



Ballance Farm Environment Awards

Promoting Sustainable Profitable Farming

2009 WAIKATO WINNERS

GRAY & MARILYN BALDWIN, HAMISH & JANE PUTT
WUPPERTAL FARMING

THE SUPREME AWARD WINNERS FOR 2009



Putt family

New and noticed would be a good catch-line for this partnership.

Owners Gray and Marilyn Baldwin and sharemilkers Hamish and Jane Putt are in their second season together with their 410-cow organic dairying operation, just west of Putaruru.

It is, according to the award judges, "an impressive farming operation founded on excellent working relationships with sustainability in mind throughout the business".

The Baldwin/Putt team combines top farming practise with hard work, broad experience and, the judges noted, "big picture vision, beyond their farm gate". Their award entry was undoubtedly a collective one and mutual respect is apparent.

Hamish and Jane's sharemilking contract with the Baldwins is for six years, which consciously mirrors the farm's contract with Fonterra to supply organic milk. They are targeting a 160,000kgMS production this season.

"The key to success is for the owner to butt out," believes Gray, who explains, "if they're good enough to deserve half the milk cheque, they're good enough to be trusted with running the place."

The Wuppertal Farming land is in conversion to organic certification. It's 40 percent flat to gently rolling, 40 percent rolling to hill and the balance steep.

The main home block is 187ha - 145ha effective and 38ha trees. Gray's family moved to the original part of this in 1965 and began dairying 10 years later. Gray and Marilyn purchased it in 1992 after two years leasing.

In 2003 they added to the home block with a 43ha forestry bush block, building a bridge to allow access to the cowshed. They developed cutover forest into pasture on contour suitable for dairying and kept the rest in trees.



Gray and Marilyn Baldwin

BENEFITS • IDEAS • INNOVATION • MANAGEMENT

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GRAY & MARILYN BALDWIN, HAMISH & JANE PUTT ALSO WINNERS OF THE...

BALLANCE NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT AWARD

"In their great favour," says Hamish, "are good free draining soils and a mild climate."



A 45ha run-off 400 metres up the road was added last year, it's primary role to provide a reliable supply of organic supplementary feed and provide winter and calf grazing, once organic certification is completed.

Their constant challenge, especially being organic, is the number of boundaries they have with corporate forestry land, "with the blackberry jumping over the fences at us"

Gray and Hamish share a good deal of common history; their families have lived on neighbouring farms for more than half a century. Both possess agricultural degrees and first-hand knowledge of working off-farm and both came home to work family land.

Gray has a corporate background in fertiliser and rural banking. This work is ongoing. After university, Hamish was a Dexcel consultant, rising to be a regional manager in Northland. Hamish and Jane have been sharemilking for the past seven years.

The Baldwin and Putt decision to join forces, and do it the organic way, stemmed from a casual conversation, literally over the boundary fence. As the story goes Hamish, who also conventionally sharemilks 450 cows on his parent's property

next door, planted the seed of the idea to Gray, whose initial reaction was "not organics, not saving whales". However, using the vision honed from years of business management, Gray delved deeper into the concept and found commercial merit. His eventual response to Hamish - "show me the money!"

So at the farm's core are organic principles, and while these two couples are passionate about organics it's not all about philosophy. They have their eyes firmly on the future.

"Producing organic milk puts you in touch with a very wealthy and elite customer base, and this insulates you from bigger market trends," explains Gray. Fonterra, he says, has around 80 organic suppliers now, and they're pushing hard for 400 farms by 2013.

"Sustainability is a nice fit, but economics come first. Organics is successful way to farm and make money."

Hamish agrees. "The premium paid for organic milk offsets any extra work or drop in production initially."

And he's finding he and his staff enjoy the greater variety of work on an organic property. "There's a lot of interest in organics," he says, "so many farm workers have been through the mill, spraying weeds in all their spare time. Here we offer something different."



JUDGES POINTS

- *Impressive big picture vision*
- *Strong commercial organics*
- *Exceptional owner/sharemilker relationship*
- *Sound understanding of nutrient requirements, working budgets in place*
- *Professional technical approach*
- *Operating within the rules whilst ensuring profitability*
- *Excellent animal health policies*
- *Sound technical backing to support farm operations and policies*



Gray and Hamish with maize crop



This is a significant factor, believes Gray, who says, “successful dairying these days is all about human resources”.

