishing well on fodder beet

Dry stock farmers are increasingly incorporating fodder beet crops into their feeding regimes, in part because of its excellent yields, which can be between 20 and 30 tonnes dry matter/hectare. ARTICLE SUPPLIED BY SEALESWINSLOW

Fodder beet also has a high energy content—latest analyses of samples show the bulb component with an ME greater than 14—although it's not the perfect crop, since it is relatively low in protein and phosphorus.

The combination of high yield and high energy levels provide a much-needed boost for finishing stock, or help maintain the condition of stock being wintered over. However, in order to get the best result from grazing fodder beet, the issues of low protein and low phosphorus must be managed.

The protein intake of stock can be increased by feeding a high-protein supplement alongside the fodder beet. Until recently, the issue of low phosphorus was addressed by dusting DCP (dicalcium phosphate). Now, however, dry stock farmers have access to the SealesWinslow Fodder Beet Block, which offers an easy, clean and efficient way to provide stock with additional phosphorus.

All stock need adequate intakes of minerals if they are to stay healthy, but this is even more important for young animals, since they have additional demands imposed by growth – bone formation, for instance, requires phosphorus and

calcium. Inadequate intakes during the critical growth periods could result in brittle and broken bones in the future.

In older stock, the effects of low dietary phosphorus intakes are often subclinical. Symptoms of a low-grade phosphorus deficiency include reduced appetite and rapid weight loss. In some cases, blood may be seen in the urine. These effects aren't immediately obvious – when dietary phosphorus intakes are inadequate, stock use their existing phosphorus reserves to maintain blood phosphorus levels, but once those reserves are depleted, overt symptoms will start to manifest. While some animals that experience a phosphorus deficiency will recover, others will go down.

To avoid these issues being a problem in cattle being wintered or finished on fodder beet, a structured transition and feeding programme is needed. This includes the transition timeframe (typically 12–16 days), the supplement that will be fed alongside the crop, and the mineral support that will be offered while the stock are grazing fodder beet.

SealesWinslow's Fodder Beet Block is an easy way to supplement the mineral intake

of cattle grazing fodder beet. It's based on molasses, so it's very palatable to stock, and it not only supplies them with phosphorus and magnesium, but also provides cobalt, copper, iodine, selenium and zinc—trace elements that may be in low supply when stock are grazing bulb-based winter forage crops.

The blocks should be placed at the crop face, allowing one block per 25 head of stock. Since fodder beet is best grazed with a long, narrow face, it should be relatively easy to space out blocks so that there is no overcrowding and to allow shy feeders to get their share. As the fence is shifted, the blocks should be moved forward so they are always in front of the cattle.

The target intake for cattle is 100-200 grams per animal per day. This will supply 5-10 g phosphorus per animal per day, and will also provide stock with magnesium, calcium, sodium and five trace elements that are important for health.

For more information on using Fodder Beet Block as part of your winter feeding programme, talk to ATS today on 0800 BUY ATS (289 287) or your local SealesWinslow Representative.

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Keeping farm safety simple

Simple health and safety messages are saving lives on New Zealand farms. BY LINDA CLARKE



"This service is not for a broken fingernail, but for more serious things like when someone needs to go to a doctor or the hospital. We can help them with advice because post-incident can be a stressful time. We point them in the right direction, tell them who they need to notify and what forms they need to fill in; we make sure it is done in a timely fashion so they are following the right procedure."

"I've taken a few calls following a serious accident and I hear the fear in our clients' voices. They need calm reassurance and guidance."

Hamish said complying with current and future workplace health and safety legislation doesn't have to be difficult or complex. There are however a few key things you have to do to demonstrate that you are addressing your legal duties. HazardCo helps farmers to put all this in place.

Whilst no one likes to do paperwork, keeping simple records is necessary to keep a focus

The easy-to-use system developed by HazardCo is taking health and safety out of the too hard basket, ensuring employers and employees are on the same page and everybody goes home safely after a day at work.

HazardCo works with around 15,000 New Zealand businesses, including agricultural, horticultural, manufacturing and construction companies. It works with DairyNZ, Federated Farmers, FMG, Dairy Women's Network and other industry groups to reduce accidents and injuries in the farming sector.

The company was started in 2007 by Gavin Karl and Mark Potter with a construction focus; their straight-talking, straight-forward health and safety plans were a hit and they took this model and expanded into other industries.

"Construction is still easily our largest sector," says spokesman Hamish Norwood, "but we saw a lot of similarities between construction and the rural sector which allowed us to develop an ag-based product. We now have systems that cover dairy, sheep and beef, deer and goat farming, horticulture and orchards."

The head office is in Wellington, where the management is based, as well as health & safety technical and support team, which answers questions from clients all around the country and provides a 24/7 accident and emergency help line. Seventeen sales and service representatives are also located around New Zealand.

Hamish said most queries could be answered by the experienced and helpful Health & Safety

ABOVE: Rod Partington, HazardCo's Sales & Service Representative

Technical team via telephone or email, with issues escalated up the company channels as needed.

New customers are visited on-farm or at workplaces so the HazardCo representative gets a full understanding of the working environment, and is able to tailor health and safety plans that work for the user. The visits are obligation free.

"Our catchphrase is 'effective simplicity'. We don't give our clients anything they don't need. While health & safety requirements are definitely getting more complex, we do our very best to make sure we translate these requirements into simple and straightforward practices."

"We use visual resources to help lead people through the system. These aren't designed to sit in a bottom drawer for years - they are designed to be used. Health and safety is an everyday thing, not once a month or once a year thing, and employers and employees are slowly but surely getting their heads around that."

In the event of an accident (serious harm incident), help is available around the clock.



on health and safety and prove that you are managing risks to health and safety, especially if something goes wrong. But again this doesn't have to be complex and HazardCo provides simple tools to help you do this.

The new Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 will require farmers or business owners to report "notifiable events" (accidents, incidents and near misses) to WorkSafe NZ as soon as possible. HazardCo members have free phone access to our experts to receive help to record and report such events and ongoing support through the often traumatic process. HazardCo's basic plans cost \$530 plus GST, a small price to pay to ensure everyone goes home safely at the end of every day.



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Electricity users could pay for future shortages

As farmers scramble for feed and livestock grazing options along the South Island's east coast, many will be looking at their power bill as closely as their weather report over coming months. BY RICHARD RENNIE

It is no coincidence the two are connected.

New Zealand is a global rarity in the energy world. With almost 60% of electricity sourced from hydro-electricity schemes, NZ is third ranked globally for sustainable electricity sources, coming in behind Norway (95%) and Brazil (75%).

But that sustainability comes with a risk. Being reliant upon water flows means there is always the possibility in dry years that river flows fall to the point hydro schemes cannot operate at full capacity.

NZ's modern history has several instances of power crises arising from such events. Back in 2008 after two years of dry weather politicians were denying a crisis as hydro output was chopped back to near 50% of supply, with coal and gas fired stations ramped up output.

Before that, in 1992 electricity shortages plagued the country with hot water restrictions and street lighting limited.

Warnings to limit use came through 2001, 2003 and 2006, and each time rainfall in the alpine hydro catchments averted national shortages just in time.

