



**Ballance**  
**Farm Environment Awards®**  
*Promoting Sustainable Profitable Farming*

# 2012 GREATER WELLINGTON

Derek and Christine Daniell, and Simon Buckley (Manager)  
 'Wairere Station' – Derek Daniell Trust

## SUPREME AWARD WINNERS

**ALSO WINNERS OF:**  
**BEEF + LAMB NEW ZEALAND LIVESTOCK FARM AWARD**



The award judges described Wairere, a 1206ha property north east of Masterton, as “a sustainable, innovative and financially sound farming operation”.

This mainly medium to steeper hill country property in the Bideford district carries approximately 12,500 su of sheep and beef and is the base for an internationally recognised Romney

sheep stud. The judges noted in their feedback report: “Strong consideration has always been given to conservation practices alongside the ability to be a leading entrepreneur of sheep genetics in New Zealand.”

Derek took charge of the property in 1984 after gaining a commerce degree from Victoria, a post-graduate diploma in agricultural science from Lincoln, a world view from travelling overseas and practical farming experience working alongside his father John, who tragically died in an accident on the farm in 1983.

Wairere has an effective farming area of 1070ha and altitude ranges between 200m and 532m asl. A number of QEII covenants, currently totalling 60ha of bush, headlands and wetland, are in place and the farm boasts an increasing number of native birds and a resident native bat population.

Derek’s grandfather Len purchased the farm in 1913 from John Rutherford, the original settler who began “carving the farm out of the bush” in 1864. Len went off to fight in WW I for four years and came back to, as Derek describes, a place of “second class hill country fast reverting to manuka”.

By 1926 Len had decided that the aerial application of fertiliser could be “the answer”, so he wrote to Henry Ford, suggesting



Ballance Farm Environment Awards National Sponsors

Regional Partner



Derek and Chris Daniell, (manager) Simon Buckley  
'Wairere Station' – Derek Daniell Trust

## SUPREME AWARD WINNERS (continued)



the car magnate make a plane for that purpose! “Even today, aerial topdressing is the only thing that stands between us farming successfully, or the place reverting,” says Derek with typical acuity.

Derek’s grandfather kept Wairere, but moved to a small block of land closer to Masterton in 1928. He milked cows and started the Akoura Romney stud, and it was from this base that John, Derek’s father, began Wairere Stud. John was a young stud stock agent based in Masterton, but the Korean wool boom and the establishment of aerial topdressing meant that taking on the Wairere property became viable.

A pivotal experience for Derek as a boy in the mid 1960s was at a ram sale where a then world record price of 5600 guineas was paid for a ram. “Dad went on to buy a ram for 150 guineas.

He liked it because it had a clear head, and it was taller than the majority on offer. But six months later the sheep had a woolly head, it had been plucked for the sale!” Integrity as a breeder has been a guide for Derek ever since.

After his disappointing ram purchase experience John took his top 500 commercial five-year-old ewes at Wairere and mated them to what he considered the best three Akoura sires, and so the progress of Wairere Stud began in earnest. By the time Derek took over the property about 860 rams a year were being sold. Within six years that figure was 1500 a year; a growing reputation and full-page colour advertisements in farming publications “helped change the perception of us from local breeders to national suppliers of top rams”.

Derek undertook a Nuffield scholarship in 1991 “which opened my eyes further”. In 1992 he entered Wairere into a joint venture with an Otago property and in 1995 with a King Country property. Composite sires are now also produced and there are joint ventures in Australia, the UK and Chile. Around 4000 rams are sold annually, approximately 2700 off Wairere.

Breeding involves nine farms in the Wairarapa and Manawatu. “We are working with around 19,400 ewes,” explains Derek. “We start with big numbers and we are culling four out of five across the board to make sure we get the quality we are seeking.” Noted the judges: “This is a complex farming system requiring a relatively large staff and high standards of organisation and stockmanship.”

