



Ballance Farm Environment Awards

Promoting Sustainable Profitable Farming

PURIRI FARM, WHAKATANE
CHRIS AND ANTOINETTE MOUNFORT

2008 SUPREME AWARD WINNERS

Also winners of the PPCS Livestock Award and the Environment Bay of Plenty Environmental Award.

Few thought the newly weds, in their early 20s with a baby on the way, would make a go of farming on a hilly, scrub covered block of land at Pikowai.

Forty-one years on Chris and Antoinette Mountfort have more than proved their critics wrong and are the proud owners of one of the most attractive, sustainable and productive farms in the Whakatane district.

Back in the late 1960s the Rural Bank wouldn't lend them money and as 'townies' they didn't qualify for a ballot farm. However, farming was all Chris had ever wanted to do.

In 1966 they bought 126.26 ha (312 acres) in Herepuru Rd near Pikowai just north of Matata.

"There was no house so we lived in the shearer's cottage on a neighbour's farm for the first two years." At the time Antoinette was just 23 and Chris 24.

Chris went shearing to help cover the costs of employing contractors for scrub cutting and fencing.

Two years after buying the first block, they bought a neighbouring 145.68 ha (360 acres) which included a house. They've been through the highs and lows of farming but one in particular almost led to the sale of the property.

"One season, after sending 200 ewes to the works, we received a bill for the stock as they supposedly were not worth enough to cover cartage and slaughter costs. Forestry companies were buying up land for pines and approached us," said Chris. When one company said it wouldn't pay for the areas of native bush the Mountforts had protected and planted, or allow them to keep the house.

Instead we went into partnership with Tasman on a block of 33 hectares of pines which they managed at the

northern end of the farm," said Chris.

The couple have planted vulnerable gullies, re-routed farm tracks and protected 40 ha of native bush through the Queen Elizabeth II Trust. As well as native trees, flaxes and pines, they have also planted 1000 blackwood trees and retired areas around springs and streams which feed the Mimiha Stream which in turn flows into the sea at Pikowai.

The plantings may have reduced grazing land but the Mountforts said the benefits of erosion control and additional shelter for stock, plus the improved appearance of the farm and increased bird life more than compensate.

Chris runs 800 ewes with a lambing rate of 145 to 150 percent. The farm runs 100 breeding cows with heifers sold at auction and steers carried on for local market sales. "We never over-stock the farm but can carry up to 400 head of cattle."

JUDGES POINTS

- *Commitment to a policy of animal health and performance rather than simply stock units per hectare*
- *The value and pride you have for a rural lifestyle and community*
- *The ongoing commitment to a programme of planting, environment enhancement and protection in conjunction with Environment Bay of Plenty*
- *A potentially fragile soil type that has been well cared for with appropriate pasture cultivators and good stock management*



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WHAKATANE DAVID AND MARGARET WRIGHT

LIC DAIRY FARM AWARD

It may not be one of the highest producing dairy farms in the district but Margaret and David Wright's Manawahe Rd property is attractive, sustainable and supporting two families.

There's no surface water, and the contour is steep to rolling but conservation plantings and careful management mean it's productive and it's managed by Margaret.

"There's only room for one boss on the farm and we'd both want to be it and anyway I enjoy my work," said David who works full time in Edgecumbe as Fonterra's environment manager.

When they bought the property in the Manawahe hills the plan was to continue to run it as a dry stock unit. "However, in 1997 we decided to convert to dairying and employ a herd manager to give me time to raise our family and to improve returns," said Margaret.

The couple has three children, Liam 15, Annelise 13 and Aidan 11.

Today the 242 ha property runs 420 cows, in a herd which is moving towards triple cross animals "because they are lighter and better suited to this type of country".

Younger cows are milked once a day, partly to preserve their condition but also so there is just one 4km walk from the furthest part of the farm to the shed.

Soon after buying the property David and Margaret began planting pines and natives.

"We fenced off areas of native bush and over the 13 years have planted about 100 kauri trees, plus rimu and other natives. These add shade for the stock and workers, provide habitat for birds and beauty to the area," said David.

Many mature natives, left when the land was originally cleared, remain as individual shade trees in paddocks too.

They installed a Marshall hot water heater, fueled by firewood and a converter to take heat from the refrigeration unit to heat water for the milking shed. Recently a solar water heating system has been installed on the family home.

David and Margaret's strong interest in conservation is shared by the majority of their neighbours and David helped set up the Manawahe Eco Trust which aims to establish a corridor of native and exotic trees from the lakes to the ocean, providing habitat for native birds.