It appears the cows are happy too, with judges noting their health and Hamish and Jane’s meticulous and thorough records proving a continual improvement overall as the organic conversion kicks in. Jane has a nursing background so takes a keen interest in the animal health and, says Gray, raises “top calves”.

Before taking on the sharemilking job for the Baldwins, the Putts did their homework in assembling their herd. Their priority was for cows that produced “good clean milk, and didn’t get sick”. An agent was instructed to source herds that had a minimum of three years of animal health records. They acknowledge this was a tall order as usually farmers who go to this kind of trouble are “in it for life”.

They lucked on a 600-cow herd and, using the records, were able to filter out the cows with any history of mastitis, bloat, sore feet, reproductive problems and high cell count. The 320 cows left over became the nucleus of their herd.

The animal health recording, monitoring and culling is a constant process, but they see it as vital for their future in organic dairying.

“It’s hard, as a sharemilker, to cull and send away a cow that might have a good index,” says Hamish. “But if it’s caused problems, you just have to bite the bullet and do it, if you want to end up with a really robust herd.”

Gray is enthusiastic about the difference the organic approach has already made to their pastures. “That stuff you would have on your own plate for a salad, you can see why the cows get all excited about it.”

Hamish explains the introduction of the organic ‘herbal ley’ in the pastures provides a range of foragers from which the cows can find their own medicines. There are seven main

components in the mix used, with a tall fescue base. The other species include chicory, plantain, lucerne, red and white clovers and timothy.

They are working on turning over around 10ha annually to crop, then regrassing with the herbal ley. The results so far are, in Hamish’s words, “really stunning”.

To gain an even spread of RPR, fertiliser is applied by air. The use of RPR allows the herbal ley seed to be mixed in with the fertiliser, speeding up the pasture improvement programme in hard to reach areas. No artificial nitrogen can be applied and the slow release phosphate reduces harmful run off.

Approximately 40 percent of the home farm is plumbed for effluent spreading and this is seen as vital. “When effluent becomes your only source of nitrogen it takes on a whole new importance,” says Gray.

Extensive tree planting is ongoing, with special attention paid to protection of waterways. The Pokaiwhenua River runs through the property and they take their responsibility for this seriously. In addition, Gray’s work for Carter Holt Harvey Properties gives him an extra insight into the importance of the river for the Kinleith Mill. The temperature of the river is regularly monitored as it runs through the property.

The Baldwins have a range of trees, from well managed pine blocks up to 14 years old, to natives in generously fenced riparian areas and the shelter and shade trees planted in rows throughout the farm. These trees are one of Marilyn Baldwin’s special areas of interest and expertise. She has chosen tree crop species including chestnut, hazelnut and feijoa with the potential of produce being sold off-farm through a Farmer’s Market.

- *Have ensured scale means they aren’t reliant on outsourcing supplementary feed*
- *Extensive and varied protection plantings*
- *Open to new ideas*
- *Long contract encourages commitment (ie: cowshed solar hot water installed by sharemilker)*
- *Very motivated family enterprise*
- *Protection of spring source, celebrated as a special family place*
- *Want to use farm to showcase organic viability*



Where plastic is recycled

DAVID FINDLAY – BARRACHDAIL FARM

SILVER FERN FARMS LIVESTOCK AWARD NZFEA TRUST HABITAT IMPROVEMENT AWARD GALLAGHER INNOVATION AWARD

The choice of name for the Findlay family's picturesque 250ha property east of Cambridge fits both geographically and within the central role the place has in the lives of many living things.

The Scottish Gaelic word alludes to lofty heights and "to be all that it is capable of being". The award judges concur, using words in their feedback reports like "magnificent stock", "dream farm" and "magic lake".

Barrachdail Farm ranges from rolling to steep contour in the hills of the Whitehall area; the top of the place is one of the highest points in the district.

It's pastures, three lakes, wetlands and bush are home to several classes of beef cattle, breeding ewes, dairy grazers and a wonderful range of bird life. But, David Findlay says proudly, "it's not a home to many possums anymore."

