



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

## 2011 WAIKATO WINNERS

GORDON & PAMELA BLAKE, GRANT & LINDSAY BLAKE  
 'WAIOMOU VALLEY FARMS LTD'

### SUPREME AWARD WINNERS ALSO WINNERS OF: LIC DAIRY FARM AWARD

Back in 1971, when Gordon Blake was establishing a 50ha dairy unit within his family's 265ha dry stock farm east of Tirau, a neighbour warned him, "it's a backwards step to go dairying".

Time has proved that neighbour dead wrong. Dairying, says Gordon emphatically, has allowed them to secure the land and lifestyle for descendants. Pam, a dairy farmers daughter, jokes she thought she was marrying a sheep farmer "then Gordon put one across me and changed to dairying". But she stresses she has "no doubt it was a good move, we have no regrets".

The award judges agreed, describing the Blakes' now-186 ha property (166ha effective) as "a long-term sustainable economic unit that will carry on into future generations". The judges commended the Blakes for their "passion for the industry and community around them". The Blakes' 530 cow dairy operation is, according to the judges, an excellent example of "intergenerational sustainability both environmentally and business-wise".

The rolling to very steep contoured land is described by the judges as "challenging". Managing run-off, retiring steep faces and protecting soil structure whilst also ensuring economic return have necessarily been long-term considerations for the Blakes.

Pam has championed a planting programme, protecting and enhancing bush and wetlands. She has waged her own personal "slash and burn" war, especially on blackberry. "She got out there and did most of the work herself," says Gordon proudly, "and she's still going!" A native corridor Pam has created from farm bush remnants down to their house now entices native birds into the garden.

In contrast to Gordon's experience as a young man, with his father and brother on the dry stock farm that needed to support three families, "and probably wouldn't have", Gordon and Pam now operate a successful, forward-looking partnership with Grant and Lindsay. Their other son, Martin, has been able to move from dairying onto his own kiwifruit operation in the Bay of Plenty.

The focus of Waiomou Valley Farms is, in Lindsay's words, "prudent investment and safe growth, within an environmentally sustainable framework". Explains Grant: "Our hope is we can consolidate and grow the business for the next generations, following on from the aspirations of the previous generation."

Grant and Lindsay have three young children: Joshua (5), Caleb (2) and baby Ashleigh. The couple met at Matamata College and while they made a commitment to each other early on, they took a longer route to their farming partnership with Gordon and Pam.

[...continued on page 2](#)



Ballance Farm Environment Awards National Sponsors

Regional Sponsor



GORDON & PAMELA BLAKE, GRANT & LINDSAY BLAKE  
'WAIOMOU VALLEY FARMS LTD'

**SUPREME AWARD WINNERS**  
**ALSO WINNERS OF: LIC DAIRY FARM AWARD**



...continued from page 1

Grant was cabinet making and Lindsay an accountant before they travelled for five years. They did, however, have an eye to the future; unlike many others returning from their OE, they "came home with some money, and a son" five years ago.

At the time Gordon and Pam were running what is now

the one farm as two units with a sharemilker and a manager. Grant and Lindsay worked for the first season on the smaller of the two farms before lifting into their present phase of development and growth for the farm, and the business.

Gordon and Pam welcome the changes. Says Gordon: "I think it is wrong for parents to stop growth and new ideas. I've always had the philosophy of encouraging considered steps forward, because even if you have a setback, it is not likely to put you further back than the step you have just taken."

So with the blessing and active participation of Gordon and Pam, Grant and Lindsay have been ringing in the changes, and planning for the future. "It's been a pretty hard five years," admits Grant. "We've learnt an awful lot in a short time."

A state-of-the-art new 50-bale rotary shed came into use in July 2009, on the back of a fencing and tracking development to reconfigure the two farms into one unit. It has been, Lindsay says, "almost on the scale of a conversion". Grant was just the man to oversee the development, she says. "He found out

working on building sites in London that he is excellent with logistics and project management."