JUDGES POINTS

- *Decisions are made with due consideration for good business practice*
- *Good knowledge of fertilisers and animal health products*
- *Staff promotion and education is well developed*

RIVERSIDE ORCHARDS AND TREBILCO ORCHARDS, KATIKATI GLEN ROBERTS

HILL LABORATORIES HARVEST AWARD ZESPRI KIWIFRUIT ORCHARD AWARD

Glenn Roberts believes not only in orcharding in a sustainable manner, but also in being as self-sufficient as possible.

He manages Riverside kiwifruit orchard and an organic orchard at Tuapiro for the Trebilco family.

"I am extremely lucky to be working for John and Erica and Neil and Margaret Trebilco as they allow me to put in place my own management ideas. They are very supportive and John in particular regularly visits the orchard to discuss what is being done."

It's four years now since Glenn took over the management of Riverside, a 22 hectare mixed orchard with 17 ha of green and 5 ha of gold kiwifruit and a small block of avocado.

"It was producing just over 100,000 trays of kiwifruit when I came. Last year it produced 200,000," says Glenn who learned his management skills as a horticultural cadet.

"We are planting strip males on banks recently cleared of pines so we can gather our own pollen for artificial pollination."

Riverside had 12 ha of river flats. "The soil is not very fertile but we've been building up the organic matter by spreading goat manure. The flats also need regular irrigation which we do from a 1.8 million litre frost pond. However, I only irrigate when soil samples indicate it's required."

The same principal applies to fertiliser inputs which are applied based on recommendations from Phillip Barlow of Bio Soil and Crop, following soil and leaf sampling.

It's not just fruit numbers which have increased since Glenn took over – so have the populations of wild duck, quail, pheasants and native birds – proving economic orcharding can go hand and hand with environmental enhancement.

"When I first came there were hardly any wild ducks and those that hatched chicks soon lost most of them to predators. Now whole families come up to the house to be fed and there are quail, pheasants, tui and fantail in the orchard."



JUDGES POINTS

- *Your drive to be the very best in the business but not at the expense of environmental sustainability*
- *The working relationship that you and your employer enjoy*
- *Your willingness to help others in the industry move forward*
- *Your desire to keep testing industry boundaries*
- *How you have been able to integrate a wetlands area into a commercial orchard*



WILLOW CREEK, WHAKATANE PAUL AND KATHY FURNISS

BALLANCE AGRI-NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT AWARD

Taking part in an ANZ Baywide Focus Farm discussion group was a turning point in farm management for Kathy and Paul Furniss of Willow Creek farm near Matata.

"The idea of subdividing paddocks and moving stock each day came from the group and it's really paid off," said Paul.

"We have light sandy soils and under this method the hillsides have held together better. There have been fewer weeds because we don't graze the pasture so short and it's easy to move the stock from smaller paddocks. We keep our herd size to around 50 animals which is also easier on the hillsides and easier to manage."

Kathy and Paul run 100 breeding cows, 70 steers, 200 bulls and up to 50 head of grazers on their 238 ha Pikowai Rd property called Willow Creek. The contour is steep and to further reduce erosion and create another long term income stream, they've planted 5 ha of pines each year. "We currently have 20ha in pines but will keep on planting," said Kathy.

Today they continue to consult with farm advisor Malcolm McIntosh of AgFirst who they met through the

focus group and to apply Ballance fertilisers based on regular soil tests.

Running a profitable farm business is their first aim. "What ever we do on the farm has to work economically because that's the only way we can afford to do what's right for the environment. Increasingly we are farming sustainably but we have to make a living and leave a legacy for our children," said Paul.

Producing many of their own calves from the breeding herd is part of that sustainable policy and calves are left with their mothers for as long as possible.

The bull beef animals are raised to 500 kg of body weight which they reach in 12 to 15 months and the steers are kept for 18 months, when they reach around 500 kgs.

As well as managing the dry stock unit, and rearing bull beef animals, Kathy and Paul also work on their kiwifruit orchard near Edgecumbe.



JUDGES POINTS

- *Your recognition of the need to develop a supply relationship with purchasers of farm produce*
- *Your livestock condition given the climatic season to date*
- *Your commitment to plant/tree selection and cropping*
- *The ongoing analysis of your orchard and pastoral businesses*

TE PUKE BARRY AND PAM PETHYBRIDGE

PGG WRIGHTSON HABITAT IMPROVEMENT AWARD

Barry and Pam Pethybridge are passionate about the world they live in.

"We feel it is up to all of us to do our bit towards a better environment," they say.

'Doing their bit' has involved hours of back breaking work planting 25,000 native trees and flaxes and fencing off 20 ha of their farm, (7 ha wetland, 10 ha of secondary kanukua forest and 3 ha of riparian margins).

