



Ballance
Farm Environment Awards®
 Promoting Sustainable Profitable Farming

2013 WAIKATO

Grant Wills and Karen Preston (Preston Wills Ltd)
Tremeer

SUPREME AWARD WINNERS

ALSO WINNERS OF:
BALLANCE AGRI-NUTRIENTS NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT AWARD
LIC DAIRY FARM AWARD
HILL LABORATORIES HARVEST AWARD
MASSEY UNIVERSITY DISCOVERY AWARD
MERIDIAN ENERGY EXCELLENCE AWARD



Grant and Karen fittingly bestowed the name 'Tremeer' - which translates in Cornish to "happy farm" - on the Wills' 244ha Walton dairy property when they first ventured into dairying, and land ownership.

The name, chosen in memory of a stint the couple had working at a rural castle in Cornwall while travelling, has proved prophetic, and apt. The award judges noted it was clear that all decision making for this 650 cow business "focuses on profitability while caring for the people, the cows and the environment".

They wrote: "All aspects of the farm and herd were in excellent condition and are a positive reflection of your commitment to balance a profitable and sustainable dairy business with being an enjoyable place to work." Production on Tremeer, per cow and per hectare, consistently outperforms the Waikato benchmark; they are on track for their targeted 280,000 kgs/MS this season from their 215 ha (effective). Grant, who is third generation on this land, agrees Tremeer is a happy farm: "That is certainly what we aim for."

Undoubtedly the signs are there: witness the cows content in one of the property's three herd homes in the depths of a cold wet winter, or height of a hot dry summer; the bird life habitat



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Grant Wills and Karen Preston (Preston Wills Ltd) Tremeer

SUPREME AWARD WINNERS (continued)



developing from the establishment of 7500 native plants since 2002; or consider sharemilker Steve Ironmonger, who began as a milking assistant and three years ago became the farm's first lower order sharemilker, a position created just for him.

Steve leaves at the end of this season after 12 years on Tremeer, to progress his sharemilking. Another variable order sharemilker will replace him next season. While always maintaining a close handle on the property's management Grant has found he values the off-farm time he has been able to achieve in the past three years while released from day-to-day processes on the farm.

Grant's approach is clearly grounded in continuing his family's connection with this land, "the money is only one part of the equation," he says. "It is rewarding to see other people developing through our industry. Lifestyle choices and personal development need to be factored into the business equation along with financial performance for our satisfaction and success."

The couple are very conscious of retaining balance in their lives between careers, community, family and themselves. Karen has been new entrant teacher at Walton School for 16 years, so despite their three children, Zeb, Beau and Kelsie, now being adult, the couple are still very connected to their community on many levels. Grant is a Fonterra Shareholders' Councillor for the Matamata ward and chairs the co-operative development committee of the Fonterra Shareholders' Council. Noted the judges: "Your business success has helped facilitate your involvement in community activities and is highly commended."

To drive the business successfully Grant says he focuses on a few key performance indicators to monitor progress. At the top of his list is total feed efficiency use, with an expectation to retain this above 75gMS/KgDM. Farm working expenses is the other key driver. "There's not much point in focusing on areas that we have little control of the outcomes. Where we can make a positive difference, we will be proactive."

Tremeer's contour is gently rolling, with some sidlings. The property now consists of all the land that Grant's grandfather grazed sheep on. Grant and his father Derek originally converted part of the farm in 1988. The original property had been split between Grant's father and uncle but the block belonging to Grant's uncle was eventually sold.

At the same time as Derek and Grant were converting to dairy, the new owner of the neighbouring block had the same idea. Grant and Karen bought his parents farm in 1997. In 2003 they purchased the neighbouring property, thus rejoining the family land. "We were pretty proud about being able to do that," says Grant.



JUDGES' COMMENTS

- Herd homes enhance staff, animal health and well-being, increase pasture production and utilisation.
- Excellent monitoring and record keeping used for constant analysis of business and environment.
- Energy efficiency vital component to minimising costs and wastage; feed bunkers near herd homes minimise machinery use.
- Keeping up with technology and research advances keeps farm current; strong links to rural professionals adding value to business.





