



Ballance  
Farm Environment Awards

# Bay of Plenty 2007



## 2007 AWARD WINNERS

*Linking sustainable farming practices with long-term profitability.*

## 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/Wanganui, Wellington, Canterbury, Southland and Otago regions of New Zealand. This is their fifth 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 chance 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 Heidi Wana at Environment Bay of Plenty on 0800 ENV BOP (368 267) or email [heidi.wana@envbop.govt.nz](mailto:heidi.wana@envbop.govt.nz).

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

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# View from here

*By Ted Coats, National judging coordinator*

The Ballance Farm Environment Awards have attracted 140 entries across eight regions in 2007. The spread of entries continues, with many clearly seeking to benchmark their properties using the expertise of the judging groups. Others are more satisfied with how their properties present and comfortable to have their farms compared with the best in the region this year.

## Many return entries

It is comforting to see the growing number of entrants who have been involved in the awards at least once before. Many have taken on the advice from previous judging visits and done a considerable amount besides. It is evident though, that those returning entrants have found value in being involved with the BFEA process, and have returned for more.

## Acceptance of benchmarking

Major weather events such as the spring snow in Canterbury and the catastrophic floods a few years back in the Manawatu leave potential entrants asking: "Is this year the right year to enter?" While it is easy to understand that position, and extreme weather forces choices that don't sit easily with those impacted, sustainability is for all conditions. I am sure that as we all strive to meet our own, our public's and our markets' expectations for sustainable production systems, benchmarking, even under adverse conditions will come to be seen as increasingly important.

## Broad appeal across many land uses

It is constantly refreshing to see the number of entrants from a wide variety of land uses. Within the traditional arable, livestock and dairy classes, diversification of systems continues apace, especially at the marketing end of the more innovative operations. What was innovative a few years ago has become mainstream and is being constantly replaced. The two main questions asked of entrants:

- How aware is the entrant of the impacts that their operation is having environmentally, financially and socially?

And:

- How innovative are they in addressing or mitigating those impacts?

These two questions remain constant and valuable, despite the innovation occurring around us.



# 2007 SUPREME AWARD WINNERS

**Coster Family Farm – Allen, Sue, Robyn and Jim Coster**  
*Mataiwhetu Station, Lower Kaimai*

## **Also winners of PPCS Best Livestock Farm Award**

The Coster family property in the lower Kaimai was a “grass desert” once – but half a century on it is now the supreme award winner in this year’s Bay of Plenty Ballance Farm Environment Awards.

The property has always been known as Mataiwhetu and contains two pa sites and signs of an old track leading over the Kaimai range. Although the Maori name for the property means “the place you stand and see the stars” the Coster family have not only looked up but have worked on what lies underfoot to improve the land at Mataiwhetu.

The family have farmed the 300 hectare sheep and beef property for the last 50 years.

Between them, they have protected most of the streams, waterways and gullies

on the property. They have also helped ensure the preservation of 100,000 acres of the Kaimai Forest for the creation of a park for future generations.

And Jim says that one of his great pleasures was to see the improvement.

“We have improved the quality of the grass, and eradicated most of the weeds.”

An old series of aerial photographs of the farm tell the story of the increasing trees on the property. From an expanse of grass with a hedge of old pine trees, the development since then has seen all the houses on the property, the wool shed and other buildings sheltered with trees - oaks, pinoaks, flowering cherries, cypresses, horse chestnuts and chestnuts are some of the introduced

trees planted and native species are also encouraged.

Most paddocks now also have trees planted as shelter for sheep and cattle.

Allen and Sue have progressively altered stock policies for better profitability and less effect on the usually wet but drought-

prone and puggable soils. Recently, they have become a Monitor Farm, opening their business to other farmers to share information and explore more sustainable farming practices for the future.



- Roads and infrastructure are all excellent
- Supplier of the year to Progressive Meats Limited
- Excellent marketing strategy
- Cultural respect for pa sites
- Excellent community sense and social conscience
- Recognition that appropriate land use is critical to best manage the environment
- Retired indigenous bush and plantation forestry
- Poplars and willows stabilising steep gullies
- Most streams and waterways are fenced off from stock
- Using experts to advise them on a range of farming issues and practices
- Health and safety is an integral part of the farm management
- Effective fertiliser and nutrient management plans



## Stuart and Alison Paton

*Paton Farms Limited, Galatea*

- LIC Best Dairy Farm Award
- PGG Wrightson Habitat Improvement Award

Alison and Stuart Paton have their own way of divvying up the farm work – they run a dairy farm each.