The Pethybridges take pleasure in the 14 different species of native and at least 16 kinds of exotic birds on the property but retiring those 20 ha has a farming purpose too.

"Animal health was initially one of the main reasons we decided to retire the wetlands. Most of the stock we carry belong to other people so we have a responsibility to those owners. Eczema is a major concern but when we put zinc in the troughs, the animals would head for the waterways. Another problem is that dairy animals are more inclined to get stuck in the swamp."

The waterways on the farm feed directly into the Little Waihi Estuary and the couple are conscious of possible impacts on shellfish gathering and swimming there.

Their's is a productive unit which in the past 12 months grazed 200 dairy heifers, 120 dairy calves and last year reared 250 friesan bull calves of their own.

"Our aim is to do the best for our stock, on minimum chemicals, using environmentally friendly fertilisers and farming practices while earning a profit in the process.

"We feel that soil is one of the world's most precious resources and must be treated with care. For the past few years we have been using organic fertilisers from fishery waste, strand line seaweeds and micronutrients from rock dust. We feel these are increasing the mineral content, biological life and depth of topsoil ensuring both production and sustainability."

There's also another side to the couple's farm management – running Scout camps. Barry saw obvious opportunities to give young people the chance to experience the outdoors, test themselves and have fun on his farm.

"We have set up a number of permanent structures (including flush toilets) and hold camps a couple of times a year for scouts from throughout the Bay of Plenty."



JUDGES POINTS

- *Committed to environmental sustainability in everything you do*
- *The management of your stock and pastures*
- *Your interaction with youth and the community at large*
- *The use of sustainability reasoning within your lifestyle*



ROTORUA
SHANE AND JUNE BIRCHALL

GALLAGHER INNOVATION AWARD

The Birchall family has such an affinity with Lake Okaro, they've retired 2.2ha of their land to help protect it.

"Daniel and I worked pretty hard on the farm when we were young but there was always a bonus – we earned petrol money for Dad to take us water skiing on the lake," said June and Shane's daughter Megan.

Lake Okaro is just across the road from the family's 233 ha sheep, beef, dairy and deer Waionehu Farm.

"We were conscious of the potential problems of run off from the farm into the lake and had intended to create a wetland," said Shane.

Environment Bay of Plenty heard of their plans and made the approach to extend the area to 2.2 ha. The wetland was lined with wood chips to help seal it and hundreds of rushes, grasses, flaxes, cabbage trees and kowhai trees arrived for a large scale planting programme. Megan was among those employed to carry out the work.

Two years on the wetland looks like a natural swamp, covered in vegetation and home to at least a dozen different species of birds including native teal and spoon bills and frogs. More than that, water samples taken this summer show no nutrients from the farm are entering the lake, something the whole family takes pride in.

Reducing the impact of their farm on the environment and animal health and welfare are key drivers of the Birchall management style.

"We milk once a day from August. It's easier on the cows and production doesn't suffer. It has been a bonus with this year's dry conditions, but it also means we can go hunting or fishing in the afternoon without worrying about being home in time for milking," said Shane.

The health of the triple cross friesian/jersey/aryshire herd is further enhanced by providing good pasture, achieved

through applying fertilisers from Ballance based on recommendations from Doug Edmeads of AgKnowledge, and re-seeding with plantain and chicory every two years.

The cows now have their own 'Herdhome' a \$250,000 structure built last year to for up to 200 cows and it's markedly improved animal health and condition. "We've had low numbers of empty and down cows as well," said Shane.

Effluent drops through concrete grills into the pit below and in summer, when the manure is dry, it is spread on the pasture.

Despite this season's dry conditions, milk production on Waionehu Farm this spring was up 35 percent, proving the value of the family's management system – which, with two young and enthusiastic 'experts' on the team, are likely to keep evolving.



JUDGES POINTS

- *Your construction of a Herd Home for your livestock*
- *The unity, empathy and consideration within your family group and the harnessing of individual talents to progress the business*
- *The placement and fencing of native plant*
- *Your awareness of soil type and its fragility*

POTTSBURY FARM, KATIKATI JOHN AND THELMA WILLIAMS

ENVIRONMENT BAY OF PLENTY LIFESTYLE AWARD

"We've got just about every nasty you could think of here but they never cause us any real problem. I believe we have achieved a balance on our orchard," said John Williams, of Pottsbury Farms, the property he runs with wife Thelma

The couple manages a little over 5 ha as a mixed organic orchard growing mainly avocado, olives, feijoa, macadamia nuts and a range of other 'experimental' fruit.

