

Ballance Farm Environment Awards

2009 HORIZONS REGION WINNERS

ANDY & CLAIRE LAW
- GLENELG

SUPREME AWARD 2009



Andy and Claire Law farm with a broad reach that combines sustainability with a willingness to look outside established practise.

The award judges wrote: "Excellent use of land resource with no-till cropping of brassicas and new pasture to create high stock performance and integration of trees and pasture."

The couple live on Glenelg, a 230ha property in the Pukeokahu district east of Taihape with their children Ella (12), Millie (10), Peita (8) and Micah (3). They are part of a partnership with Andy's brother Rob which farms 8000 stock units on 566ha and operates a Cross Slot No-Till contracting business.

Sheep, cattle, deer and Kiko (meat) goats are all part of the operation that also has a strong agro-forestry underpinning. The Law brothers were pioneers of the Cross Slot machinery allowing no-till cropping and new pasture creation in the Taihape area. The award judges were impressed with Andy and Claire's approach. "They are passionate about what they are doing," noted the judges. "They have an overall enthusiasm for farming, the farming community and the rural way of life."

The current partnership evolved from an earlier one with Andy and Rob's parents and was established seven years ago after their father Peter died. Peter combined farming with hay contracting for many years so the foundation was in place for Andy and Rob's progression to another kind of contracting with the Cross Slot.

The partnership allows flexibility and lifestyle, with tractor driving shared on a 2-3 day rotation when in season. Andy is quick to point out their focus is pasture and crop production. Buying the drill wasn't about the machinery," he says. "We are more interested in what the drill can do, the results, than the machinery itself"

One of the developers of the Cross Slot, Bill Ritchie, lectured both the Law brothers during their time at Massey University. They cast their



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eye in the direction of the no-till concept while looking for a way to get their land into a 10 year cropping rotation. "We were only doing 10ha a year and we had 300ha of cultivatable land at that stage," explains Andy. Already aware of the negative effect cultivation has on topsoil, they opted for the Cross Slot "and to get away from cultivation altogether".

Andy concedes the no-till approach was a "huge shift" for many and is comfortable using their land for their own trials or in collaboration with research institutions. The judges commended the contribution made to stock and land performance on the Law farms, and others in their region, because of the Laws' considered approach to such changes.

Andy relates that some aspects of Cross Slot use have been quickly grasped, like the saving achieved by making just one pass over the ground. Others have yet to be taken up: "Sowing ryegrass and clover, we've found the best result comes from using about half the accepted commercial seed rates," explains Andy, "It's a huge saving, but no clients are prepared to do it, yet."

Andy possesses a keen awareness of the climatic and soil care considerations on the easy rolling hill country of Glenelg. With an altitude of 600m, all of the farm can receive snow in the winter. Some areas can be prone to erosion, but the property has been mapped out with a planting plan to counter this, and a feed pad has been installed. The breeding cows – which are the heaviest stock wintered – are put onto the pad to prevent soil damage once rainfall reaches the "trigger point" of 25mm in a day.

Trees play a major role on Glenelg. A 25ha area of mature

native bush has been placed under a QEII covenant. Earthstar mushrooms, usually found at low altitude in the Waikato and Coromandel regions, were discovered growing in the bush 3 years ago. They had not been found this far south or at this altitude before.

Andy and Claire take a long-term view of the trees they are planting, with an area planted almost every year on ground deemed unsuitable for pastoral farming. Their altitude means their species choices are "constrained a wee bit", but Andy enjoys the challenge of finding the right tree for the right spot.

He has learnt to stick broadly to cypress and pines on the colder southerly faces and likes ash eucalypts and cedars on the north facing land. They have a firm policy of planting only trees that have timber potential, but Andy candidly admits, "we've got some trees that Claire and I won't see logged and sold". However the farm has already provided timber to extend their house and plenty of post, batten and railing timber.

He does as much of the silviculture as he can himself. "It's quite peaceful, you can think while you're doing it." They get great pleasure out of watching their trees grow. "If you don't plant something now, you will never have big beautiful trees in the future," Andy muses. "A lot of people don't seem to make that connection."

Andy and Claire's community involvement has been significant and wide ranging, including school, church, community and farm groups. "Pukeokahu is a good little district where everyone helps out when needed," says Andy. "We are fortunate to live here."