The elevated risks had prompted investment in more gas fired plants by generators, including geothermal stations, to spread the risk of ongoing and economically damaging supply interruptions.

Recent events, both within the weather and within the market, bring a note of caution around electricity pricing in coming months and years, in a market where pricing reflects the source of supply.

Hydro is the base line cheapest source and should it fall in availability pricing jumps to the next most cost effective supply source, often geothermal or gas, both which bring with an increase of several cents per kilowatt hour in power cost.

Meantime some long standing coal fired "reserve" type stations are being tagged for shut down including Huntly in the Waikato and Otahuhu in Auckland coming off line in September.

That loss of Huntly amounts to a loss of its massive coal pile reserve, and that equates to 30% of the hydro storage. This has some analysts nervous about NZ's ability to weather dry periods in the valuable Alpine catchment. Meantime climate change means the Alps are more likely to receive higher rainfall and less "stored" water as snow, bringing changes in river flow rates and shifts in storage demands.

From 2019 onwards, it is possible NZ will face greater risks of shortages in a dry year than seen since when the Meremere power station was built in the 1950s.

The risk from this is generators being forced to switch to "next best" options, including geothermal and gas powered stations, pushing spot electricity prices to very high levels, and squeezing electricity retailers forced to buy power on the spot market.

The economic impact can also be far reaching. Back in 2003 even though there were no blackouts, the economic cost of increased energy amounted to \$200 million.

And the ability of geothermal stations to pick up the shortfall cannot be assumed. Such stations which already account for 16% of our power and already operate at full output, so offer no "freeboard" to take up any slack left by a slump in hydro.

The ability of gas fired stations to ramp up output can be constrained by contracts. This means options are limited for boosting output from existing generating assets.

That leaves demand side options to explore. The most obvious is shutting down the Tiwai smelter which accounts for about 14% of national energy use. Losing Tiwai off the grid would make any security of supply risk from 2019 low.

Transpower has already warned of a risk to electricity supply over winter months when Huntly shuts, and has acknowledged in a recent report security of supply is likely to become highly uncertain.

It notes it would require an additional 600 Megawatts (Huntly's size) of generation to reduce that risk from "very high" to "moderate."

But in an environment of lower electricity demand and uncertainty about Tiwai's tenure, there are no build prospects on the horizon.

Only a clear signal from government on Tiwai's future will cement this, putting the smelter owners in quite a powerful position when negotiating power rates from Manapouri. Meantime should a dry year unfold, consumers and businesses are very vulnerable to prices ramping up, and Transpower notes the possibility of paying as much as 50c a kWh, over twice the rate paid by many.

Past dry periods have caused prices to spike to as high as 30c/kWh for extended periods.

The Transpower report notes the risk will be lower if the Tiwai plant shut down, and that is a possibility with Tiwai's electricity contract up for review in 2017.

Transpower has however expressed confidence the market would provide signals in advance if the new plant was needed. This includes a reference to "new or refurbished generation likely becoming available from 2019."

This does raise the possibility that Huntly may not shut, be upgraded and kept as an idle backstop for dry years.

That possibility, and Transpower's predicted shortage in Huntly's absence, would make for interesting negotiations between Huntly's owner Genesis and the government of the day keenly aware of the political ramifications of a country running short of power.

For more information on this topic or any other energy issues, please contact Tracey Gordon, ATS Energy Account Manager on 0800 BUY ATS (289 287) today.



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The first step is all about autumn grazing management. Agriseeds pasture systems manager Graham Kerr says this is the perfect place to start, because good pasture management through autumn helps farmers grow and utilise more dry matter/ha (DM/ha) straight away. It also sets the farm up well for the coming spring.

Included in this section is practical advice about helping pastures recover from a potentially dry summer. Graham says the importance of avoiding overgrazing, and giving pastures enough time to start growing properly again when it does rain, cannot be over-stated.

To drive pasture utilisation in autumn, he encourages farmers to focus on leaving consistent post grazing residuals, day in and day out. "This ensures high cow intakes and high pasture utilisation from the current grazing, and sets up pasture quality for the next grazing so the cycle will repeat itself in the next round."

Later in autumn, it's time for farmers to check whether paddocks need any late nitrogen; deal with any quality issues and look after newly sown paddocks as they establish.

The second step that will help farmers get the best out of their pastures is making good decisions around drying off this autumn, Graham says. "The right dry off strategy matches current cow condition, calving dates and pasture cover to help the farm be in right place at calving. With the cool spring we are seeing thinner cows on many farms, and now is the time to sort this out to be well-primed for calving and a successful 2016/17 lactation."

The third step is implementing the right pasture renewal programme, including any 'grass to grass' renewal that's needed.

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If you would like to receive a copy of the booklet order one from www.agriseeds.co.nz or visit your local ATS store to grab yourself a copy. To plan your autumn pasture renewal programme, talk to ATS Seed or your ATS Arable and Pastoral Representative today on 0800 BUY ATS (289 287).

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A photograph of a man and a woman operating a large yellow berry harvester in a field. The man is in the foreground, wearing a white shirt and headphones, steering the machine. The woman is behind him, also wearing headphones. The harvester is a large, complex piece of machinery with a large hopper on top. The background shows a field of berry bushes under a clear sky.

A berry tasty business

Enjoying the fruits of their labour is a family and friends affair for Damien O'Connor and Sharon Flood of Mahana Berries.

BY KATE TAYLOR

"When the boysenberries are good to go, we encourage our friends and relatives to pick their own as part of our contribution to their Christmas, a teacher from the school bought some friends along and made an outing of it," Damien says.

"The amount friends and locals take is nothing in the scheme of things and we would always encourage them to do that. While we've balanced the books and it has paid its way, we do have alternative income. There are other values connected to growing the berries for us. Sharing is one of them."

Speak nicely to Damien and you might even be allowed to sample some of their schnapps and port, still in experimental stage, which they're investigating as a value-added proposition to improve the business.

Mahana Berries has eight varieties of boysenberries – the block was established more than 20 years ago and built up by another enthusiastic part-time grower.

Damien has a saying about their business. “We’re not berry growers. We grow berries. There are berry growers who are people with real expertise and drive because they have to rely on their business for their income. We’re growing berries but have the advantage of off-farm income.”

That off-farm income includes Damien’s role as the Member of Parliament for West Coast-Tasman and Labour Party spokesperson for Primary Industries, Biosecurity and Food Safety and Sharon’s role in strategic planning with the local Tasman District Council.

They own 8.5 hectares at Mahana – a small rural community in the Upper Moutere-Mapua area between Richmond and Motueka.

“There were four and a half hectares planted in boysenberries when we first moved here, which was quite a large block. It was all grown on contract and we had nothing to do with the management of the berries. It sounded like a sound proposition at the time given we had no knowledge of berry growing when we came onto the place.”

The following three years saw the business evolve to the point where the couple had full charge of the berries and with Sharon in charge of administration and employment details. But they still had limited knowledge of the industry.

“We had some issues with disease in some of the blocks and generally, we discovered it hadn’t been well managed for a few years. So we were facing some challenges in terms of the health of the berries and the management regime.”

A 1ha block wasn’t cropped for one season in an attempt to manage out some of the disease.