David's unashamedly passionate about the place he happily describes as "my life".

"I'm definitely a greenie," he says, "I love planting trees."

He's been fencing and planting steep sidings, waterways, wetlands and the lake edges "since day one here, and still going". He has also fenced an almost five hectare stand of native bush earmarked for preservation through a QEII covenant.

David likes that the family of the previous long-term owners still feel free to visit and that there is a history of many people enjoying the place. The lakes were made for recreation and enjoyment and were the scene of many extended family and community activities prior to David buying the farm.

It's a spirit that endures, and David says he's not the only one who now gets pleasure seeing the environmental transformation all the fencing and planting is making.

"I like to share the farm," says David, "sure, legally I'm an owner, but I look on that ownership more as a guardianship, a caretaker".

A livestock agent, David purchased the original 198ha portion of the property from the Gardener family in 1995, fulfilling his childhood dream of farm ownership by the time he was 50. The balance of the property was added when a neighbouring block was bought in 2003. The son of a farm labourer from Canterbury, David held tight to his farming dream, despite his father's words to a little fella, "you haven't got a dog's show of owning a proper farm".

Central to David's successful and ongoing farm ownership are two management priorities:

- Systems established minimising labour input, allowing David to also run his livestock business
- Environmentally friendly farming practise

The award judges noted: "The farm layout has been adapted to meet the demands on David's time. This is set up and managed to a very high standard." One judge described the property as "a large farm that can be run like a lifestyle block" and all agreed this was an innovative approach.

Example of gully fencing



JUDGES POINTS

- *Immaculately presented property*
- *Excellent stock*
- *Passionate about this property*
- *Very productive and easy-to-run unit*
- *Excellent planning of improvements and management policies*
- *Great pride in achievements*
- *Conscious of soil types and constraints*

David Findlay by his native bush





Catriona, David and Andrew Findlay



Explains David: "It's set up with laneways with three access points. In most cases, I can get the cattle into the yards within 20 minutes. Because of the livestock business, the workload on the farm has to be manageable, otherwise we just couldn't do it".

Areas of the farm have been designated for sheep only. David is always mindful of the effect farming, particularly the bigger classes of cattle, can have on the soil. He runs some bulls "because they pay the bills". Their good management is vital, given dairy grazers are also on the farm, and the ever-present time factor.

He believes he is able to run bulls in relatively large mobs of 55 because they are kept in the same group and same rotation from when they arrive on the place as weaner calves. The key, says David, is to keep them settled and always in their own territory.

By the end of June each year, he ensures all large cattle are off the property and winters over with around 550 in-lamb ewes, 300 dairy grazers, 150 yearling bulls and 100 yearling steers.

"The loam soil here can get quite powdery. Break feeding big cattle in winter would hammer the ground."

A feed wedge is built up before winter with silage fed out and break feeding, allowing an all grass system through the winter, and avoiding soil damage from stock milling about feed out areas and tractors.

"Cattle can really scar the country," he says, pointing out "we don't need to be flogging the countryside, and we shouldn't be".

Being on high ground, David is particularly conscious of taking care of the quality of water that leaves the farm. Cattle are not allowed near any natural water and the heads of all springs are well fenced.

Planting on Barrachdail has been a "trial and error" process. A good portion of the property makes up the top of a large

gully with often windy and exposed conditions. "We have established that growing specimen trees in the open country here doesn't work," says David wryly.

What does work in those areas are natives like pittosporum, flax, manuka and kanuka, which still afford stock shelter and shade once growing well. Further down and in sheltered areas species like Pin Oaks, Plane trees, Alders and a range of David's preferred native trees have been established.

It's an obvious pleasure to David that his children Andrew and Catriona and the farm's part owner Jan enjoy and appreciate the farm, despite their own commitments. The future of Barrachdail lies with Andrew and Catriona via a family trust David and Jan have set up.

David began his livestock business in 1993, after many years as an agent for national stock firms. Andrew has been working with him since 2004 and Catriona has just completed university.

Andrew already lives on Barrachdail with his partner Julieanne and son Harrison, though Andrew has his own 120ha block a few kilometres away, where he grows maize and runs steer and dairy grazers.