JUDGES POINTS

- *Well-designed flexible farming enterprise with good mix of livestock enterprises*
- *An overall enthusiasm for farming, the farming community and the rural way of life*
- *Flexibility created through farming in partnership*
- *Use of land resource - no till cropping of brassicas and pasture*
- *Integration of trees and pasture.*
- *Understanding and knowledge of soils and nutrients, their relationship with livestock systems and their effects on waterways*
- *Use of feed pad to minimise soil damage in wet periods*
- *QEII covenant of native bush area and attractive woodlots*
- *The gradual approach to plantings to fit cash and time availability.*

KEITH AND KIM RILEY – AUROAM RIMA LIMITED



BALLANCE NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT AWARD LIC DAIRY FARM AWARD

The Rileys farm 340ha at the eastern entrance to the Manawatu Gorge with “vigour and enthusiasm for the farm, and their industry” according to the award judges.

The judges commended Keith and Kim’s ability to manage their 800 cow operation around the three waterways associated with the property; it is bounded in the west by the Manawatu River and two tributaries run through it from the north. The judges commented: “Very impressed with how you make effective use of the resources available to you while contending with the constraints of major water courses running through the farm, exposing it to flooding, silting and weed infestations.”

Keith concedes farming around the waterways presents challenges. “You get pretty good at watching the weather, knowing what kind is going to mean flooding for us,” he says. The small amount of riparian fencing they found when they came to the property eight years ago has been expanded and is now almost complete.

He’s aware the riverside silt soil is easily damaged, “so we’re pretty quick to stand stock off if we need to”. And an investment in improved nutrient management was made two years ago to have engineer Stewart Reid build a first-of-a-kind 100 day effluent storage area with its own stirrer. “We want to capture the nutrients in the soil, not have them running into the water,” explains Keith.

The Rileys own the farm, three kilometres west of Woodville, in an equity partnership with John and Margaret Young. The Riley/Young association began three years prior to this farm, when the Rileys sharemilked for the Youngs on their 180 cow farm at Toko. Keith and Kim’s dairy farming experience had commenced just two years before that, as milkers “learning where to put the cups” on a Stratford property, but they are no strangers to hard work.

Keith shore sheep for 11 years and built up his equity with a combination of stepping stone block purchase and land lease. It was taking in dairy grazers at their remote Whangamomona sheep and beef farm that provoked an interest in dairying,

and this, combined with a desire to expand education choices “nearer civilisation” for their children that prompted what Keith calls his “career change”.

When the Rileys moved to their current farm with daughters Brooke and Tyla (now 20+) and son Liam (now 17), they converted the property from drystock and cropping. Since then they have milked up to 1000 cows on the place, but have settled at 800, consistently achieving between 280-300,000kgsMS. The cows are milked through a 60-bale rotary shed with three workers rotating roles through the milking. Keith, Kim and two full-time staff operate what Keith describes as a simple system, with effective and efficient use of resource being their aim: “No inductions, 70 day mating and spring calving only”.

The property is predominantly flat. Being in the rain shadow of the Ruahine and Tararua ranges it usually receives a good even spread of rain. Wind is a consideration, “they don’t have all those turbines on our skyline for nothing,” points out Keith. For that reason as much existing shelter as possible was retained in the conversion, and as the existing pine belts mature they are being replaced with natives.

The Rileys have been leasing a 400ha sheep and beef block next door. The young stock is grazed either there or at a 40ha property the equity partnership owns two kilometres up the road. They appreciate being able to take care of all their own grazing and supplementary feed requirements.

- *Personal transition from sheep and cattle farming to the current dairy operation*
- *Impressive knowledge of natural resources and understanding of managing this farm, especially soils and water courses*
- *Investment in improvements – especially effluent management system*
- *Management of staff promoting successful partnerships with workers*
- *Acceptance and adoption of the Horizons’ One Plan.*
- *Striving and planning for the future to reduce impact on farming platform while enhancing per animal productivity.*





DAVID, MAUREEN AND CAMERON SMITH – HOLLY FARM

SILVER FERN FARMS LIVESTOCK FARM AWARD GALLAGHER INNOVATION AWARD

David Smith portrays Holly Farm as “just a family farm that goes forward in a sustainable direction”.