Grant describes his entry into hands-on dairy farming as “a very steep learning curve”. He had milked cows, during summer practical work as part of his B AgSci degree, “but I’d never calved one”. Prior to going overseas with Karen he had worked as an engineering consultant for what was then the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Grant and Derek had to be decisive, committed and highly organised when they undertook to venture into dairying on the sheep and beef farm. Recalls Grant: “Karen and I got back from overseas in March, within a month we had decided and by the 20th of July we were sending milk away. It was actually really exciting times, and I still look back on it as a great time, a valued time, Dad and I working together.”

Grant and Karen began by 50/50 sharemilking 150 cows with Grant’s parents Derek and Audrey. As more of the home farm was converted, that number rose to 300 cows, until Grant and Karen bought the neighbouring farm in 2003. The two dairy farms are run as one property, but the cows are milked in two herds through the two herringbone sheds. Maize is grown over about 20ha of the property. Approximately 16 percent of

Tremeer’s feed requirements are imported through supplements or grazing.

The judges were impressed with the attention to planning, monitoring and detail on Tremeer. This season, for example, soil samples from every paddock were tested. Grant admits to being “quite into” monitoring. “Having tangible figures makes it so much easier to make decisions,” he says. “This year I’ve been able to pinpoint which paddocks are low in K and utilise effluent as a resource.”

The judges highlighted the efficiency of energy and water use through milking routines, and the planning that allowed efficiency of machinery and resource use for feeding out and cropping. They wrote: “Your regular pasture cuts for monitoring growth rates and dry matter are critical in planning and showing benefits for animal health and production. The data collection in regard to all facets of your business are a valuable tool.”

The judges also praised the use of herd homes on Tremeer: “The practice of standing cows off to protect pastures in both summer and winter will be contributing to your ability to maximise pasture production and persistence of new pastures.”

Grant says he has never regretted the decision to invest in two herd homes, which came into use during a very dry period in February 2008. So much so that they had another one built 18 months ago. These purpose-built shelters are a huge asset to the farm in all seasons he says: “The staff love them, the cows are clearly more productive and content in them and they create a huge number of efficiencies on the farm, including caring for our farm environment. They stack up so well financially and for creating management options, I’m surprised there’s not more of them.”



JUDGES’ COMMENTS

- Excellent mapping and recording of effluent areas; major efficiencies gained by testing each paddock for fertiliser requirements.
- Water quality high priority through the fencing of waterways from 2002; ongoing, annual riparian planting.
- Excellent long-term trend monitoring for pasture growth rate and cropping; pasture still focus of farm production system.
- Special attention to detail; ‘shared responsibility’ approach to staff management, allocation of separate parts of the farm.

Hamish McMullin and Selina Rutherford Kereru Farm

BEEF + LAMB NEW ZEALAND LIVESTOCK AWARD and WATERFORCE INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT AWARD



In 2004, when Hamish and Selina purchased this 204ha property in the hills east of Cambridge, they brought with them an impressive knowledge-backed plan to transform the run-down unit into a profitable, sustainable farming business.

The award judges wrote it was “thought provoking to others” that while farmed land area on the property was decreasing (currently 185ha effective) because of the retirement of sensitive areas, production continued to increase. They commented: “The judging team noted with pleasure your knowledge of economic, environmental and social sustainability, and adoption of environmentally sound on-farm practices. The business plan is impressive, particularly the performance targets and matching farming practice to land capability.”

Hamish and Selina met while working as soil conservators for what was then the Bay of Plenty Catchment Board. After travelling overseas they purchased a property in Northland but as it wasn't an economic unit they managed a family property and some smaller blocks.

When they looked over what is now their Kereru Farm, in the Whitehall district, they saw beyond its “incredibly rundown”

state to potential that is now being realised. “We knew it would be a pretty big uphill battle,” concedes Hamish, “but now we are making a good living, sustainably.”

Contour is easy hills with some steep faces adjacent to streams and waterways. The farm runs back into the Te Tapui Scenic Reserve and contains headwaters for both the Piako and Karapiro catchments. Around 3000 su are wintered; about 30 percent sheep and 70 percent cattle. The cattle are a mix of dairy heifer grazers, breeding cows and fattening stock.