“But the following year the yield wasn’t all that great again so this year we only cropped one hectare in



total. We left one block uncropped and we pulled another block out completely and put it back into grass. Now we have to decide what the next step should be—to grow more berries or not.”

He says the willingness of their berry-growing neighbours to share their knowledge and time has been paramount.

“We are lucky to have a number of growers around us who have given us good advice and helped us directly at times when I’ve been unable to be here at a certain time, such as the occasional spray. We’ve got to the point now where we are self-sufficient with our own harvester and sprayers and we can run it ourselves, but the realities of limited time and sometimes poor timing for spraying means we’re still not able to run the type of operation we’d like to.”

Aside from the opportunity to put boysenberries on family and friends’ pavlovas on Christmas Day, Damien says a focus of the business is picking for punnets for local outlets.

“We have one variety that comes on earlier and is usually available for Christmas market. We like using local young people and a mix of local people who come in to pick for pocket money, which gets the good berries out there to a supermarket, a friend’s local store at Tasman who is always wanting more at that busy time and a few other outlets.”



TOP: Damien, Sharon & eight-year-old daughter Maria
ABOVE: A focus of the business is picking for punnets for local outlets

LEFT: Mahana Berries has eight varieties of boysenberries and was established more than 20 years ago

He says there’s a sense of satisfaction about seeing the berries they’ve grown meeting the needs of businesses crying out for them. “It’s Christmas so there’s a feel-good factor there too.”

The crop is then harvested mechanically.

“We cover the block about five or six times to take off the ripe berries. Over the years we’ve had a variety of outlets. It can be a challenge for small

growers to ensure you have good sound base of customers. Given the seasonal variation in terms of output, volumes to some of the buyers has to be assured and they in turn have to cover their backsides or make sure they've got a quantity of suppliers to give them full volume. Over the years we've had small contracts going to people ranging from Barkers, Enza and Old Mout Cider through to North Island jam makers. Some also go to another grower who has large volume contracts for export," he says.

"There is a co-operative which we haven't supplied as yet and that could be the next logical step if we were to go back to full production in terms of our land. I support the co-op structure to give growers and other small players some leverage."

While decisions loom with the future scale of the berry venture, Damien and Sharon have branched out with ideas for value-added boysenberry products. They've been working with a wine-maker friend and a local craftsman distiller to produce their own schnapps and port.

"We're toying with the idea of whether or not it's commercially viable to move down that value-added path. In saying that, I'm not naive enough to think anything in that area is easy but firmly believe New Zealand's primary industry has to do everything it can to extract the most value from what we produce. I guess it's a matter of practicing what I preach by seeing what we can extract from what we're producing from the ground up."

He says the response from the tastings of the port is outstanding, but the schnapps is more of an acquired taste.

"We're trying to take the unique nature of boysenberries and promote the reality that New Zealand is the best boysenberry-growing country in the world. Our boysenberries have a unique flavour appreciated by many kiwis but hasn't been utilised maybe in the way it should be, so we're experimenting. We're not the only ones. Old Mout lifted the game in terms of berry ciders and capitalising on that kiwi flavour. It's an exciting future if people get it right." It's exciting but unknown.

"Hence the ongoing discussion as to whether or not we should continue growing berries. We both have fairly hectic other jobs and for us, the idea of summer holidays is a good theory completely thwarted by berry harvesting," he says.

"The fortunate thing is the intense harvesting period occurs over what is generally the holiday season for most jobs, mine especially. It's certainly a change rather than a break. Sharon is probably more inclined to get rid of all the berries whereas I like the idea of intensively managing small blocks of land trying to get a profitable return. I also really enjoy the ability to be directly in touch with the realities of land management in farming. The business, albeit small, keeps us in touch with the realities of small business, primary production and wholesale and retail marketing."

Damien grew up on a West Coast dairy farm. Before becoming an MP in 1993, he worked in



ABOVE: Caitlyn a local from the community picking for pocket money

BELOW: The family run other dry stock on the area they've put back into grass

a variety of jobs in farming and tourism. During a five-year stint in Australia, he worked as a machinery operator and in sales, then came home to establish Buller Adventure Tours.

"I have enjoyed having fingers in a number of pies so this is another new challenge. I've been farming before, but not berry farming. I have had limited knowledge of horticulture generally but as the representative of the Tasman part of the electorate I've been in touch with growers of many crops over the years and am aware of the risks for horticulture from climatic and seasonal variations. Just this past month there was a hail storm that just passed by us but affected some others, cutting a swathe through the coastline. The grower next door had his hail cannon going, which may have helped us in hindsight, but it can be luck of the draw really."

He says Mahana has a strong community with a great primary school, a winery and surrounding vineyards and is arguably the best and the safest area in the country for growing boysenberries.

"There's a little micro climate here that has been great for a number of crops. New Zealand is the largest exporter of boysenberries in the world and Waimea Plains and Mahana have the biggest boysenberry growers in the world. It's a small industry with limited scientific background but increasing local knowledge on what to do and how to manage different issues."

Boysenberry growing boomed in the late 1970s and 1980s but many growers have now left the industry, which is now consolidating even further around a smaller number of larger growers with a few others on the fringes, he says. It's about economic return on land and investment.

"Our yield was probably less than half what was needed to run a viable economic unit or to make a healthy economic return. New varieties need to be planted and other plants replaced with an increased level of skills and commitment. I am in a profession that has some uncertainty every three years but I have always approached politics as all or nothing. I've never seen this as Plan B but it's certainly an interesting alternative activity for my

holiday period. Otherwise I'd be eating too much or crashing my mountain bike more often."

Damien has four adult daughters who are more enthusiastic consumers than producers, he says, and he and Sharon have eight-year-old daughter Maria.

"I'm resisting the demand for a horse, given my previous experience as the owner of a 20-horse trekking business," he laughs.

"We're running other dry stock on the area we've put back into grass and working in with... well, relying on the goodwill of a neighbour for some of the animal management, given that I'm away a lot." He goes back to Parliament in the third week of January and will be "24/7" until the end of the year.

"While there is some flexibility, it's a demanding job in a huge electorate. But it's one I carry out passionately and I don't compromise that role for our home venture, which comes at the price of boysenberry production."



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2016 wheat competition aiming to attract top crops

New Zealand farmers' ability to grow high quality wheat is increasingly being recognised, and growers keen to show case that ability are encouraged to enter this year's United Wheat Growers Competition. BY RICHARD RENNIE

The 2016 competition promises a high level of competition across the five award categories seeking entry, including biscuit, feed protein, feed, milling-gristing and premium milling wheat.

United Wheat Growers Director Brian Leadley said this growing season had a tough start with high temperatures and low moisture levels, but he expected the industry would witness some very high quality crops partly as a result of the drier conditions.

"The conditions put a bit of pressure on yield, but you can get some good quality crops too."

Brian says the competition is an excellent opportunity for the industry to demonstrate the exceptionally high standards Kiwi grain farmers can work to.

"New Zealand may have a relatively small grain industry, but we are identifying some really valuable niches within the sector that our growers are proving very capable of working within," he says. This includes the premium milling and biscuit wheat categories, and partly explains why the competition has been split up into categories.

"We want growers to identify where they are best at, and feel they can confidently enter their crop in the sector that best matches that crop's specifications."