The award judges were not so low-key in their description, calling the 345ha (304ha effective) stud sheep business at Upper Tutaenui north of Marton a “very impressive operation”. The judges noted, “a strong focus on performance, efficiency, environmental awareness and sustainability”.

David’s father Bob bought the home block of Holly Farm in 1947 and established the Romney stud with bloodlines from his uncle’s respected Leedstown Stud. David and his wife Maureen took over in 1969 and have since added six neighbouring blocks to the original farm, most recently in December 2007. 1700 ewes, 60 breeding cows and 80 yearlings were wintered last year, and, for the first time, 120 dairy grazers took over much of the flat land. Contour runs from flat to steep hill, with roughly one third cultivatable. Height is a feature of the property, which ranges up to 381 metres. “We are higher and colder than most,” says David.

But this gives them distinct advantages, he believes. They run a farm stay in a macrocarpa cottage built from timber they milled themselves on the farm. “The views are wonderful,” says David, “the tourists love it, they can watch the sun rise through the Ruahines and set over the west coast sea.”

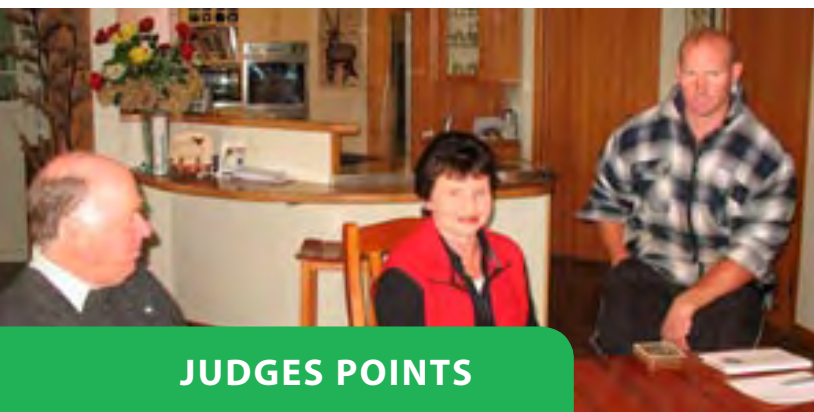
The farm’s position turns out the type of sheep they strive to

produce for clients who buy around 450 rams a year. 1200 Romney and 150 Suffolk recorded ewes are run on the property, which, with its climate and altitude, is a perfect testing ground for the survivability, longevity and low input traits David sees as essential for successful commercial sheep farming.

The Smiths have developed excellent relationships with research and industry groups. Currently they are part of Meat and Wool New Zealand’s Low Cost Easy Care sheep programme and a Lincoln lamb survival trial and David is a farmer mentor for AgResearch’s parasitology group. The award judges commended the Smith’s collaborative response to the challenge presented to the Romney by composite breeds, describing it as “innovative”. The judges wrote: “The Smith’s willingness to maintain detailed records of a range of characteristics is an enormous contribution to the sheep breeding industry and will also contribute to maintaining or increasing the value of the stud progeny to their clients.”

David and Maureen’s two adult sons still call the farm home. Howard is a design engineer with his own business in Wanganui and Cameron works on the farm. A renowned motorbike rider, Cameron has the distinction of holding number one ranking in two categories – enduro and cross-country. “It’s a pretty tough sport,” says his proud Dad, “sometimes on a Monday morning we give him an easy job!”

Two QEII covenants are in place over 3.2ha of mature bush and 13.3ha of regenerating bush. The latter is on the most recently purchased block, its retirement in keeping with their policy of either planting out or protecting steeper and erosion-prone land. “That way we can farm the rest of it a lot easier,” says David. A variety of trees, including pine and macrocarpa woodlots, provide shelter and shade on Holly Farm.



JUDGES POINTS

- Clear farm policy - To farm with low inputs and a high performance to develop a “clean green” product.”
- Goal of a low input stud is being achieved by no-drench, dag-scoring regime
- Meticulous records contributing to highly appropriate genetic lines
- Involved in ongoing research parasite work and lamb survival with AgResearch.
- Two bush remnants protected with QEII covenants
- Well planted with a variety of trees providing ample shade





DAVE AND JAN, TIM AND SIMONE, JAMES AND DEBBIE STEWART

PGG WRIGHTSON LAND AND LIFE AWARD



If you had to find a family farming enterprise that demonstrates co-operation and sustainable New Zealand farming you wouldn't go past the Stewart clan.