When they first saw the property the couple were particularly taken with an impressive old stand of native bush which they believe was purposely left by early owners, near the pre-WWI house the couple now live in with children Rebecca (20) Douglas (18) and Frances (15).

QE II National Trust covenants have been placed over 20ha of land containing bush and waterways. They have deliberately and gradually reconfigured the farm, working off the new fences for retired areas. “This property is very long and narrow,” explains Hamish, “the new fencing allows under-utilised country to become profitable country”.

Much has been achieved, including planting 5000 natives in the past eight years and a concerted and successful effort to significantly reduce pests, mostly mustelids, possums and feral cats. Water is now reticulated to every paddock, mostly gravity fed from the main header tank. Hamish has built two weirs supplying two small header tanks to gravity feed also. An electronic control system allows wireless activation of the pump from the house, and a remote gauge on water status in all tanks. “We bought that at the Fieldays last year, it's fantastic,” says Hamish with a happy grin.



JUDGES' COMMENTS

- Excellent monitoring for pest control, with great results; impressive achievement through hard work in only eight years.
- Sheer energy and enthusiasm for planning, fencing, planting and retiring sensitive areas.
- Valuable time spent designing reticulated stock water scheme; whole water system planned for ease of management and reliability.
- A worthy industry example of making good farming decisions specific to their environment; excellent stock quality and performance.

James and Ella, Pamela and the late Richard Bailey Momona

DONAGHYS FARM STEWARDSHIP AWARD and PGG WRIGHTSON LAND AND LIFE AWARD



James and Ella have been in charge of this 470ha Tirau sheep and beef property for four years but the family's connection to this land spans back five more generations.

"I respect and am thankful to those who have gone before me," says James, whose obvious commitment to farming both sustainably and profitably was praised by the judges. The judges described James as "very passionate about the environment and sees himself as a caretaker of the land."

The judges noted: "The passion to develop the land and look after it is very evident. The change in management to continuously monitor and stay at the leading edge is amazing. James has a questioning nature which is a key to his success, and thirst for knowledge which is excellent to see."

Momona is 440ha effective, situated just north of Tirau with a mix of rolling downlands and moderately steep to steep hill country. The property has a commercial ewe flock, a purebred Hereford herd, trading cattle and dairy grazers. Last year 5200 su were wintered with a cattle to sheep ratio of 49:51.

To better match the stocking policy with land use capability, they are shifting this ratio to 45:55 in favour of sheep. "Bluffs and steep contour on some parts of the farm, and the many springs and beginnings of waterways means we have to consider where it is environmentally sustainable to have cattle at certain times of the year," explains James.

"With the help of the regional council we have designed an environmental plan that is a central tool to prioritising and planning our projects. We've still got a lot to do, this is definitely a work in progress!" In 2009, James and his late father Richard placed QE II National Trust covenants on 9.3ha of land covering mainly steep gullies, with native bush remains. These are being left to regenerate. Richard and Pamela Bailey moved off Momona in 2011.

With a commerce degree from Canterbury, extensive overseas travel, and experience co-founding the successful and effective 'Sustainable Coastlines' charity to his credit, James admits coming home to the farm in the second half of 2008 saw him "in the deep end a bit". "But I sought help from my father, family and friends and a farm discussion group."

"Sustainability, simplicity and profitability are the three things that I consider when making farming decisions. Ultimately my vision for the farm is to have a property that has minimal impact on the environment while producing high quality food and fibre. I plan to leave this farm in a better position to satisfy modern agricultural standards."

Ella is a partner in the Mt Maunganui catering business 'Devour'. The couple have two children: Jake (3) and baby Isabelle.



JUDGES' COMMENTS

- See themselves as caretakers of land; passionate about environment on and off farm; co-founder 'Sustainable Coastlines'.
- Well thought through environmental plan including prioritising areas needing most attention; protection of riparian and bush areas.
- Very mindful of past generations achievements, but keen to make business a more environmentally sustainable unit.
- Excellent stock condition and breeding; high performance all stock classes; excellent use of advice from mentors and professionals.