"Andrew's very keen on trees too, he's always looking at what can be done next here."

Andrew assists on the farm when he can, and David considers himself fortunate that when he calls on his long-time casual worker Rex Kidd to help at busy times, he has another person on the property that knows and appreciates it also.

- *Good management of wet areas*
- *Plantings include shelter and shade for stock*
- *Extensive plantings around ponds and wetlands, great visual appeal*

David Findlay with his stock



TERRY AND SUE MAGILL – ERENA FARM

LIC DAIRY FARM AWARD ENVIRONMENT WAIKATO WATER PROTECTION AWARD

"The decision to farm organically fits nicely thanks," says Terry.



Riparian plantings

When Terry and Sue Magill bought their first dairy farm in 2001 their processor wasn't paying a premium for organic milk, but they immediately began the procedure of organic certification for the 82ha Te Poi property anyway.

The addition to the 82ha property of a nearby 28ha run-off block now rounds off the organic holding known as Erena Farm which was described by the award judges as "a good example of 'best practise dairy farming' in all areas, conventional or organic".

A senior partner in a Matamata law firm, farmer's son Terry is passionate about excellent farming. "There remains the perception out there that organic farmers are hippie types," he says, "but we aren't here to muck about. This is not some sort of lifestyle scenario.

"Like many farmers, we have relatively high borrowing ratios and we have to run our farm at the best production level we can. We are focused on good production levels through contented animals and healthy soils. Organics is the way we believe we can achieve that."

The farm's production and operating costs speak for themselves, says Terry. Contour on both blocks is flat to rolling. 230 cows are calved down and the production for the past five years has averaged 75,000kgsMS.

Inputs are continuing to track downwards says Terry, who poses the question, "could it be because the land, soil and animals are becoming attuned to a more sustainable system?"

Barberry hedging and just three trees were present when the Magills purchased the farm. Unproductive wetter areas were identified straightaway and taken out of use. An extensive seven-year planting plan was adopted immediately to improve stock shade and shelter and ensure riparian protection.

The first area they turned their attention to was the main waterway through the farm. They have always been conscious this is only a kilometre from feeding into the Rapurapu River, which in turn feeds into the Waihou River.

"We feel it's important to do our bit towards what has to be a collective commitment to water protection," says Terry.

Terry has always been a hands-on farm owner, and not just because he loves it. He is keenly aware of the compliance and accreditation issues involved with organic farming and he is mindful of the integrity of the product. "It's critical that the requirements we have signed up to are met," he says.

The judges commended the "high standards" present and obvious in all aspects of the Magill's farming business, highlighting extensive plantings, weeds under control, healthy stock, good fencing and an excellent working relationship between the Magills, who live on and operate the run-off block, and sharemilkers Chris and Helen Brookes.

The Brookes came to work for the Magills as managers in 2002. It is a happy and secure partnership. Terry appreciates Chris's "huge" work ethic, care of stock, equipment and farm maintenance, and commitment to farming organically.

"We made the decision to go organic back in 2001 based on philosophical reasons," chuckles Terry. "It's very nice that since then Fonterra have found that organic dairy product is not something they have any difficulty selling."

JUDGES POINTS

- Good example of "best practise dairy farming" in all areas
- Extensive riparian planting with great results
- Good understanding of nutrient and technical issues
- Excellent staff relations
- Sensitive soils and unproductive areas well planted
- Very committed to farm, proud of results
- Excellent animal health monitored with regular soil and blood testing
- Well presented properties, clean and tidy
- Live the organics philosophy but also committed to making it work financially



Terry and Sue Magill



KEITH AND MARGARET ORMSBY

PGG WRIGHTSON LAND AND LIFE AWARD



“It feels like we are blowing our trumpet,” says Keith, “and that’s not us.”

This energetic and enthusiastic Ngutunui couple’s reluctance to enter these awards, and talk about themselves, is a measure of their humility.

The judges summarised Keith and Margaret like this: “There is a strong commitment to sustainable farm practises and an equally strong desire to provide leadership in ensuring the well being of the community.”

The original 53ha block of the Ormsbys now 260ha dairy farm in the southern foothills of Mt Pirongia has been home since they took it over from Keith’s family in 1958.