Happily, if you were a tourist or a film crew, you wouldn't have to venture far to find them either. The family run their stud sheep, dairy cow and luxury spa and boutique lodge business on 500ha of land just north of the Palmerston North city edge, on a ridge at Hiwinui.

The Stewarts have been in the district since 1886. James and Tim are fifth generation farmers on a property that is the result of successful inter-generational farming; ten farms have been absorbed into the Stewart holding in the past 100 years. The Stewart brothers are acutely aware of their family history, and have gladly taken on the shared mantle of land stewardship. They are proud of canny past decisions, like their great grandfather famously storing his wool for four years to ride out low prices during the Depression, and their parents having the pluck to buy four neighbouring farms during the big rural downturn in the 1980's.

"There's always been one son per generation, and this one there's two, so we are grateful to Mum and Dad for that, and we know we've got to work twice as hard to make sure there's enough for us all," says Tim.

Traditionally a sheep farm, with a Romney and Poll Dorset stud since 1954, Stewart Farm's entry into the dairy industry

has been gradual. James worked on a nearby dairy farm for two years after leaving school but in 1993, when he was just 20, established himself sharemilking 100 cows for his parents using a restored 10-aside shed on a recently purchased property. Another adjoining farm purchase in 1999 saw the "logical next step" to build a 36-aside shed and raise the cow numbers.

This 270 cow operation, run "as a kind of equity partnership within our family" by James and Debbie, grew to 500 cows within 4 years. In 2007 the numbers grew to the current 640 cows when a separate milking operation was established for 150 of the youngest cows.

The award judges recognised the family's successful synergy, writing of the "well set up family structure" that "meets the needs and aspirations of all the family members". The judges also noted: "Passion for the business is evident and to be highly commended." Entering these awards has been an enriching experience for all six members of the family partnership, relates James. It has prompted them to realise farming for the future is an inbuilt direction for them, and community commitment and involvement is "part of the family culture". "We have all got our own roles but we all share the farm and get on really well," says James. "We are really proud to be each other's family."

Contour planting mainly natives around dams and in gullies has been a family commitment, led by Dave's passion, for the past 20 years. Jan's drive has established the hospitality arm of the operation. Tim, who has been on the farm since he left school, helps Dave with the sheep but also assists the dairy unit by rearing calves and relief milking and does all of the tractor work. James and Debbie and Tim and Simone have three children each – Sam (8), Robbie (7), Olivia (4) and Levi (7), Lily (4), Matlock (1).



JUDGES POINTS

- *Business structure is excellent with a number of companies and trusts*
- *Succession obvious and family commitment and involvement excellent*
- *The family are all involved in the community via industry, school and church*
- *Work to ensure their farm fits into a community of lifestyle block owners.*
- *Tourism operation is a window to the farm and to the agricultural industry*
- *Effluent system and feed pad is well planned and utilised*
- *A keen interest in planting areas that are under-utilised with emphasis on natives*



MACKINTOSH GROUP LIMITED - DUNKELD

HILL LABORATORIES HARVEST AWARD



Dunkeld is operated with a clear view of the property's place in the Mackintosh family's life - past, present and future.

These days a 223ha cropping and finishing unit, a base for a grain contracting concern and free range chicken business, Dunkeld, in the Fordell district, was part of the original block leased and later purchased by Inverness immigrant Duncan Mackintosh in the late 1800's.

Duncan's great-great grandson, nine-month-old Duncan junior, lives on the property with his parents Paul and Anna and brother Ben (3). Paul's parents Bruce and Helen are in the farm's original homestead, which was carted in four pieces by bullock to its position 4.5kms inland, south of Wanganui off what is now SH3.

The Mackintosh family's motivation to grow and keep their family legacy secure is reflected in their diverse interests and the sustainable approach they strive for in operating their business. Commented the award judges: "Diversity of their business is well thought out and has helped weather changes."