Graham and Rosemary Davison *Pinewoods*

WAIKATO RIVER AUTHORITY CATCHMENT IMPROVEMENT AWARD



There is a clear and long-standing commitment to combining environmental stewardship with successful farming on Pinewoods, the Davison's 103 ha (95 ha effective) dairy farm south east of Otorohanga.

The award judges commended the couple's approach writing: "This is a terrific example of a dairy property that enhances its environment whilst running an effective, sustainable farm." Situated on flat to undulating land in the Otewa district, with a boundary on the Waipa River, Pinewoods was described by the judges as "a very wet farm in the winter". The judges noted the "extra care" taken to avoid soil structure damage and "significant work undertaken at their own expense to ensure the river was fenced off and remedial work done to stop riverbank erosion".

Graham purchased Pinewood from his parents in 1979, after 50:50 sharemilking for them for five years. In 1994 a 27ha adjoining block was added, giving the couple the milking platform they

have today. Production last year, from a shortened season due to the construction of the new 40-aside herringbone shed, was 125,000 kgs/MS. Production high is 134,000 kgs/MS. Around 290 cows are calved down each year, with the milking herd usually steady at 275 cows.

Lower order sharemilker Scott Massey has been on the property for 11 years, a clear indication said the judges that he "embraced the owners' vision for the farm and environment". Graham and Rosemary agree: "Scott knows what we are aiming for and he's an absolutely top chap," Graham says. Years earlier, when the couple met, Graham says he experienced a similar visionary insight into sustainable farming. "He couldn't really help it," laughs Rosemary, who is a daughter of respected King Country farmer conservationists Arthur and Pat Cowan.

The judges were impressed with the couple's work over many years to protect existing "rare and precious" stands of kahikatea, planting to encourage native bird life, and undertaking pest control. A QEII National Trust covenant has been placed over seven hectares of lowland bush on the property. Describing Pinewoods as "one of the most picturesque properties in the district" the judges wrote, "a massive amount of effort has gone into enhancing the existing native stands, they are a sight to behold and well occupied by the native bird life".

Rosemary oversees possum and rat control on the farm and runs a 14km trap line through bush on a family dry stock property further east in the Upper Waipa headwaters. "We really like that we have got all sorts of native birds you don't normally expect to see on dairy farms," she says.

Graham and Rosemary have four adult children: Thomas, Sally, Ben and Katie.



JUDGES' COMMENTS

- Many years hard work enhancing and protecting picturesque productive dairy farm; high commitment to breeding, health, nutrition.
- Extensive waterway protection, showing excellent examples and setting achievable standards for industry
- Significant work undertaken at own expense to ensure river fenced off; remedial work to stop erosion, protect river.
- Huge effort to fence all drains and planted up for protection of water and conservation.

Graham and Tess Smith *Miraka*

WAIKATO REGIONAL COUNCIL WATER PROTECTION AWARD



Miraka is a 37ha property in the hills south east of Te Awamutu, where the Smiths are working hard to balance multiple income streams and careful environmental stewardship.

On land in the Wharepunga district that ranges between flat to vertical cliff faces Graham has been milking 90 cows for the past 25 years, and in that time also, in his words, “adding more layers of income”. That interesting variety includes forestry, duck eggs, and the ‘Miraka Magic Mountain’ fisherman’s accommodation.

The award judges wrote: “You are making the most of the land that you have and keeping a watchful eye on the environmental effects of farming and nature. You are enjoying your lifestyle, community and looking after what you have. Your water protection and monitoring are an example for all farmers to take up.”

The property is enhanced by the Mangatutu Stream running through it. The fishing lodge, which sleeps six, has been open