She stresses it has been important to carry on with the environmental care, economic considerations and community commitment that Gordon - a former councillor and mayor - and Pam established, but they've also been mindful of "future-proofing" all development. "We've been careful to look at what might be required in the future, or what sort of technology might be able to be applied." Grant has gone from being a "non-computer user" to "someone who actively seeks new technology". This approach, keeping options open, has also driven innovative decisions like the incorporation of a creche "at cups on" in the cowshed.

The award judges noted the solid structure of the farm's operating systems. "They have a programme goal set for the next seven years and have changed the financial structure from a family trust to a company to allow the ongoing development of the farm for inter-generational change." Lindsay's skill as a chartered accountant came in for special praise: "Lindsay has provided very detailed analysis of the farm's operational costs and has set up key performance indicators, which so far they have exceeded since inception."

Lindsay is quick to defer individual praise however, saying she believes the strength of their operation is in the different skills that all involved "bring to the table". This includes not just the two Blake couples, but also Pat Panoho, who has worked on the farm for 33 years, and young Jimmy Power who came there for work experience and is now a full-time employee in the agricultural apprentice scheme. Of Pat and Jimmy, and with perhaps a nod to himself and his father, Grant says with a grin, "it works well having an old head and young legs".



**JUDGES COMMENTS**

- The farm is being operated in a way that utilises the experience of the two generations to create equilibrium - sustainability.
- Total package of farm sustainability covered; land classification constantly being monitored and revised.
- Excellent recording of financial, production and risk management policies; actively setting seasonal goals and benchmarks.
- Commendable community and industry involvement.



JUSTIN & JANINE NELSON, MARTIN NELSON  
'EARLSWOOD'

**HILLS LABORATORIES HARVEST AWARD**  
**BALLANCE AGRI-NUTRIENTS HABITAT AWARD**

Backing up onto the Waikato side of the Kaimais, Earlswood is a 202ha family farm with a proud past and a hopeful future.



Referring to the father and son combination of Martin and Justin, the award judges pointed out the strength of “the combined knowledge of two generations acting with an open mind towards new ways” on Earlswood. They also wrote: “Justin and Janine are very enthusiastic people who are trying to think outside the square, while staying sustainable and profitable.”

Justin’s grandfather Robert bought the property in 1934 and ran 3000 ewes on the original 280ha. Justin’s father Martin, who still lives and works on the farm, carried on the work of his father improving and developing the farm, eventually switching to a bull beef operation. With Martin’s support, Justin and Janine have now broadened the scope of the farm, adding Dorper sheep and ginkgo biloba trees (as a crop) to the mix.

Justin, who came home to the farm in 2002 fresh from five years of travelling, shares Martin’s environmental care and sustainability awareness. Justin and Janine have continued Martin’s efforts to protect wetlands and waterways; they have in place a planting programme that includes flax shelterbelts, native trees and, for erosion control and stock shade, pole planting. The Nelsons, noted the judges, are “passionate” about looking after the environment.

Just under two years ago the first ginkgo were planted on Earlswood. More went in last year and there are now two hectares of the ancient tree with medicinal properties, prized by many cultures. The active ingredients in the ginkgo leaves are said to assist with memory, concentration, alertness and blood circulation. The leaves are sent to Hawkes Bay for drying before being processed into a powder in China. The ginkgo powder is marketed through NZ Nature Green, a charitable organisation that helps people with special needs.

The first harvest of the trees’ leaves was this February, using a specially commissioned mechanical harvester from Marlborough. The cost of establishing the trees was approximately \$125,000. They hope to eventually net \$40,000 per hectare. “It’s a bit of a gamble,” says Justin, “but we are cautiously optimistic”.

Contour on the farm is 75 per cent flat to rolling and 25 per cent steep. Last year they wintered 600 Dorper X ewes, 280 Dorper X hoggets and 110 R1 and R2 beef cattle, and grazed 260 dairy heifers.