Everything at some time or another receives foliar feeding with diluted 'worm tea' produced by the property's millions of worms, living in 14 'farms' made from old baths mounted on stands.

"We first heard about worm farming and how wonderful worms were from a seminar in Auckland in 1996 and have been converts ever since," said Thelma, who sells worms by mail order to customers all over the North Island.

However, this isn't all the Williams do. Pottsbury Farms also has holiday cottages for guests who enjoy the tranquil and safe orchard environment, so close to the Tauranga Harbour.

JUDGES POINTS

- *Your philosophy to sustainability and its application to everyday living*
- *Your standards of orchard management that reach to levels in excess of the requirements for organic certification*
- *Your widely diversified income stream from the orchard enterprise and holiday accommodation*



POYNTZFIELD, ROTORUA MERLIN AND HEATHER MCKENZIE

ENVIRONMENT BAY OF PLENTY ENVIRONMENTAL AWARD

Heather and Merlin McKenzie have spent thousands of dollars and thousands of hours converting a 3.9 hectare run down, scrub covered property in Paradise Valley Rd near Rotorua into a tree-clad parkland.

"It was the fact that the Ngongotaha Stream ran through the property which first attracted us to it. We also believed that the relatively narrow riparian protection strips around many streams were probably not doing enough to stop nutrients from grazing land getting into the waterways, so decided to have no animals on our land, and plant it all in trees," said Heather.

"This is a life-style block. We don't derive any income from it at present although we have planted Cyprus, blackwoods and redwoods for timber." The rest is a mixture of native and exotics.

In the early 1990s around 30 percent of the property was covered in blackberry and barberry and there were few trees.

Sandy soils, high rain fall and run-off from a neighbouring property all added to the fragility of the land so the McKenzies set out to protect it.

"We no longer use bonfires to burn vegetation as we did at first because we've realised the impact of fires on the atmosphere. Now we have a chipper and use the mulch to spread around new plantings, putting the goodness back into the soil."

JUDGES POINTS

- *Passionate about the property and what's been achieved*
- *Great knowledge about the region*
- *The planting on the property is impressive*
- *Your dedication to the property and your community involvement*





Ballance
Farm Environment Awards

A BIG THANK YOU TO ELAINE FISHER AND THE BAY OF PLENTY TIMES
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ABOUT THE AWARDS

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, Manawatu/Whanganui, Wellington, Canterbury, Southland and Otago. This is their sixth year in the Bay of Plenty.

The aim

The aim of the Ballance Farm Environment Award is to encourage and support farmers to 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, and a change for farmers to get information and advice from the various assessing representatives.

Contact us

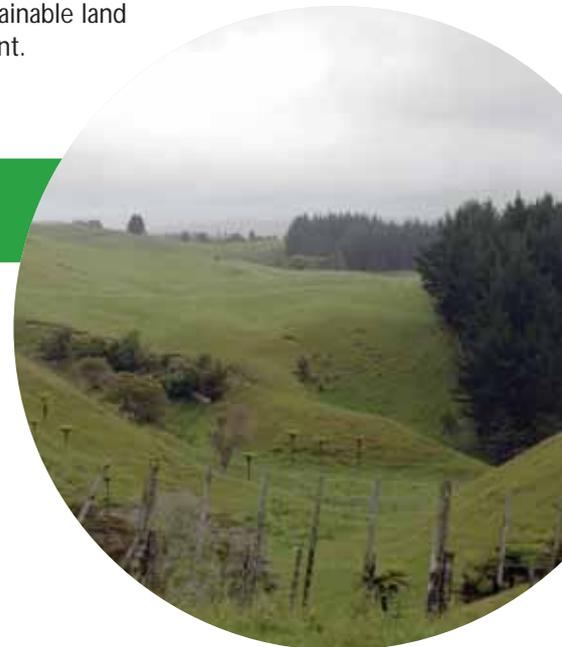
The Bay of Plenty awards process is managed by the Ballance Farm Environment Award Committee. Environment Bay of Plenty is the regional coordinator. For more information about the event or if you would like to be included on the mailing list, please phone Environment Bay of Plenty on 0800 ENV BOP (368 267).

Environment Bay of Plenty staff can also offer advice and information on sustainable land management, riparian fencing, farm conversion and environmental management.

UPCOMING DATES – FIELD DAY

There will be a field day to showcase the Supreme Award winning farm in the next few weeks.

Keep an eye out on Environment Bay of Plenty's website for more information once details have been finalised.



Ballance
Farm Environment Awards

NEED MORE INFORMATION

www.bfea.org.nz

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