Including Derek there are nine staff members. Key to Wairere’s day-to-day operation is Simon Buckley, who has been there for 25 years and manager for 18. Derek and Chris have three adult children - Jess, Josh and Marcus.



### JUDGES’ COMMENTS

- Stud breeding ram production, supported by commercial sheep and beef production.
- Wairere enjoys an international reputation for producing rams of the highest quality.
- Exceptional revenue from multiple sources; business has diverse income base with equity partnerships and off-farm investment.
- Significant focus on biodiversity; QEII covenants on 60ha.

## Stewart and Ally Weatherstone 'Rotopai Farms Ltd'

### LIC DAIRY FARM AWARD WATERFORCE INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT AWARD

Rotopai is a 2000 cow South Wairarapa dairy operation the award judges praised for "exceptional management skills and structure".



Weatherstones began dairying in the Tuhitarata district in 1931, milking 60 cows on a 42ha property they named Rotopai. Four generations on Stewart Weatherstone is at the helm and Rotopai Farms Ltd spans 950ha in one block in the district and 200ha 25km away.

The milking platform is 460ha; in a remarkable feat of organisation the farm's Jersey cows are all milked through one 60-bale rotary cowshed. There are three herds. Two, sized approximately 750 and 550 cows respectively, are milked once a day. The third herd of approximately 700 cows is located nearest the shed and milked twice a day.

There are 10 full-time staff but despite the operation's size the judges described Rotopai as "a great example of a family unit", noting the active involvement of Stewart's wife Ally and parents Bryan and Sherry, all shareholders in the business. Commented the judges: "Top drawer personal factor with excellent labour relationships."

Breakfast is provided at the milking shed every morning and,

during spring, lunch is also available to staff. Stewart values the relationship they have with Taratahi Agricultural Training Centre; seven of their current staff members are ex-students and Stewart and Bryan are proud that they can only recall advertising once for a worker. "The rest have come to us by word of mouth," says Stewart.

Staff rosters are carefully managed to ensure sufficient time off and all staff rotate through all types of work. "We don't employ milkers," stresses Stewart, "we employ farmers." During morning milkings he makes a point of being easily accessible and often finds himself at 'cups off' in the shed, a place he refers to as "my office". "Availability is the key," he says. "With all we've got going on, there's no point being at the other end of the farm when someone's trying to find you."

With the exception of 100ha of medium hill, their land is flat. The Ruamahunga River skirts the western boundary and the Haurangi State Forest the eastern boundary of the home block. Winds are a factor to be considered in farming this area says Stewart, especially biting spring southerlies and drying summer 'norwesters'.

Irrigation covers 295ha. 85ha is covered by a pod system, 100ha by guns and 110ha by centre pivots. The judges noted shelter was valued, writing, "a feature of the property has been the retention of shelter belts despite the establishment of centre pivot irrigation". Stewart says succinctly: "No point in having irrigation if you've got no shelter for your stock."

Stewart and Ally have three children, Isla (6) Edward (4) and baby Vienna. The couple are committed to community involvement that currently includes their local playgroup, school and rugby club.



### JUDGES' COMMENTS

- Superb people skills ensure great dynamics with both staff and intergenerational within family.
- Large scale semi self-contained dairy unit; excellent production; bridging over waterways; very aware of soil structure preservation.
- Very professional business model with exceptional management skills and structure.
- Feature of the property is retention of shelter belts despite establishment of centre pivot irrigation.

Guy Didsbury (primary shareholder/manager), Tony and Gaye Didsbury, and Duncan Didsbury - 'Pirinoa Station Ltd'

## BALLANCE AGRI-NUTRIENTS: NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT AWARD PGG WRIGHTSON LAND AND LIFE AWARD



The Didsbury family's deep commitment to and connection with this 1800ha (1620ha effective) property undoubtedly shapes their approach to the land and the business of farming it.

The award judges commented in their feedback report: "Pirinoa Station is a fine example of a traditional Wairarapa sheep and beef property with a great amount of history to complement the operation, which the Didsburys show great pride in."