Justin began breeding up the Dorper flock in 2004. He sells the lambs to Lean Meats in Hawkes Bay because the company makes a yield payout, “and that’s where a good Dorper excels,” he explains. Justin is happy with the Dorper type they are breeding up. He has always culled heavily, he says. The feet can still be an issue, but he estimates he only has to foot trim about 10 per cent of the flock. “If I don’t have to shear, dip, dag or dock them I don’t mind trimming the odd foot,” he says.

Justin and Janine have a baby daughter, Piper.



**JUDGES COMMENTS**

- Combined knowledge of two generations acting with an open mind towards new ways of total sustainability.
- Property well planted; ongoing to provide shelter for crops and stock.
- Flexibility to change policies a key factor in this farming operation.
- Innovation and enthusiasm for new ideas and markets (ginkgo); new trials currently taking place.

DEREK & DAPHNE LUGTON, PHILIP & JACKIE LUGTON  
'SANDPHIL LAND LTD'

**BALLANCE AGRI-NUTRIENTS NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT AWARD  
ENVIRONMENT WAIKATO WATER PROTECTION AWARD**

The Lugtons demonstrate a clear appreciation of balancing environmental care with economic viability. Commented the award judges: "They are very knowledgeable and have a very good grasp on what sustainability means to them."



Phil and Jackie have been sharemilking on Derek and Daphne's two farms west of Matamata for the past three seasons. With a total of five labour units they milk 880 cows, but the 132 ha (125ha effective) home farm at Walton, on which they calved 440 cows this season, is the subject of their entry into these awards.

The judges paid tribute to the prolonged effort of the Lugton family in farm enhancement and protecting waterways, noting their estimate of up to 8,000 trees planted. Wrote the judges: "The planting on the property was superb. This has been achieved through hard work and dedication. The swamps and ponds have been created in wet areas and although they are lovely to look at they have also been designed to have a filtering effect for any run-off that may occur."

The judges identified a key factor in the success of the Lugton family's farming operation was their shared environmental awareness. For Derek, that has meant farming carefully, and well. Phil's addition to the mix has brought about an even sharper environmental focus via both Phil's personal interest and his specific knowledge gained studying ecology and parks management at Lincoln University.

Prior to coming home to sharemilk, Phil was a park ranger for the Auckland Regional Council. The job included farming 1200 stock units of sheep and beef under environmental best practise principles. Upon taking up sharemilking Phil, in consultation with his parents, began a trial of biological farming systems on 30ha of the home farm. The results, so far, are promising, says Phil. "But it will have to stack up financially, not just environmentally."

The judges praised this initiative, noting it demonstrated a strong ability to "think ahead and plan" and an effective family working relationship. "Although they all have slightly different ways of doing things they complement one another with their different strengths. They were very respectful of one another and were willing to listen to each other's opinions."

With water protection and minimising the impact of effluent and farm run-off a priority, protecting waterways is ongoing. They have replaced a travelling irrigator with a pod system. "It's all on a timer system so we can control the depth of effluent application, says Phil. "It gives us much better management options whatever the weather."

Phil has also overhauled the rubbish system on both farms. All households contribute to the domestic recycling collection and silage wrap is recycled through the Plasback scheme. There are no longer any farm dumps, "they only create a problem for the future".

Phil and Jackie have two sons, Fletcher (4) and Harrison (2) and twins "on the way".



**JUDGES COMMENTS**

- Well developed nutrient management plan, well thought through – everything counts.
- 'Safe' areas for waterway protection; wetland areas and ponds collect runoff from steeper areas, filtered before leaving property.
- Enthusiastic about environment and the effect of nutrients; open to new ideas and willing to trial.
- Well-fenced wetland, ponds and waterways.



ALLAN & MARY-ANNE GODDARD  
'GTG ESTATE LTD'

PGG WRIGHTSON LAND AND LIFE AWARD

This King Country couple came to farming later in life than most but are quick to point out they view their timing as a positive, and the award judges agree.



“We commend the Goddards on the balance they have found between farm and leisure activities,” wrote the judges. “This needs to be a standard key performance indicator with all farmers, well done on making this commitment and sticking to it.”