Last year the competition had 90 entries, and Brian is hoping to top a century for this year's competition. He is confident that even with

on-going dry weather; irrigated properties in particular will deliver exceptionally high quality crops in the drier conditions.

The competition's judging process includes a variety of criteria for judging. This includes grain moisture, weight, size and milling class. Passing these quality standards ensures a higher quality product at the end of the milling process.

Standing wheat crop colour and appearance are also taken into account.

ATS General Manager Robert Sharkie says the competition represents an excellent opportunity to celebrate the skill and tenacity of the grain growing sector.

"It is a sector with an exceptional amount of grower talent, and we at ATS are proud to play a part, as we have for the past six years, sponsoring the event and drawing some attention to that talent."

"The level of industry support makes this a very special competition. It is an opportunity to promote the varieties of wheat now available out there, and the expertise that exists to help support growers to get the most out of their crops," says Brian.

Robert Sharkie says wheat growers are the quiet foundation of the arable sector, with a crop that continues to play an invaluable role being rotated between assorted fodder crops now grown in Canterbury and beyond.

"Those growers still practicing arable farming are there because they want to be there, they

enjoy what they do and are particularly good at it. We want to support them, and really highlight the work they do to the rest of the farming community and beyond," says Robert.

ATS Shareholder and Methven cropping farmer Dale Palmer, a previous prize winner in the feed wheat category, and is looking forward to entering the competition again this year.

"It is a good opportunity for a younger farmer like myself to benchmark myself against other farmers who may have been growing good wheat for many years. It gave us a chance to see where we sat and was a very positive experience," says Dale.

Dale says New Zealand's ability to compete against huge wheat producers like Australia on volume is impossible, but the industry here is developing its own niches within the processing sector that means wheat remains a valuable, worthwhile crop to grow well.

The 2016 competition is open to crops harvested in 2016, with entries closing May 31 2016 and judging taking place in autumn. A prize giving will follow in winter, with prize money up for grabs in all five categories of the competition.

For an entry form contact ATS on 0800 BUY ATS (289 287), www.ats.co.nz or www.uwg.co.nz.

Any questions about the competition contact George Walker, ATS Marketing today on 0800 BUY ATS (289 287).

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Rich tradition of outstanding service

A 121-year tradition of going the extra mile for customers sets Central Stockfeed ahead of the pack. Owners DC Turnbull and Co, of Timaru, supplied the British army with oats for their horses during the Boer War and that tradition of outstanding service has remained for more than a century. BY LINDA CLARKE



They are a boutique feed manufacturer, making fresh nutritious feed on a daily basis that they know stock love to eat. Their customers include farmers, horse trainers and lifestylers who want stockfeed to boost performance and animal health.

Innovation and customer service is central to Turnbull's long business success. David Clarkson Turnbull came from a pioneering family and the company was initially involved in the grain and seed trade. One of their early contracts was to supply the British army with oats and the company soon got involved in shipping, which became their main focus for 80 years.

Turnbull was one of the founders of the Canterbury Steam Shipping Company, which moved grain around New Zealand in a fleet of steamships, docking at small ports.

The shipping company stopped trading when the inter-island ferry made rail transport easier and the Turnbills continued to focus on their other shipping interests as stevedores and ship agents. They were involved with loading grain for export though the 1980s and '90s. They turned their focus back to the core grain and seed trading with changes in shipping in the late 1980s, early 1990s. Andrew Turnbull's sudden death two years ago was the catalyst for a history project detailing life and business since 1894.

Craig Smith, who has 22 years with Turnbills, said he and historian Ruth Lowe have been interviewing past and present employees, clients and Turnbull family members, to capture facts, figures and memories that will form the basis of the project. He said it was important history was not lost.

The steamship company acquired or had built a number of ships for its coastal missions, naming them Storm, Gale, Breeze, Squall and other weather related-terms. Two of their ships were requisitioned for World War Two.

"Those were early days in the shipping scene. They plied the coastal scene, but also shipped to the UK. They were one of the first companies to use jute bags in New Zealand. I really wanted to get something down about Turnbull's history before it was lost."

The new business chapter has involved Central Stockfeed. In 1998, DC Turnbull & Co bought what was then known as Central Grain and soon after changed the name to the The Central Stockfeed Company Limited.

Craig said the company was committed to manufacturing the best stockfeed available, using quality local raw ingredients where possible including grain and peas.

"We don't use low quality ingredients to reduce costs. We manufacture daily, so the stockfeed is fresh. It is our belief that the best feed is produced from only using top quality ingredients."

Central Stockfeed's small manufacturing plant is on Hayes Street, near the Port of Timaru, and two skilled and experienced workers process grain to customers' specifications.

Grain for the feed is sourced from South Canterbury farmers, maize from the North Island and soy from the United States. Craig said traceability was important and the growers were known and approved by Central Stockfeed's team. "We are careful about what we use and where we get it from."



ABOVE: The plant produces stockfeed for dairy cattle and calves, sheep, deer, poultry and horses
MAIN IMAGE: The feed is sold out of the Timaru plant in bags and manufactured to scientifically-designed formula

The feed is sold out of the Timaru plant in bags and manufactured to scientifically-designed formula. "All our product is put together with nutritionists, and sometimes customers bring their own feed recipes so we can make up a mix to order, or just roll their barley."

Customers are many and varied, and the plant produces stockfeed for dairy cattle and calves, sheep, deer, poultry and horses.

"Turnbills have always focused on quality in whatever they have been involved with. Whether as grain and seed merchants, shipping or storage, and now stockfeed, quality is very important and a tradition we intend to continue."



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Signs of pneumonia

Pneumonia (viral or bacterial infection of the lungs) in sheep and cattle poses a significant threat to production through reduced live weight gains and higher than normal death rates. ARTICLE SUPPLIED BY IAN HODGE. BVSC., MACVSC. VETENT RIVERSIDE

Infections of the lungs, the external linings of the lungs and inside of the rib cage can result from viral or bacterial infections or both. Once infected with pneumonia, animals become slow to move short of breath, ill thrifty, don't eat properly and often die suddenly. When being moved, animals with pneumonia are often not able to keep up with the rest of the herd or flock and they are noticeable by having a nasty wheezy cough.

Pneumonia and pleurisy in sheep is common in Canterbury. Risk factors include colder nights and warm humid days through late summer and autumn. Inhaled dust can play a role in pneumonia especially when lambs are yarded or driven longer distances by road. As with many other diseases, stress plays an important role.

Shearing and weaning can be stressful and can be the start of the pneumonic process. Feed changes are significant stressors in sheep and should be avoided. Parasite infections can also lead to malnutrition, low protein levels and compromised immunity. Uncontrolled lungworm can result in lung infections.

Weaning and tailing are perhaps the greatest stressors to lambs and can result in a high prevalence of sub clinical pneumonia and pleurisy. So it follows that all practicable steps should be taken to mitigate the chance of pneumonia becoming significant at these times.

Weaning and tailing should be as stress free as possible with minimum handling, droving and

yarding. When yarded, ventilation for the lambs should be very good. Dogs should be kept under control and not used excessively.