The Mackintoshes have structured for the future, installing silos, driers and a certified weighbridge in 1982, buying a 690ha hill country breeding property 'Aramaire' north west of Wanganui in 1993, and taking on the lease of a nearby 60ha block in 2005. In 2007 Bruce and Helen instigated their plan

to use a company structure to enable succession. Mackintosh Group Limited shares are half-owned by Bruce and Helen and a quarter each by Paul and Anna and Paul's sister Ruth and her husband Simon. Formal operational meetings with an agenda are held every six weeks with Paul, Anna, Bruce, farm consultant John Stantiall and Aramaire manager Mike Black in attendance. Ruth and Simon, who live in the US, are involved in big-picture decision-making

"To be able to continue the work of generations before you is very fulfilling," says Paul Mackintosh. "Farming is becoming more complicated and we are conscious we have to work better and become more efficient in what we do all the time, we don't want to be the ones to drop the ball!"

Bruce and his brother Neil established the broiler chicken sheds in 1973. In 2000 these were converted to a free-range operation that today produces 24,000 birds six times a year. The shavings and manure cleared from the shed after each batch matures amounts to around 220 tonne a year that is distributed onto the Dunkeld permanent pasture using a muck spreader. Such specific knowledge of weights is a valued advantage of having a weighbridge on the property explains Paul. Logging and stock trucks also use the weighbridge providing a useful extra income source.

The growth response to the application of the chicken organic matter is "massive," Paul says. "We test annually and the results are clearly showing the soil's microbial health. We can safely crop for five years without deteriorating the soil."

Contour on Dunkeld and the nearby lease block is flat to easy rolling. A six-month winter grass, six-month crop regime is in place, with a rotation of five years grass, five years grain. Barley and wheat is grown between October and March and winter grass between April and September. Dunkeld produces its own annual grass seed. Around 8000 lambs are finished annually. Soil damage is avoided by selling all May-June purchased weaners by the following May.



JUDGES POINTS

- *Whole operation demonstrates a willingness to try new ideas*
- *Excellent understanding of soil moisture issues pertaining to cropping of barley and wheat and robust pasture management on heavy soils.*
- *Involved with FAR and crop trialing and discussion group for local grain growers - an example of their innovation and leadership in the community.*
- *Diversity of business including chicken rearing enterprise.*
- *Community contribution – especially YFC*



DAN STEELE
– WHAKAHORO FARM AND BLUE DUCK LODGES

**NEW ZEALAND FARM ENVIRONMENT AWARD
TRUST HABITAT IMPROVEMENT AWARD**

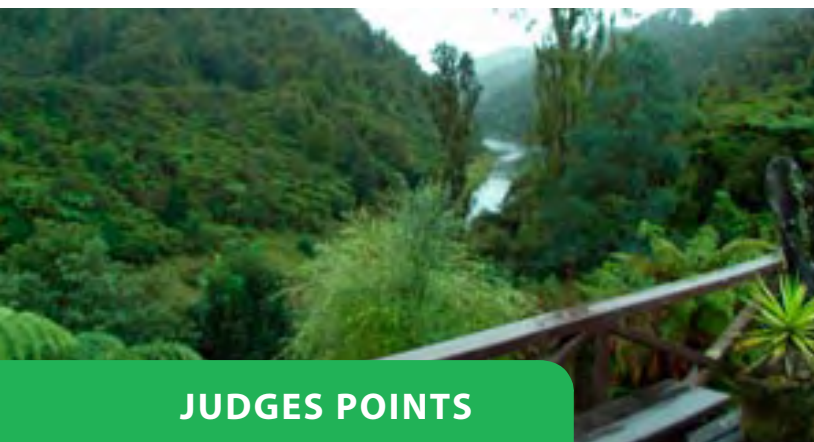


The window on the central North Island corner of the world that's Dan Steele's 'watch' just keeps getting bigger.

Dan welcomes scrutiny; he's aware of the importance of wide appreciation of the beauty and the fragility of the natural resource he takes responsibility for.

The 1300ha of land on which Dan and his business partner, Hamilton doctor, Luk Chin run their farming and eco-tourism business borders the northern edge of the Whanganui National Park, an hour west of Mt Ruapehu. It takes in the infamous 'Bridge to Nowhere' farming settlement, which the NZ Government began in 1917 and abandoned in 1942. The property harbours an intriguing social history as well as being a part of a habitat for a huge range of native flora and fauna.