The eldest of Tony and Gaye's four sons, Guy is the fifth generation of his family to farm the property situated south of Martinborough, seven kilometres from the coast and Palliser Bay. Guy's forebears purchased the property in 1877. Guy came home to the farm in 1998 after time at Massey University, shepherding, shearing and travelling. He now lives there with his wife Andrea and their children Jono (5), Lucy (3) and Heidi (1).

The award judges commended the Didsbury family's "careful and skilfully implemented succession plan" which, when finalised in 2009, secured the future of the station for another generation.

Decisions around the succession plan were shaped by the desire of Tony and Gaye to "settle all their sons equally, without having to split up Pirinoa" says Guy.

"Keeping Pirinoa intact was important to all of us," says Guy. "Our grandfather did it, buying his brother out despite all the advice at the time of it being impossible. And Dad bought his sisters out."

An inherent knowledge of the property's strengths and limitations guides the farming operation that has shifted from breeding and fattening to lamb and cattle finishing, with a cropping rotation aiding quality pasture renewal. A variety of crops are grown, depending on season and demand. Cropping includes winter wheat, spring barley and peas, and, for lamb finishing, chicory and rape.

Between 20-30,000 lambs and approximately 1200 cattle are finished annually. There are also 250 breeding cows. Up to 1200 cattle are wintered on a pad, minimising soil and pasture damage and allowing the station to avoid competing for trading cattle when demand is higher in the spring. For the past year Guy has been developing a 'paddock to plate' branding 'Pirinoa Station' for their lamb meat. Currently accounting for around 10 percent of their lamb kill, this figure is growing as restaurants, catering firms and a wholesale outlet increase their use of the product.

Contour and soil type on Pirinoa is divided approximately 400ha steep, 300ha rolling, 150ha gravelly-riverbed and the balance flat, alluvial. Noted the judges: "They have identified all soil types and arranged their farming practises around these." Shelter, much of it established in the past thirty years, is vital says Guy. 165ha of forestry is spread across the station, ranging in age from mature to just-planted. There are numerous native bush areas fenced, including two significant areas which have been QE II covenanted.



### JUDGES' COMMENTS

- In the family since 1877, Guy is fifth generation on this land; careful and skilfully implemented succession plan a highlight.
- Pirinoa Station brand for lamb meat an exciting and ambitious undertaking; target to mainly winter finish up to 30,000 lambs a year.
- Exceptional ability to retain staff; long history and ongoing record of community and industry commitment.
- Soil tested annually; nutrient budgeting; excellent awareness of individual land use requirements from regrassing to lamb fattening.

Tim and Belinda White  
'Upperwood Ltd'

## MASSEY UNIVERSITY DISCOVERY AWARD



The Whites run what they term “a traditional breeding, finishing and grazing” operation on their 457ha (440ha effective) property at Matahiwi, in the foothills of the Tararuas west of Masterton.

But, the award judges pointed out, the Whites were to be commended for their “ability to cultivate an idea into a profitable system” and “making some very good land purchases that complement each other in terms of aspect, contour and size which in turn has made the Upperwood property an excellent farming operation”.

Until three years ago, Tim was farming in partnership with his brother Richard, who was on their family farm just up the road. Tim was working full-time in his property valuation/farm consultancy business but when the brothers made the decision that they had the stability to farm independently, Tim came

home to farm, and works from home for his business. The couple have two daughters, Grace (12) and Maggie (10).

Last year they wintered 2000 ewes, 600 hoggets (lambled) and they grazed 500 hoggets. Typically they also graze 150 dairy heifers or weaner bulls on contract and have up to 150 of their own trading heifers. Although, says Tim, “we keep our cattle numbers flexible, the grazing stock always get priority”.

Tim’s professional expertise around the business of farming is evident in his efforts to “develop extra income stream that adds to the whole farm package”. The judges were impressed with the system he has in place lambing some of the flock three times in two years, allowing the production of lambs on season shoulders, when return is highest.