At present there is no available vaccine in New Zealand to help control pneumonia, so we have to use management tools to reduce the effect of the disease. The best approach to prevent pneumonia and pleurisy is to tail and wean lambs at good body weights, maintain low levels of stress at these times and maintain good consistent animal health and nutrition at and after weaning. A planned animal health programme as discussed with your Vet is strongly recommended so that the obvious and important things are not over looked.



Using more of OVERSEER's horse power to plan for nutrient constraints

Having access to a computer model like OVERSEER and then only using it to run one retrospective budget annually to spit out a number for compliance, well, it's just a waste.

ARTICLE PROVIDED BY CHARLOTTE GLASS, AGRIMAGIC

It's like having one of these:



And only using it to pull one of these:



In a time when farmers must reduce nutrient loss, it is crazy that the emphasis has been on the use of OVERSEER nutrient budgets for compliance purposes. In fact, when used well, with the context and understanding of the farm resources, system and business, OVERSEER is a phenomenal tool to help highlight the aspects of the production system that can be altered to improve nutrient loss in a sustainable way for the farm business. It has so much more horsepower that most are even aware of.

This article hopes to highlight some things farmers (or those directing farm businesses) can consider when you are ready to use more of OVERSEER's horse power to extract value beyond compliance.



Use OVERSEER to compare scenarios, not to just run one nutrient budget in isolation

At the very least if you are asked to provide a baseline nutrient budget (representing the seasons 2009–2013) then you should also run a current budget for the same farm and compare the results. An additional scenario that models future options provides the most powerful comparison. This allows you to really see which management options your farm or parts of your farm may be sensitive to.

Please note that each farm is a unique mix of resources, soil types, climate, topography, irrigation opportunity and of course management. I don't know a person good enough to be able to consider how each of these aspects integrate with the dynamic soil processes to estimate nutrient loss accurately and to just know where you should prioritise your actions in detail— that is why the OVERSEER model is so good. Once I have run the model I can check the output for sensibility, but I have stopped trying to guess what the nutrient loss estimate might be in advance. Your situation is likely to be different to your neighbour. This issue absolutely requires a customised approach. We know that aspects such as improving irrigation water use efficiency and reducing drainage from soils will reduce nitrogen loss, this generalisation is useful but in a world of emerging rules you need to know where you get the biggest impact

in the context of your own farm and plan your changes to match your other farm and business objectives. The next level of detail can be very insightful—and that insight can lead to more valuable decisions and timing of action.

It is imperative that you only compare OVERSEER outputs that have been calculated from the same version of the model. People get their knickers in a knot about the fact that “the number keeps changing” as the versions of OVERSEER change—take your focus off the number. To get value from this process it is the relative difference and the drivers of the difference that you need to understand. It would be simpler to interpret but far less effective if the versions didn't update and the calculation didn't improve—to use another Tractor analogy... if we got cranky because Tractor versions kept changing we would all still be farming with Red Spot Fordson Majors. Its progress and we need to let that part happen. Try not to let “the number” of your nitrogen loss estimate be your only focus.

Use many of the OVERSEER output reports

These reports help you make sure the budget actually reconciles and is accurate. They help the modeller know if the scenarios are realistic and which aspects of the system are the most sensitive to losses. The following are the ones I use the most:

- a. The overall nutrient budget for the farm;

- b. The individual block N loss reports (and P loss risk report);
- c. Estimated pasture production;
- d. Other values (particularly to check the annual depth of irrigation OVERSEER estimated and the drainage);
- e. Effluent summary—reconcile the area and nutrient loading.

Invest in the “Tool that drives the tool”

Use qualified people that understand you, the business of farming (cross-sector), the rules and planning process and who are also certified nutrient management advisors. If you can't find those skills in one person or business then employ a team to work together for you. It's just like driving machinery, the more of the horsepower you use, the more skill the driver should have, or they become dangerous.

Feel particularly alarmed when someone sends you a template to fill in to then processes your budget in an office with inexperienced “data input” people—NEVER use such a nutrient budget for compliance, strategy, due diligence or planning unless the inputs and outputs are also checked by someone who understands more about you, your farm business and the physical resources you are working with and is certified as a nutrient management advisor. It only costs a little bit more to get the job done properly. It is a complex business and could have a big impact on your future.

Recognise that we are going through a time of change and make sure you have a plan for your business for the future. This is not going away.

Understand that farming is a complex business and that “effects based policy” is a powerful opportunity for you to continue to innovate to manage your own nutrient reductions. If you don't make plans to understand and manage this you may lose the privilege and be forced by input controls. I back NZ farmers to be better than that.

Learn what nutrient constraints might mean in the context of your farm business and then get stuck in to influence your future.

Once you know the aspects of your farm business that are more risky from a nutrient loss perspective you are far more valuable at contributing to industry and catchment level planning processes. Farmers are the best advocates for their own businesses but these issues have become complex, academic and detailed and allowed you to let others advocate on your behalf. Once you see nutrient constraints in the context of your own farm business you become a far more effective advocate.

Invest in more of OVERSEER's horsepower to gain insight and help position your farming business to better manage nutrient constraints and protect our future.

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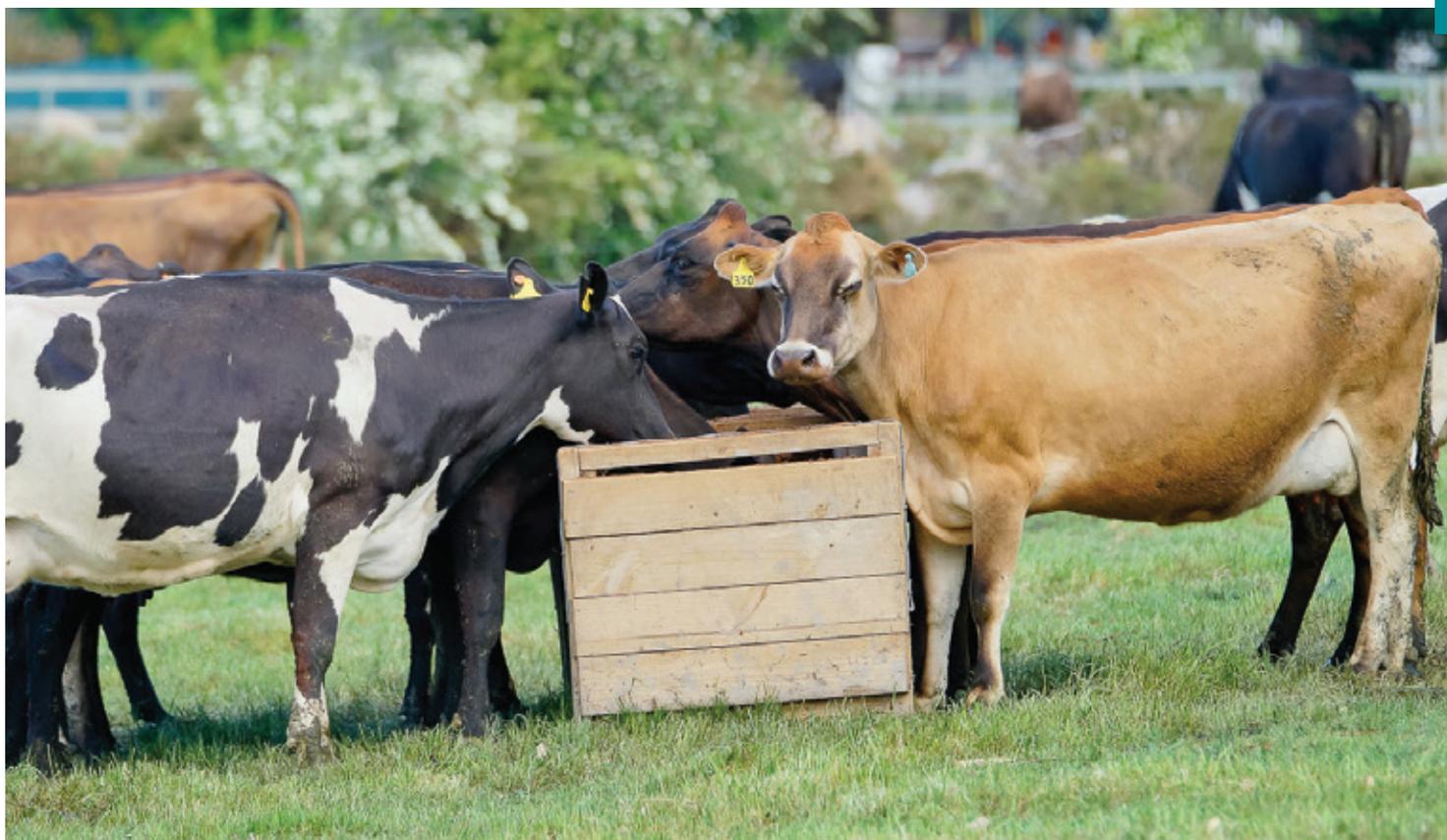
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Have your say