When Allan and Mary-Anne purchased their 335ha (260ha effective) easy contoured Kopaki sheep and beef farm

south east of Te Kuiti in 2006 they underwent a massive lifestyle change. Allan had been working for the Auckland Regional Council for 21 years, and was in charge of Solid Waste at the time he left. Mary-Anne worked for what is now IANZ, auditing testing laboratories.

This clear-thinking, focused couple met at Massey University while gaining their B AgSci degrees. Before marrying in 1996 decided they would have a farm ‘one day’. “Then one day I said to Allan, when is ‘one day?’,” recalls Mary-Anne. “So we sat down there and then identified what was stopping us, and what we needed to do to remove those obstacles.”

They set a goal to buy a farm and become full-time farmers by November 2008, but instead made it onto their place by 2006.

The stage in life at which they entered farming has allowed them to be specific about what they want, the couple believe.

Ensuring that a pleasant work-lifestyle balance was possible has underpinned all their planning and decision-making. “We are aware that coming into farming in mid-life means that, while we have a lot to learn, we are also bringing skills that many in the sector haven’t developed,” says Mary-Anne. “Those personal strengths are what we like to focus on.”

The couple looked for a farm that was a size and type to allow them to do the work themselves. “We didn’t want something that was so difficult and challenging that we would be working all the time, but at the same time we wanted a farm that had a bit of potential, that we could make something of.”

Last year they wintered 1000 ewes, 340 hoggets, 44 M/A breeding cows and 32 R1 and R2 steers in a farming operation described by the award judges as, “a good set of sustainable farming practises that meets with their objectives and goals in an environment that many would find challenging.”

The Goddards hire contractors for some specific jobs, but do the rest – like docking for example – themselves, in their own time. In the five years they have been in the King Country, they have become valued community members. Allan recently became deputy mayor of the Waitomo District Council and Mary-Anne’s commitments include Citizens Advice Bureau, Red Cross and the Women in Farming organisations.



JUDGES COMMENTS

- Flexible farm policy to fit in with climate, prices and people; plan whole farm system around work/life balance.
- Embrace information technology; extensive use of data capture and analysis to understand challenges and set goals.
- Clear achievable goal setting; focus on profitability without being intensive.
- Excellent community involvement. In a short time have got involved and are valuable community members.

ROSS & PAMELA TOWNSHEND  
WITH MANAGERS PODGE & TRISHA HELLINGS, DAVID BECK & LAURA COLE  
'RANWORTH FARM LTD'

**BEEF + LAMB NEW ZEALAND LIVESTOCK FARM AWARD**

Ranworth Farm, a 700ha Te Akau property is, according to the award judges, notable for a marked production lift and for the passion of those involved to develop, care for and enjoy its unique coastal situation.



The judges noted after their visit the “very evident” passion of all the people involved in the farm they described as “beautiful”. Wrote the judges: “The change in stock class and management of these stock classes to reduce soil erosion has made a dramatic change to the farm.” It had gone from being a “run down farm” to “a highly productive sheep and beef operation”.

In 2005 Ross and Pam purchased 500ha, the Papunga block. The 200ha Mangati block across the road was added in 2008. Ross is an executive with a large private equity business, so doesn't live on the farm. Podge Hellings was employed as manager “from day one”. David Beck was employed when the Mangati block was purchased. Ross values their input. “With my work I travel a lot, and sometimes I'm just not accessible, so a high level of autonomy and trust is required,” he explains.