Ten years ago Dorper bloodlines were introduced to the Upperwood flock for a high yielding carcass and easy-care around wool and dags. But Tim was also aware the Dorper trait extended the ewes breeding season so he began identifying for the out-of-season lambing trait.

This season 66 percent of the flock was in this bracket. “In the same month we can be putting out the ram, docking and weaning,” says Tim. “It sounds complicated but it’s not. The only extra work and cost is scanning and vaccination, and marginally more grass required, but this is more than balanced out by the higher return we get for the lambs, and the extra lambs we get.” Under this system, a 200 percent lambing figure is realistically achievable, without the intensive input that would usually be expected to reach this figure, says Tim.

Noted the judges: “Tim and Belinda have a high awareness of the importance of wetlands and bush areas. The farm was in excellent condition both in terms of aesthetics and performance and is something they should be extremely proud of.”



## JUDGES' COMMENTS

- Three lambings in two years allows the business to take advantage of favourable lamb prices.
- Tim’s consultancy expertise gives advantage in budgeting, profit and cost analysis across all areas of farming system.
- Sound understanding of nutrient budget, used as a tool to ensure best management practise.
- Stock health and pasture quality a real credit, this is reinforced in property’s production.

Alan and Dot Bissett  
'Wee Red Barn'

## HILL LABORATORIES HARVEST AWARD

The progression of the Bissetts from lifestyle block category winners in 2009 to the main section of these awards this year is a clear indicator of the success of the Wee Red Barn.



The award judges pointed to the couple's "passion and enthusiasm" as driving success factors in this intense horticultural operation based around the Bissetts UK-farm-shop-styled retail outlet on their 3.3ha Opaki property. They supplement their growing area with leases on three other blocks totalling 4.5ha.

"They truly love what they do," noted the judges, "and plant health was outstanding. Incredible to think that so much produce can come off such a small area. They have been very innovative with their shop and also stock Scottish memorabilia which sells well, especially as now they are a recognised destination."

The Bissetts produce strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, boysenberries, gooseberries, red and blackcurrants, potatoes, tomatoes, leeks, beans, garlic, free range eggs, jam made from frozen surplus berries, olive oil and five lines of wine made from their own grapes. 10 sows also live on the property, a handy outlet for the shop and production waste; about 200 weaner piglets are sold annually.

Alan and Dot have cultivated a hearty community profile with an off-site presence at Wairapa markets, fairs and

events and on Facebook and, at their Wee Red Barn on SH2 just north of Masterton, a warm welcome to casual and regular customers, schools and bus tour groups for farm tours, and wedding parties using the venue for photos.

They particularly enjoy their regular contact with Opaki School. The school's food scraps are saved for the pigs, and children visit weekly in term time to undertake jobs ranging from planting to helping in the shop. Last year the potatoes the children planted produced 500kgs that were sold for the school's eco group fund. "They have such a good time and we love to see the buzz of 'grow it, sell it' that they get," says Alan.

Alan is Scottish and Dot a New Zealander. Both had extensive experience in 'soft fruit' production and management when they met in Scotland while working on neighbouring strawberry farms. This business, which the Bissetts have established since they purchased the property in 2007, now employs up to 20 people seasonally. Alan's adult daughters, Heather and Kim, are key staff members, dividing their time between New Zealand and Scotland each year.

Alan works part-time outside the business for Haygrove Tunnels, a UK firm marketing Voen tunnel systems for crops. The Bissetts have been successfully growing strawberries using the company's 'table top' method for several years, avoiding the need to rotate the crop in the ground, reducing chemical use and making picking less labour intensive. They also used Voen covering for raspberries this season, picking three times more than in previous years with only marginally more plants.