In the last issue of the Real Farmer, I read with interest an article by Kevin Wilson of AbacusBio entitled “PKE Guidelines hard to swallow”.

ARTICLE PROVIDED BY DAVID CLARK

The article lamented the request from Fonterra that farmers voluntarily limit PKE feeding to 3kg/day and was somewhat critical of the rationale for, and delivery of the request. I was keen to see a solution to this situation being put forward by the author and was disappointed to get to the end of the article and find no reference to the range of domestically grown feed alternatives that are readily able to fill any gap left by PKE.

Fonterra, as we know, is NZ's largest company and responsible for in excess for 30% of world dairy trade. During the spring of 2015 Fonterra made a request that their suppliers adopt a voluntary feed limit of 3kg/cow/day of PKE, with a warning that such a guideline may become a limit and condition of supply in future years. Fonterra cited issues with market perception and more importantly, changes in the composition of milk from high PKE herds creating limitations or difficulties in the products able to be manufactured from the milk flow.

I would well expect that such a decision was not made lightly and without sound reason, as Fonterra would be acutely aware of how unpopular this request would be.

ATS, as the parent company of Ruralco has its' origins firmly and proudly based in Mid Canterbury, a province that is also the powerhouse of NZ arable production. Extolling the benefits of PKE, or failing to see beyond this product seemed to me a strange strategy for Ruralco/ATS as the company does not trade this product, nor does it sell inputs used in the production of PKE. However Ruralco/ATS does have a large arable shareholder base who purchase a vast array of farm inputs necessary in the production of grain and fodder crops.

In reading the article, it would have been refreshing to see a discussion on the alternative feeds that could be utilised in the post-PKE era. That would have seemed to me to be a smart strategy and one that could have delivered value to both arable and dairy shareholder alike. A true win-win.

The proposition of the original article was not one of whether to use supplementary feed or not, rather protesting at being limited to 3kg/day. We all understand that grass is the cheapest feed available for any class of livestock within all pastoral farming types, however if grass growth limitations or stocking rates necessitate supplementary feeding, then which feed provides the best return on investment becomes the key consideration. The best return on investment is not always derived from the feed of lowest purchase cost.

To demonstrate my point I have run a simple exercise using the Dairy NZ Feed Cost Calculator. The assumptions are that a trigger point of 1,400kg/dm/ha grazing residual has been reached

and to maintain a certain production level additional feed must be added to the daily intake. The worksheet is based on contemporary values, at time of writing, of \$5kg/ms, \$240t for PKE, \$320 for Barley and \$340 for wheat on a delivered basis, fed to a herd with a stocking rate of 4 cows/ha.

The return on investment after feed purchase costs are as follows:

PKE \$30 Barley \$90 Wheat \$120/t

This Dairy NZ model shows that the return on investment available to a dairy farmer who needs to use supplementary feed to be three times that of PKE when feeding barley and four times when feeding wheat.

In my view, a smart strategy for Ruralco/ATS would be to promote locally produced feeds as a very viable alternative to PKE that offers an improvement in profitability for their dairy shareholders. Rather than lamenting a 3kg cap, we have the opportunity to demonstrate how grain could be fed alone or incorporated into the diet as a mix with PKE to increase total supplementary feeding, whilst still adhering to Fonterra's 3kg request and therefore assisting in maintaining the quality of their milk flows.

As growers of local grains, we produce a high quality, fully traceable feed that has an opportunity to improve the profitability of dairy herds through improved nutrition. This would deliver real value to both sides of ATS' shareholder base and I would encourage Ruralco/ATS to embrace this opportunity.

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New central base for fencing business

After 18 years of being based from home, Ed Body Fencing Limited now has its own independent yard in Ashburton. BY ANITA BODY

Ed and his family recently moved from their former Windermere Road property, and the lead-up to the shift provided an opportunity to look at how the business would move forward and where it would be based.

"We decided the time was right to create a separate depot for the business. With the majority of our customers located in the Mid Canterbury region, it made sense for us to be centrally based in Ashburton, so we began the search for a suitable site," said Ed.

"It took some time to find and secure it, but the Bryant Street property in Tinwald ticks all the boxes. It is well positioned for us to collect materials in town before heading out to a job, and it is a good location for our staff to come and go from."

The property is also nestled between other rural service providers, and being near the town boundary means staff can be on the road quickly when heading off each day. It has a large shed and a recently shingled yard which both provide great spaces for the upkeep of machinery. "We have additional plans to continue tidying and improving the site over the coming months, including the painting of the shed and the installation of some fencing around the yard."

The business has grown from small beginnings 18 years ago when Ed operated just one tractor and post driver. Today there are three tractors and post drivers in operation, and four full time staff along with a small pool of skilled casuals to draw on during busy times. The current team has been with the business for several years and they are all highly skilled and experienced fencers.

While much work over recent years has taken place on dairy farms or dairy support blocks, Ed Body Fencing can provide fencing solutions for any location. The team are experts when it comes to carrying out dairy conversions and ensuring farm fencing complements the individual needs of every farming operation, from lane ways to fencing off ponds and water ways. They also pride themselves on creating highly functional and effective cattle yards, which again are designed to meet the customer's particular needs.

In addition to dairy, sheep, beef cattle and deer fencing, the team also carry out residential

ABOVE: The Ed Body Fencing team from left, Ed Body, John Handy, Gregor Howe and Adam George at the new Bryant Street depot

fencing, both on farm and in town. This includes traditional post and rail fencing, the installation of shade cloth, and providing a variety of gates to suit a variety of requirements.