Back then most of the property was untouched native bush. Keith had helped fell about 20ha of bush there in the previous two years. When they took over they farmed 66 ewes and milked 23 cows. Keith spent his days felling bush. “I had to cut it all down to get myself a farm,” he explains

When he got up to 130 dairy cows, he made the switch to dry stock, and continued to spend his days “breaking in” the land. Then 16 years ago Keith and Margaret made the decision to convert the farm into a modern dairy unit and there’s been a 50/50 sharemilker working the property since.

“It was a good choice,” says Keith, who ironically has used much time and resource since then protecting and replanting remnant native bush and riparian areas. Recently 25ha was protected by QEII covenants.

Keith has lived in the Pirongia area all his life. He traces his ancestry back to a local Maniapoto iwi and the first schoolteacher in the frontier settlement now called Pirongia. He and Margaret have four adult children, Kay, Brett, Ross and Angela.

Their commitment to their land and community is palpable.

The Ormsby property boundaries the magnificent Scott native bush reserve and the thriving two-teacher Ngutunui School. Five years ago, and down to just six pupils, closure of the school was imminent. But the Ormsbys spearheaded a successful drive to return the school to being a central community focus.

Keith became BOT chairperson and Margaret spends many hours at the 32-pupil school too, voluntary teacher aiding. The community hall is now a shared facility with the school and a playgroup has been established.

The fight to save the school has “bought the district together again” says Keith, who likes that new people coming into the area now can’t be missed.

The Ormsbys have involved the school children in a recent joint initiative with Environment Waikato restoring around three kilometres of waterways on their farm. The children have helped plant 3000 natives so far. This fits neatly with the school’s Enviro School status. The children have great pride in the plantings, many of which can be seen from the school.

Keith is teaching others to value their resources too through his involvement running the nearby Waiwhakaata Trust dairy farm. Under his stewardship with the sharemilkers on the farm, production has increased and sustainable management policies are being established.

As well as being “quite possibly” the oldest school BOT chairman in the country, Keith is current president of the Alexandra Racing Club at Pirongia and the Pakeke Lions Club in Te Awamutu.

JUDGES POINTS

- *Exceptional community contribution*
- *Great people skills, organising and encouraging for positive outcomes*
- *Energetic couple with energy and enthusiasm*
- *Replanting, protecting and passing on the passion*
- *Making a difference in many areas*
- *Involve local school in clean streams planting project*
- *Very humble couple*
- *Lead by example, values passed on to staff and others*
- *Deep appreciation of natural beauty and the environment*



Stock on the Ormsby property



OTHER 2009 FINALISTS

JAMES AND LEIGH NEEDHAM, GLENLEA DOWNS 273HA SHEEP AND BEEF, SCOTSMAN VALLEY

- The water quality on farm is excellent and they are passionate about maintaining that quality.
- Sidlings have been planted in pines and natives to avoid run off by stabilising the soil.
- There is an awareness of the impact stock have on the soil.



ANDREW AND MAREE PALMER 80HA DAIRY FARM, WHANGAMATA

- Understanding and acceptance of the challenges that come with the property.
- Commitment to water quality through protecting waterways, and retiring of wetland areas.
- The protection of the stand of native bush on the property.



WAIKATO FOREST AND BIRD NATIVE FOREST RESTORATION AWARD

JOHN AND HEATHER SMYTH

The Smyth property is a well run dairy farm with dedication to tree planting, the protection of existing native vegetation and enhancement of waterways. They do this work in conjunction with the Mangapiko stream care group.



HILL LABORATORIES HARVEST AWARD WAS NOT PRESENTED THIS YEAR

FIELD DAY

5TH OF MAY, 2009
10:30AM – 2.30PM
LUNCH PROVIDED

Wuppertal Farming Ltd
Gray & Marilyn Baldwin
Hamish & Jane Putt

Dukeson Rd, Putaruru
or down load a map from www.bfea.org.nz



NEED MORE INFORMATION... www.bfea.org.nz

- For more information please contact the Ballance Farm Environment Awards through Environment Waikato freephone 0800 800 401 or Ballance Agri-Nutrients Freephone 0800 222 090

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