The Patons purchased the Paton family farm at Galatea 16 years ago. Today, Alison is in charge of the home farm of 60 ha, milking 170 Friesian cows. Stuart is responsible for the second property of 100 ha, running a herd of 230. Their daughter Megan (15) is currently at home working full time for her parents – but she will join her brother Andrew at Telford Agricultural College next year.

Although the couple are responsible for their own farms “we discuss things. And we do some things together, like planting trees, and if we’re drenching stock we do it together,” Stuart says.

They are farming because they enjoy it. Even in spring time when they gear up for a busy few months as the herd calves.

“As long as we’re well organised and do things once and do them right we seem to be all right. We’re always looking ahead and try to do things on time,” Stuart says. They also have a policy of handling the stock quietly which gives better results. Also important is making sure there are two water troughs per paddock.

They have a planting programme for the fenced off creek and a beautification and animal health programme for each paddock on both farms.

Mrs Paton said the home farm had cherry trees planted first, followed by fast growing willows. The couple are planting up to four trees in each paddock - for shade for livestock. The climate in Galatea, although cold in winter is very hot in summer and the Patons like their animals to be comfortable.

### What impressed:

- Retirement of waterways
- Excellent increased production
- Low-cost farming
- Innovation - automatic gate opening
- Encouraging wildlife
- Tree planting for shade
- Animal health and wellbeing
- Efficient use of fertiliser
- Teamwork
- Passion for farming



## Ruth and Doug Espin

*ND & RE Espin, Te Puke*

- Hill Laboratories Best Harvest Farm Award

Proving that organic growing can be a good business decision as well as a rewarding lifestyle has kept Doug and Ruth Espin's kiwifruit operation interesting.

The couple have grown organically for the past 10 years after converting the orchard they purchased near Maketu in 1982.

The orchard of 3.2 canopy hectares produces an average of 10,000 trays a hectare – a figure that was much more than the organic average production.

Doug can't really say why that's the case. "Everything has come together. Some of it is the area, we get good winter chilling and the rest of it probably comes down to management, fertiliser programmes, that type of thing."

When the Espins moved to the block 25 years ago they had sold a dairy farm to go into kiwifruit. They turned organic to move away from toxic sprays, which were affecting Ruth's health.

The orchard is slightly undulating with two hollows that attracted frost – something that they resolved by putting in small frost fans that pump the cold air out of the orchard.

The Espins run the orchard themselves, bringing contractors in to do major winter and summer pruning, thinning and the male pruning. They like to be actively involved.

"It's all about timing. You've got to do things when they should be done and not allow work to back up. If you need to get people in to get it done on time then do it, if you can't do it on your own," Doug says.

### What impressed:

- Doug and Ruth's close cooperation strongly contributes to the success of their venture
- They are keen to grow their knowledge and obtain professional advice
- A commitment to sustainability
- A well-ordered operation
- Very active in the community
- Wind generators Doug built for frost protection
- Attention to detail



## Steve Saunders

*Gro Plus Limited,  
Pollen Plus Limited – Te Puna*

- Ballance Nutrient Management Award
- Gallagher Innovation Award

Gro Plus Limited provides a one-stop shop service for kiwifruit orchard management. It is the largest independently-owned company of its kind in New Zealand, representing 102 orchards and managing about 400 ha. Associated company Pollen Plus Limited is one of the largest kiwifruit pollen producers in the world. According to the assessment team, the business excels across many levels of activity – in a client's orchard, in the company's meeting room, with research and development, amongst industry peers, and within the local community. It is innovative and an example of best industry practice.

Steve Saunders, the company's owner, provides the business with strong leadership. He has vision and enterprise. One of his key strengths is that he identifies people who will complement his business aims and then recruits accordingly.

Steve started working in the nursery/kiwifruit industry 23 years ago and worked his way to operations manager of a large kiwifruit packhouse. Later, he and a business partner operated a successful orchard and post-harvest management

company. Steve left the partnership four years ago to specialise in orchard management and pollination. In just four years, the business has had tremendous growth, with staff numbers rising from three to 22 and up to 200 casual staff.