Specialised fencing solutions can also be sourced and erected by the team, including Durapanel coloured steel, Terranota (a high quality timber product) and a variety of security fencing options.

"We pride ourselves on providing a wide variety of fencing options, completed to a high standard, on time and on budget," said Ed. "It gives us a great deal of satisfaction to come up with the right fencing solution for our customers. Part of the service we provide is to make sure we use the best products for the job to ensure the customer gets a fence which will stand the test of time."

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Trip produces spectacular South Island farming scenery

It was hectares to the sheep rather than sheep to the hectare on a 4WD tour traversing 1,250 kilometres of South Island high country. BY KATE TAYLOR

From sea level at Blenheim to 2,000 metres above sea level on Mt Pisa near Cromwell, New Zealand Adventure's High Country Heritage Safari offers spectacular scenery.

Some of the views are visible from the highways and local roads, but instead of looking at the ranges and hills from afar, you're in amongst them and on top of them, says owner Robbie Crickett.

"This is big-sky country... wall to wall sky."

In a region troubled by drought, there were no complaints as light rain fell as the convoy left Blenheim. Ten 4WD vehicles carried 21 people from the starting point in Blenheim down to Cardrona via accommodation stops at Hanmer Springs, Methven, Tekapo, Omarama and Cromwell.

Former dairy farmers Robbie and Connie Crickett have owned NZ Adventures since 2013 having worked for the previous owners and running their own motorcycle tours since the late 1990s. They dropped the motorcycle options in 2014 to concentrate on the 4WD side, but would like to develop shorter trips under their High Country

Trails brand in the future. They use tracks on private stations and Department of Conservation reserves to offer stunning scenery and a first-hand glimpse of New Zealand's high country. It is one of several offering high country experiences – its itinerary for summer and spring includes five monthly 1,250km Marlborough to Central Otago trips as well as Mackenzie country, West Coast and southern routes.

A highlight for Robbie and Connie is watching strangers become friends over the tour.

"People and friendships are as important and memorable as the scenic views and the farms we drive through," says Robbie.

The trip caters for people with their own 4WD vehicles and preferably with some 4WD experience. Some of the places driven in the tour are not for the fainthearted in terms of sheer drops on the side of the tracks or long, steep inclines up to spectacular views and back down again.

Occasionally the tracks give the drivers extra to think about.

"Drivers are often learning about themselves and their vehicle and these tracks aren't always a walk in the park," says Robbie.

"...mostly it is experience. It is common sense and a bit of basic car control!"

The first day of the tour has the convoy traveling up the Waihopai Valley, through Tyntesfield and Blairich Stations and Middlehurst, into the Awatere Valley and slicing through part of the 180,787ha of Molesworth Station.

Tyntesfield was previously a 2,800ha sheep and beef farm with fattening country at the front and running into some very rugged country at the back. The Ensor family's vineyard enterprise was a timely addition to the business in 1995 with the first river flat paddock planted in grapes (now 100ha in grapes).

Tyntesfield was the first example of many on the tour of how land use has changed in the past 20 years and also of how stations are adapting, diversifying and creating their own brands. Tourism ventures and accommodation were evident on

farms throughout the tour, such as Canterbury's Lake Heron with walkers, mountain bikers, hunters and heli-skiers; Glenfalloch Station with a corporate conference venue and heli-skiing, Lake Benmore's Black Forest with accommodation and an agricultural helicopter business; and Northburn Station at Cromwell with vineyards and multisport events. Many properties open their gates to tour groups such as NZ Adventures.

Each vehicle is supplied with a hand-held radio. With an open view at the start of the convoy, Robbie tells stories of the properties and their owners, history, neighbours and farm production. He's a natural storyteller.

The radios are also an important part of the convoy in terms of making sure everyone is, indeed, on the road and in the convoy. There's a system for corners and intersections to make sure everyone continues to travel in the same direction, as well as for gates.

"We have a huge responsibility to make sure we leave gates as we find them," says Connie.

Fire risk is also high on the agenda. Experience with 4WD trips has taught Robbie hot brakes can spell bad news for long, dry grass so he's often on the radio reminding the drivers to be in their lowest gear on downhill tracks.

The value of water, both rainfall and man-made storage, is evident throughout the six-day trip. Robbie talks about the changes in land use in the past 30 years as a result of projects such as the Amuri Basin irrigation scheme. As the convoy moves down the South Island, modern land use change due to pivot irrigation contrasts with the tile drains, flood irrigation, border dykes and stone water races of yesteryear.

On Bill and Phil Paterson's McDonald Downs Station, west of Hawarden, the convoy is treated to its first 360-degree view on Blue Mountain before taking a public but isolated road over the 600m Okuku Pass into the Lees Valley.

Many of the original farms in the valley are now owned by corporates, but Richon Station is one of only two still in private ownership. It has been home to third-generation farmer Rob Stokes all his life. He and wife Julie farm 6,000 Perendale sheep, 1,400 Hereford cattle and 400 Red deer on 25,000ha, including an autumn grazing licence. A high vantage point amongst the tussocks at 580m shows the Pancake and Puketeraki Ranges in the foothills of the Southern Alps to the west and the start of the Canterbury Plains to the south east. Evidence of wetter seasons lies either side of a hunter's track being used by the convoy on a property that ranges from intensive land use up to sub-alpine conditions.

There's a light dusting of snow on Mt Hutt as the convoy makes its way up the Rakaia Valley to where the entrance to Glenfalloch Station marks the end of the public road. The wide river valley and the snow-capped mountains are iconic New Zealand views, made unique for each tour by the line-up of four-wheel-drive vehicles in the tussocks.

Glenfalloch has an annual rainfall of 1,600mm a year at the homestead, but that has been

declining the past few years, says owner Chas Todhunter. The 10,000ha property, which ranges in height from 500m at the river to 2,005m on Smite Peak, has 136ha of "good workable paddocks with pretty good dirt" that Chas says holds on longer when everything else is drying out. Flat land is used for winter cropping, including swedes, turnips and now fodder beet, which is mainly for the yearling heifers. The station winters 7500 stock units including 3,000 ewes (two thirds Perendales and one third Merino) and 300 Angus cows.

After driving towards the Arrowsmith Mountains, the convoy turns to run alongside them heading for Sugar Loaf and neighbouring Lake Heron. Owned by Philip and Anne Todhunter, Lake Heron Station has 450 Angus breeding cows plus replacements and 10,000 Merino sheep. Wool is contracted to the NZ Merino Company with most going to Icebreaker.

Winters can be harsh—about a metre of snow fell around the house two years ago.

"A lot of our summer is spent preparing for winter months," Anne says.

Snow isn't as frequent lower down on Orari Gorge Station, which has some of the oldest farm buildings in New Zealand dating back to 1859, or the neighbouring Blue Mountain Station, which takes the convoy back out to the highway near Fairlie.