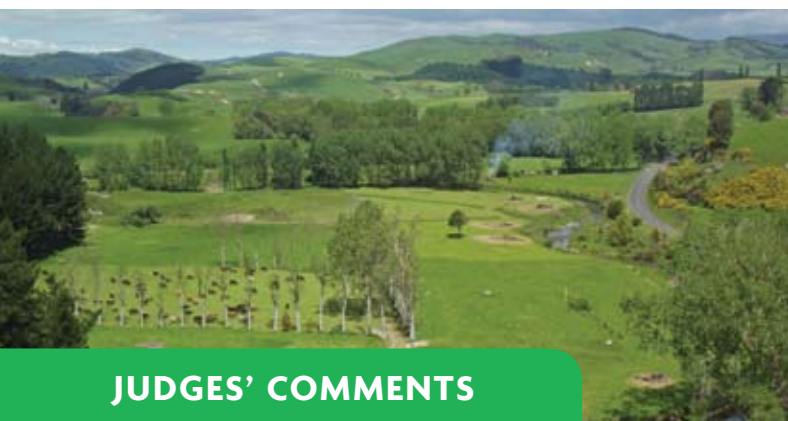
since last April. It is situated about 30 metres from the stream. “There are hundreds of trout in there,” says Graham proudly, “and it is one of the top two ‘clean streams’ in the Waikato.”

Graham believes they are growing more “accountable” as they learn more. He has been involved in Project Watershed (the Waikato River Catchment Services Project which began in 1999) and credits this participation for much of his awareness. They’ve been testing the quality of water flowing from their place and have found that coming through their swamp and pond of much superior quality than that flowing from drains. Accordingly, with the Waikato Regional Council, they have just built another wetland pond area.

The couple lease a nearby nine hectare block. On the home block they have about nine hectares in trees. Their 28ha milking platform includes a small fenced off wetland area. Milk production last season was 28,112 kgs/MS, or around 1000 kgs/MS per hectare. Before buying the property Graham was sharemilking 420 cows. “It was a conscious decision to go small and not employ labour,” he says. “I try not to get stressed and I think it’s working. I’m 58 and not stale, I still enjoy the milking.”

There are over 10,000 trees on Miraka. The harvest of some of the pines is imminent. There are also lusitanica planted for long-term harvest and the fast growing paulownia. Graham has a steady specialist market for the latter wood, which is just 40 percent of the weight of pine. It is very light but strong and binds well with resin so is used in construction of such things as boats, snowboards and polo mallets.

Graham and Tess married in 2004. Between them they have four adult children: Chris, Stacey, Lance and Phillip.



JUDGES’ COMMENTS

- Excellent riparian planting for water protection; passionate about looking after water and soils.
- Resourceful and inventive; innovative methods for river bank stability are now being used region-wide.
- Excellent water testing and monitoring of water leaving farm.
- Hunger and passion to learn; good examples of planting for income, aesthetics, erosion, shade, shelter.

Simon and Liz Clayton

2013 FINALIST

The Claytons have found dairy farming at the southern end of Lake Karapiro for the past 23 years ensures a keen and enduring consciousness of environmental and waterway care.

With contract milkers Aaron and Karen Thompson the couple farm 110 ha at Horahora, milking 225 cows off 80 ha effective. Production on this flat to rolling property is steady at between 70,000 to 80,000 kgs/MS annually.

The award judges noted Simon and Liz were passionate about environmental issues “from day one” on the farm. They wrote:

“We are impressed with your holistic values in looking after the environment, family and staff. You have embraced a simple system which works very well for your situation. You have a farm with obvious biodiversity and conservation values, where all facets of sustainability can be seen.”

Four years ago the Claytons purchased a 40ha run-off nearby allowing the employment of contract milkers and the desired ‘closed herd’ policy for their operation. The Claytons live on the smaller block. They have four children: Jeremy (23), Laura (21), Daniel (19) and Bridget (17).

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, Greater Wellington, Canterbury, Southland and Otago.

This is their twentieth year in the Waikato region. The 2013 Waikato Ballance Farm Environment Awards was held at the Don Rowland Centre, Lake Karapiro on Wednesday the 3rd of April 2013.

THE AIM

The aim of the Ballance Farm Environment Awards is to encourage and support farmers to pursue good environmental practices. When farmers enter the awards, a team of judges 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 judging representatives.

FIELD DAY

A BFEA field day will be held at the Supreme winners’ property *Tremeer* on Wednesday 15th May 2013.

Name: Grant Wills and Karen Preston (Preston Wills Ltd)
Where: Tremeer
93 Paratu Road
Walton
Time: 9.30am to 2.30pm

For details, contact: Tracy Brown
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FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE BALLANCE FARM ENVIRONMENT AWARDS, VISIT: www.bfea.org.nz