### What impressed:

- Excels by working across many levels of activity
- Has good business structure
- Innovation is a key activity within the company
- Great example of horticultural management
- Strong and vibrant business
- Business leadership with strength, vision, enterprise and compassion



## Winston Fleming

*Kiwi Outback, Rotorua*

- Environment Bay of Plenty Environmental Award

Winston Fleming is a “kiwi character” who manages a farm with a tourist operation on the side. He runs sheep and beef on his 210 ha Kaharoa property, as well as deer and goats.

Kiwi Outback, his tourism business, incorporates bush walks, farm stays in a cabin, and hunting expeditions.

Winston’s property is in the development stage so there’s still a lot of work to do, he says. He has an Environmental

Programme with Environment Bay of Plenty that involves fencing off bush and waterways, and planting steep areas. His beef cows and calves are in excellent condition, as are the ewes.

Winston is passionate about protecting the environment, and carries out a range of other environmental initiatives with enthusiasm.

### What impressed:

- His love for the land
- Protecting bush and waterways with fencing
- Very strong on animal pest control
- A very good stockman
- Involved in the community



## Anne and Stewart Koopal

*Rerewhakaaitu Road, Rotorua*

- Environment Bay of Plenty Environmental Award

The Koopals believe in leading by example. They hold field days on their 204 ha property at Rerewhakaaitu and are involved in a number of groups that encourage sustainable farming practices, including riparian restoration. The Koopals are very keen environmentalists and have a positive desire to protect the environment. They have made changes to their farming practices to support their beliefs, and have plans to do more.

The family play a leading role in the Lake Rerewhakaaitu Restoration Project (Awaroa Stream), which they became involved in after attending a BFEA field day four years ago. They've been on their farm for 25 years now, growing it over time to 204 ha. They're keen to protect and preserve both the productive and non-productive parts of the farm.

### What impressed:

- Good understanding of nutrient management and nutrient budgeting
- The park-like gardens
- Condition of young stock
- Good record keeping
- Team work and family culture

## Field Day

Visit the 2007 Ballance Farm Environment Award Supreme Award winners:

Allen and Sue Coster, Robyn and Jim Coster  
Mataiwetu Station, 29 Thorn Road, Lower Kaimai,  
RD 1, Tauranga

**Date:** Wednesday, 9 May 2007

**Start time:** 10 am

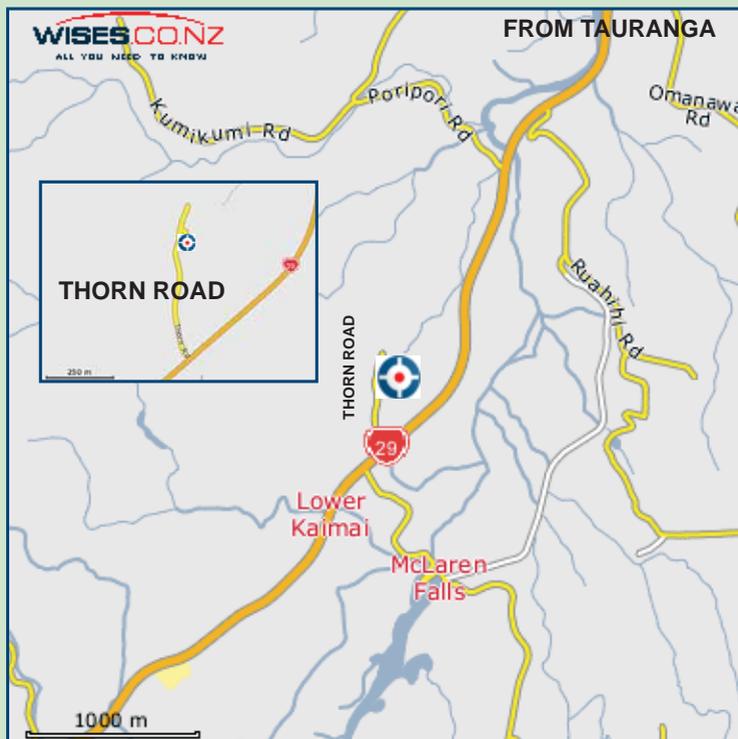
Please contact Heidi Wana to confirm your attendance:

Email: [heidi.wana@envbop.govt.nz](mailto:heidi.wana@envbop.govt.nz)

Phone: 0800 ENV BOP (368 267)

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## Map (not to scale)



A big thank you to Val Sherriff and the Bay of Plenty Times for help with preparing this booklet.

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