The award judges noted Podge had “excellent skills in animal management” and that the Hellings “treat Ranworth as their own”. Ross describes Podge as “a quiet thinker who is doing a spectacular job”. He values the close relationship Podge has fostered with Kaitaia vet Lloyd Wilkie. “It sounds like a dumb idea because of the distance, but it works well,” says Ross. Lloyd is a regular visitor to Ranworth, combining his professional input – they are currently running trials around worm-resistance in

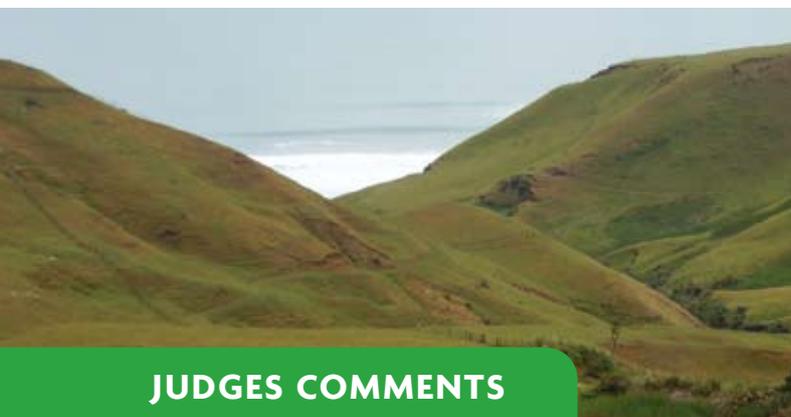
lambs and pre-lamb inoculation of ewes – with farm's edge fishing expeditions with Podge.

There is a private access beach with a rustic solar and gas powered beach house, and a good range of duck shooting ponds on Ranworth. There are frequent visitors, including five adult Townshend children who “don't have any agricultural aspirations but do enjoy the place”.

About 30 per cent of the property is “tractor country” with the rest steep. Wide soil variety and the two block set-up allows for scope to protect soil and improve production by moving stock types and classes around according to the season. Last year 6680 SU were wintered including 2500 ewes, 500 hoggets, 450 store lambs, 400 R3 steers and 300 R2 heifers.

Rehabilitation of 40ha of river flats on Mangati is underway. Lambs are fattened on a ryegrass, clover and chicory mix there described by the judges as “outstanding”. Overall, lamb finishing on Ranworth has lifted from 50 to 100 per cent in just six years.

An extensive fencing and planting programme is ongoing and has included a nine-hectare bush block being QEII Trust covenanted. Ross is candid that the work to develop Ranworth into a sustainable farm would not have been possible without his off-farm income. However their plan is that as his retirement draws near, the production and profitability lift will make Ranworth not only a great place to live, but also a viable economic unit.



**JUDGES COMMENTS**

- Owners and managers working as one unit to create top quality stock; high standard stock procurement and management.
- Great balance between soil, plants and stock; good understanding of property limitations.
- Excellent management of fragile soils.
- High standard improvements built to withstand the challenging coastal environment.

PETER & KATHRINE MCINTYRE  
'AMBERDALE TRUST'

MASSEY UNIVERSITY DISCOVERY AWARD

A keen interest in the sustainable management of natural resources and a powerfully simple mission statement are key drivers in the operation of the McIntyre's 89ha Kereone dairy farm.



After visiting Amberdale, an attractive rolling-contoured property between Morrinsville and Matamata, the award judges commented: "Peter's objective of having a pragmatic plan for every project that he undertakes has not only impressed the judging team, but also highlighted the family's positive attitude towards sustainable farming."

Peter explains, "how we do business" is arranged around their five word mission statement – 'trustworthy, evidence, challenges, simple and people'. "It is a mission statement that is simple and brief, but the outcome is a sustainable income and a happy family," he says.

This is a family-oriented operation. There are three children: Joshua (18), Daniel (15) and Larissa (13). Peter describes Kathrine as "the best calf-rearer in the world, and a pretty handy emergency relief milker". A part-time worker is employed over the spring calving, "because it enables me to carry on with family and community involvement. These things are important," explains Peter.

Peter is the farm's full-time labour unit. This season he is milking 260 cows on the farm's effective 85ha. "I am tending to milk less cows over time," he says. "Less cows, more sustainable profit." A keen learner, he undertakes as many courses that he can

targeting specific skills – in relation to farming, and in support of the children's education and sporting activities – and studies extra-murally at Massey University.