Another iconic New Zealand view was in the convoy's sights for most of the fourth day—a snow-covered Aoraki Mt Cook. After crossing the delta of the Ohau, Pukaki and Tekapo Rivers, with vibrant purple lupins in almost every direction, the convoy follows a rabbit-proof fence, complete with chewed posts, through a Department of Conservation reserve on the boundary of Haldon Station. Different views of Lake Benmore come and go during the day from Black Forest Station and the back paddocks of Te Akatarawa Station, while the Hawkdun Range dominates the view to the south. The conversation, however, is dominated by the issue of tenure review. This process sees the permanent retirement of higher land in return for station owners being able to freehold other land (from long term pastoral leases). Some have finished negotiation—the Department of

Conservation's Oteake Conservation Park was formed as a result of the retirement of the back of Twinburn Station. This is where the convoy crosses the Omarama Saddle and moves from the Mackenzie Basin into Central Otago.

Turning to the south, it is the Old Man Range dominating the landscape and largely creating the barrier that creates the rain shadow and semi-arid continental climate of Central Otago.

From a tiny speck on the skyline of the north/south-running Dunstan Range, Leaning Rock still looks small as the convoy turns into Pinckney's Northburn Station from the Cromwell Gorge. But from there, every minute that passes shows a higher view of Lake Dunstan until the convoy can see both the Clyde Dam to the left and the Bannockburn arm of Lake Dunstan to the right. The track gets narrower and drops deeper as the track nears the now-looming Leaning Rock. The view is breath-taking.

"Every day I think the view can't get any better and we can't go any higher," remarks one passenger.

"But wait, there's more," replies Robbie, laughing. Leaning Rock, home to a communications repeater station, is at 1,647m and looks like a lunar landscape. The top of Mt Pisa the next day is 2,000m. There the view encompasses Mt Aspiring and parts of Lakes Hawea and Wanaka on one side and the entire Upper Clutha Valley down to Cromwell on the other.

Other last day highlights include historic goldfields sites on Bendigo Station and a loop road on Cluden Station on the Lindis Pass side of Tarras, which is owned and farmed by Lesley Purvis. Sons Sam and Ben are fifth generation farmers on the property.

The high country tour ends with the swapping of addresses and emails at the historic Cardrona Hotel, where the last word belongs to Robbie Crickett.

"We came together as strangers and leave as friends and it's the company of people such as yourselves that reminds us how lucky we are to be doing what we're doing."

OPPOSITE PAGE: A convoy of NZ Adventures vehicles on Glenfalloch Station with a spectacular view of the upper Rakaia Valley
BELOW: The NZ Adventures convoy snakes its way up a farm track on Orari Gorge Station



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Tech Tips

BECOME TECH-SAVVY WITH RURALCO'S TOP TECHNOLOGY TIPS

Astutely App

This edition we focus on helpful apps for parents keeping track of their busy children.

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



Screen time

Screen time is an app which monitors your child's internet usage. You'll receive a daily summary showing which apps and websites your child has used and how long for. You have the ability to block apps and approve apps that your child wants to download. Easily set time limits for specific apps, restrict bed time and school time for the devices and have access to pause your child's device, giving you full control. The basic version of this app is free but a cost of \$3.99/month to receive all the features of the premium membership.



Allowance & Chores Bot

The Allowance & Chores Bot allows you to easily keep track of the family's allowances and chores, without the hassle of misplacing paper and keeping track of allowances by hand. You have the ability to create a daily, weekly or monthly allowance for each child, which can either be a periodic allowance or based on completion of chores. You can also set chore reminders to appear on the lock screen of your child's individual device. This app will help you control your child's chores and allowances but also teach them the importance of earning, saving & spending money in a simple display.



Find my friends

The Find My Friends app allows you to easily locate friends and family. Once you have installed the app, invite friends to share their location with you by either choosing from your contacts or entering their email address. You have the ability to set up alarms that can notify you automatically when a friend or family member arrives at the airport, leaves school or arrives home safely. If at any time you don't want to be followed, you can hide your location with a single switch.



NCEA Pal

Connect with NZQA to transfer a record of learning from NCEA to your device. Once the app is installed, choose your school, NCEA level and chosen subjects. You'll have a simple timetable which lets you plan out 2 weeks, a smart student diary which will have key dates and events, school notices and best of all a credit counter. As you pass your assessments, add your results and the app will let you know how far off you are from passing or getting endorsed. This app helps students keep on top of their study and can be useful for parents keeping track of their busy children.

How to get the best coverage out of your WiFi

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While you would expect the WiFi with your broadband to be available to use in your standard sized house wherever you want, this is sometimes not the case.

Here are some easy (and often free) steps you can take to increase usable coverage.

Choose wisely where you place your router

Think of WiFi like water, the bulk of the signal doesn't run in straight lines but flows easiest where the entry way is clear. Placing a router in the study next to a cabled PC (the red dot in

the example) may mean little or no signal in the Master Bedroom—too many corners and walls. For better signal think central and imagine the invisible lines of light travelling through the house.



Not all walls are created equal

WiFi signal will pass easiest in a house with plasterboard walls rather than an older brick or double brick construction. Solid walls or tilt slab concrete will require a more creative solution such as WiFi repeaters to extend a network.

Objects in the way

Filing cabinets made of metal, mirrors and movable wardrobes can weaken or even totally stop WiFi from getting where you want to use it, if they sit in the path of signal. Lifting a router will remove obstacles like kitchen counters and even sofas which are often full of metal springs.

Other wireless interference

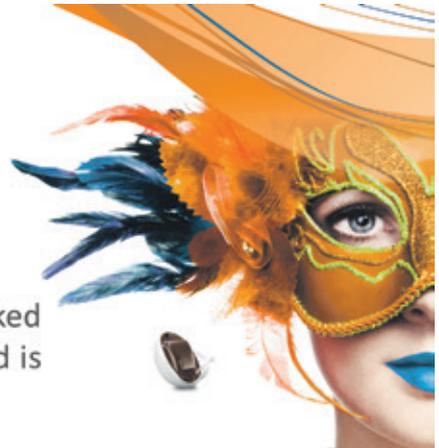
Most WiFi uses 2.4GHz signal but so do some other appliances - the wireless mouse, wireless printers, and even microwave ovens can run on this frequency and smart fridges are now coming WiFi ready. If you aren't using the wireless feature on these appliances disabling this in the settings should free up signal space for your router. Nearby routers might be on the same channel, and this could reduce your usable signal. Most routers have 14 channels to choose from so you can move away from the channel your neighbours are using.

While each manufacturer has different steps to change the channel, the process is usually the same. You will usually find this in the wireless advance settings - select a different channel from the one that is currently selected. Refer to your user guide for more information.

In the example above, you might change to channel 5 then click Apply/Save to allow these changes to take effect.

Wireless signal is sent two ways

In the end the problem might not be your router at all. The device you are receiving your signal on can also be the slow down point; the WiFi transmitter in a 3 year old cell phone will never be as strong as a PC with an external antenna. Keeping your devices up-to-date with the software updates will mean you have installed any enhancements to assist with WiFi.



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1. From left: Barbara Burst, Allison Fleming, Nancy Christie; 2. Sheena Clarke, Vicki Barlett & Tania Morris; 3. Janice Crawford & Julie Crawford; 4. Flynn & Madeline Harmer; 5. Mary-Anne Martin & Kathleen Vessey; 6. Kay Roulston & June Whittaker; 7. Stephanie & Joe Butchard; 8. Sheldon & Hayley Price

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