Dan, Luk and their business were successful finalists in these awards last year. Whilst their farming enterprise remains, in Dan's words, "simple" – 3500su of sheep and cattle – the growth in the other facets of the business continues. Beehives are being placed by helicopter into the dense manuka scrub on the property for a joint venture in valuable manuka honey harvesting, and their Blue Duck Lodge has expanded to accommodate 54 people with facilities for events like corporate functions and weddings. A riverside one hectare base for a former canoe hire business has been purchased and now serves as a focal point for all the activities in the valley.



JUDGES POINTS

- *Incredible enthusiasm and vision, and the way he is marrying together farm business, environmental objectives and tourism experiences.*
- *Exemplified by buying in to the Kia Wharite project*
- *Recognising the conflict between being a tourism operator and a farmer – including allocation of time and cash resources between the two.*
- *A long list of achievements over the intervening year since the last awards*

Dan's excited about the exposure because of what it means for the conservation cause, and for the country. The link is clear, he believes, between selling New Zealand's products like meat, wool and tourism, and environmental consideration. "I believe that conservation is the biggest thing that we can do for New Zealand business," he says. His enthusiastic buy-in to the Kia Wharite environmental management programme established earlier this year is for the same reason.

Kia Wharite is a joint project between the Department of Conservation, Horizons Regional Council, iwi and supportive landowners and is the biggest of it's kind in the country. It covers around 180,000ha, taking in the Whanganui National Park and private land. Dan welcomes the increase in scale it will bring to the predator control, conservation and education work undertaken by the Blue Duck Lodge team of himself and three full-time staff, the guests who come to stay as part of Dan's 'eco-warrior' programme and a range of groups including University of Waikato researchers.

"It means we are able to expand our little conservation project exponentially through the national park," he says. "Where I have been looking after 10 pairs of Whio (rare Blue Duck) and a few kiwis, now what we are doing is for the biggest population of Whio in the country, and one of the largest populations of naturally living kiwis."

It's a war, says Dan, "that's best fought by joining hands". He is inspired by his surroundings and "almost daily" confirmation by passionate guests, and he's committed to "changing the world, in my little corner of it".



JOHN AND DIANA DERMER – WAIPIKO FARM

HORIZONS REGIONAL COUNCIL AWARD (for the integration of trees)



In 35 years farming his Cheltenham family property, John Dermer has developed a self-described “simple” philosophy: “If your land is steep and eroding, plant the bad bits. If it is low lying and wet, build dams and enjoy the bird life that will thank you for it.”

John and his wife Diana farm 186ha (145ha effective) of flat to easy rolling country north of Feilding, predominantly livestock finishing with a varying area of cropping annually to finance their regrassing programme. John’s grandfather bought Waipiko in 1909. When John took over in 1974 there were mature trees on the farm, but “serious planting” began in 1982 when John established the first woodlot of pine.

He says his contact in those early days with the Farm Forestry Association – he’s now on the national executive – had a significant impact, affording access to knowledge and inspiration from others. “We’ve made a lot of single decisions but now I can see they added up, and we’re really proud of what we’ve achieved here,” says John.

The award judges agreed, noting that trees were not the only feature of the property. Two wetlands had also been protected and all waterways fenced. They wrote: “Designed and developed over many years to take account

of the effects of streams and gullies, soil characteristics, the owners’ intense interest in trees and the desire to continue farming into the future.”

Waipiko Farm features a range of natives and exotics species. The exotics are maintained to high silviculture standards, ensuring a quality timber will be produced when they are milled. “We are lucky the three streams, now fenced and planted, run north to south and form great shelter belts, as well as areas to grow quality timber.” John says.



JUDGES POINTS

- *Farm effectively developed over many years around streams and gullies and soil characteristics.*
- *Intense interest in trees and the desire to continue farming into the future.*
- *Lifelong work effort that has gone into establishing and beautifying the property.*
- *The system is resilient to adverse and unexpected weather*
- *Two wetlands have been developed, fenced and planted.*
- *Active member of local Farm Forestry group*

NEED MORE INFORMATION...

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