"I do a lot of on-farm research here. I go a bit further than saying I believe I am sustainable. I work to provide evidence to support that claim." Ensuring compliance with resource consent should be a major consideration for all farmers, Peter believes. "If farmers get into it, they would see that providing key compliance evidence insulates us from the consent process. Farmers need to prove they are having a 'minor effect' on the environment – the alternative is not pretty."

Peter makes the farm available for data collection and co-operates in research with organisations like NIWA, Landcare, Environment Waikato and Dairy NZ. He is involved in a 10-year cadmium monitoring programme and has been looking at ways of reducing fertiliser transfer to water. "I am close to presenting a paper on that, a lot of people will be interested."

The judges commended Peter and Kathrine for their documentation and planning, describing their recording and bookkeeping as "extremely impressive". They described riparian management on Amberdale as "appreciable" and wrote: "Biodiversity and conservation practises are of high order". They praised the McIntyre's focus on "doing things better by looking at details and evaluating every aspect of the business" and "growing net capital by reducing debt from cash surplus and taking opportunities locally only if economic and environmental advantages are gained".



JUDGES COMMENTS

- Research is driver to gain more knowledge; meticulous record keeping backs research.
- Peter undertaking tertiary education into soils, nutrients and agriculture.
- Research on property taken further onto industry research, often done on own initiative, with new unpublished findings.
- Simplifying and minimising stress in farming operation has benefited both farm production and family life.

## 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.

The awards have been running in the Waikato region since 1993.

## 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

The field day will be held at the Supreme Winners property.

**Gordon & Pamela Blake**  
**Grant & Lindsay Blake**

**When:** Tuesday, May 10, 2011

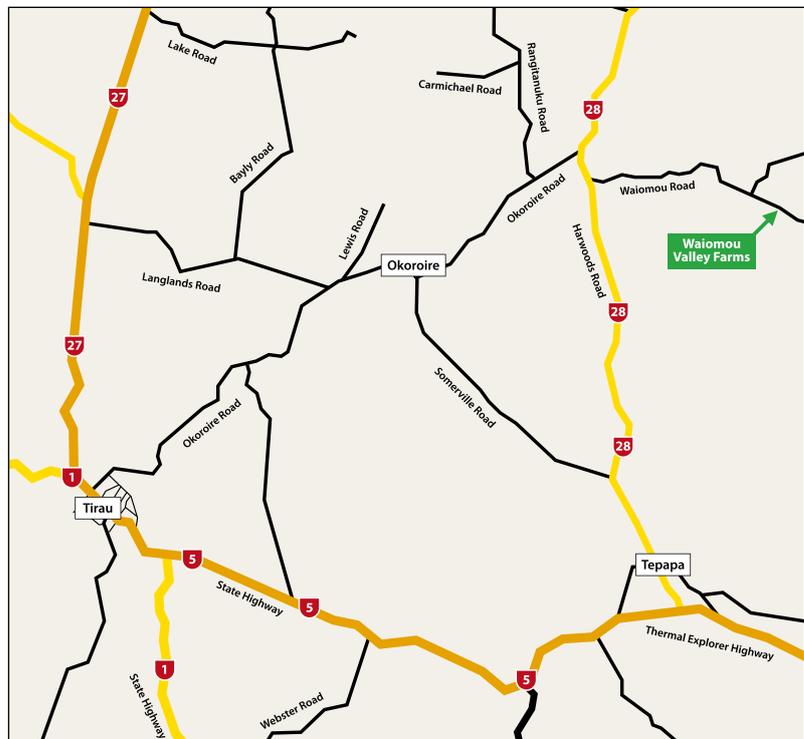
**Where:** Waiomou Valley Farms Ltd  
36/38 Pakaraka Road  
RD2, TIRAU  
Dairy Supply #77698

**For details, contact Tracy Brown**

**Phone** (07) 888 5949

**Mobile** 027 2911 716

**Email** waikato@bfea.org.nz



**FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:** [www.bfea.org.nz](http://www.bfea.org.nz)

**Ballance Farm Environment Awards National Sponsors**

**Regional Sponsor**