## JUDGES' COMMENTS

- *Pride in growing and selling direct to customer through UK farm shop retail model; specialise in strawberries and raspberries.*
- *Astute local market analysis, supplying product when and where needed; hawkers license allows multiple selling locations.*
- *Alan and Dot passionate and show amazing ability to multi-task in a complex business.*
- *Intellectual property around growing specialist crops an integral component of business success.*

Peter and Bridget Evans  
'Awatiritiri'

## GWRC AKURA CONSERVATION CENTRE LIFESTYLE FARM/SMALL BLOCK AWARD

A love of trees and a clear vision for their 'mass effect' has enabled the Evans' to lead a transformation of their area, west of Masterton.



When the couple purchased 10ha of bare land 25 years ago they were the only 'lifestyle blockers' on their road. "The whole of this road used to be quite desolate," recalls Peter. "It was stony and bare and the wind whipped up it. Now, with all the planting we have done, and everybody around us also planting, the whole climate and outlook has changed."

The award judges commented: "A property showing great results after many years of tree planting. Peter has had a vision of large trees in groups and avenues, which has become fact. A most appealing property."

Native bird activity has risen markedly in recent years, the birds encouraged down from Mt Holdsworth by a corridor of trees, cover and food source. Two years ago Peter and Bridget sold 16ha of their land, but building covenants protect their outlook, and the significant trees they've planted.

Awatiritiri consists of three river terraces, with the Waingawa River on one boundary. The Evans' moved their home, an 1860s heart Totara homestead from Puketiriri at Ngamu, onto the property.

## FINALIST

Angus and Davina Thomson  
'Urlar Estate'

At Urlar, a 43ha Gladstone vineyard and winery, the award judges found "a strong focus on the environment and preserving the land for future generations to enjoy".



Established on flat, free draining soils south east of Masterton in 2004 the growing area of the vineyard covers 30ha. 85 percent of the area is split equally between pinot noir and sauvignon blanc plantings with the balance pinot gris and riesling. The grapes are grown using biodynamic principles, the wine produced is recognised as premium and 95 percent of the 15,500 cases produced is exported to 20 countries.

The judges recognised what had been achieved in the four years since the Urlar brand was established. They commented: "Urlar has developed their brand and sales in a very difficult marketing environment for wines and this is a credit to the business. A strong focus on financial management is a real strength of the business."

The judges commended the long-term relationship of Angus and winemaker Guy McMaster and their collective commitment to the organic operation, their soils and the wider environment, the Wairarapa wine industry and their community. Angus and Davina have three children; Rory (12) Safi (11) Hamish (6) and "one on the way".

## THE AWARDS

The Ballance Farm Environment Awards are designed to encourage farmers to support and adopt sustainable farming practices. The awards are now held in Northland, Waikato, Bay of Plenty, East Coast, Manawatu/Whanganui, Wellington, Canterbury, Southland and Otago. This is their eleventh year in the Greater Wellington region.

## THE AIM

The aim of the Ballance Farm Environment Awards is to recognise farmers who pursue good environmental practices. When farmers enter the awards, a team of assessors visit the farm and discuss the entire farming operation. The awards are designed to be a positive experience for everyone, an exchange of information and ideas, plus a chance for farmers to also get information and advice from the various assessing representatives.

## UPCOMING EVENT

A Field Day will be held at the 2012 Supreme Winner's property on Wednesday the 16th of May. More details to be confirmed once the structure of the day has been planned with the Supreme Winner.

**Name:** Derek and Christine Daniell

**Time:** To be confirmed.

**Where:** Wairere Road, Bideford, RD6, Masterton

For more information contact Regional Co-ordinator Angeline Colquhoun on (06) 378 8008 or [wellington@bfea.org.nz](mailto:wellington@bfea.org.nz).

## THANK YOU

Thank you to preliminary and finals judging teams, and members of the Greater Wellington BFEA management committee. Entries for the 2013 Ballance Farm Environment Awards open on the 1st of August. Contact the Regional Co-ordinator on (06) 378 8008 or [wellington@bfea.org.nz](mailto:wellington@bfea.org.nz).