



Ballance
Farm Environment Awards®
Promoting Sustainable Profitable Farming

2013 WELLINGTON

Michael (Mick) and Karen Williams
Ahiaruhe Farm

SUPREME AWARD WINNERS

ALSO WINNERS OF:
BALLANCE AGRI-NUTRIENTS: NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT AWARD
and HILL LABORATORIES HARVEST AWARD



The award judges described this 224ha central Wairarapa arable, lamb finishing and beef unit as, “an outstanding farm operation run by an inspirational young couple”.

The judges highlighted the couple’s “immense passion” and how they displayed acumen in their everyday decisions in achieving the best. “They are innovative, hardworking and work as a team to bring their practical farming and business/financial skills together to achieve top results,” the judges wrote.

Mick and Karen have been farming in their own right since 2009. Mick came to the Gladstone district east of Carterton in 1999 when his family partnership purchased the initial block of 64ha. Since then the balance of the land has been added by purchasing neighbouring farms, the most recent being 38ha this year.

The judges noted: “From small beginnings they have set about to provide critical mass and have achieved this well in earlier years through leasing and more recently through land purchase.”

Through the years Mick and Karen have also farmed lease blocks, but the couple say they feel very fortunate that they have had the opportunities to purchase land adjacent. Says Mick, “having all your land together is so much more efficient use of time and resources”.

Crops include wheat, barley, ryegrass, peas, red clover and, for seeds, onion, mizuna lettuce, coriander, carrot and celery.



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Regional Partner



Michael and Karen Williams Ahiaruhe Farm

SUPREME AWARD WINNERS

(continued)



Around 3800 lambs have been fattened on the property annually in recent years. Also wintered are 90 yearling bulls, which are sold before their second winter to avoid soil damage.

The judges stated: “Exceptional production and revenue per hectare, excellent yields with all crops that is achieved through meticulous planning and management. Karen’s role as a resource management planner has been a great asset to the business.”

They have 215ha effective; there is a clear policy to retire land not suitable for cropping or stock access. A two hectare native bush remnant was stock proofed in 2005, as soon as the couple purchased the block of land the bush was on. Their active management of their bush continues as they undertake pest control, underplant, and constantly do battle with the invasive Old Man’s Beard plant. The judges said: “Protection of native habitat is part of their vision and the preservation of their non cultivatable flood channels into planted riparian zones is of note.”

The Williams’ land is flat, alluvial river silts with the Ruamahanga River on 2.8kms of their boundary. The river is fenced off and work is continuing on smaller waterways. 151ha is irrigated with a system installed, including telemetry soil moisture monitoring,

in the past three years.

Cross slot (no tillage) is used for all crop establishment except onion seed which requires some cultivation. The judges noted that soil health was a clear consideration for the couple. Explains Karen: “Our soils are the lifeblood of our operation. All management decisions are made around soil health and protection.”

A Whole Farm Nutrient Management Plan is in place. “This allows us to very accurately match the nutrient requirements of crops to paddocks,” says Mick. “We are trying to be as efficient with our nutrients as possible.” Ground used for cereal crops and ryegrass are deep nitrogen tested down to 30cm, allowing for precise calculations and application.

The judges found there was “a real focus to maximise production but not at the cost of their natural resources”. The couple clearly have a firm direction and priorities. Their stated philosophy reflects this.

It reads: “We believe we live and work in a really special place and that we have a responsibility to look after it. Whilst our vision is to grow a successful business, this will be achieved while maintaining the high quality of our soils, improving the quality of freshwater and through continued habitat enhancement. We wish to undertake our farming business in a happy and rewarding environment, for ourselves, our family and staff, and to foster good relationships with contractors, neighbours and the community. We hope our children will continue this philosophy in the future.”

Mick and Karen have three children: Tom (10), Ollie (8) and India (4).



JUDGES’ COMMENTS

- *An outstanding farm operation run by an inspirational young couple.*
- *Very well organised business.*
- *Strong awareness of the sustainable requirements of their soil around production; very focused on farming for the long term.*
- *Strong community involvement around their business and the family.*

Ross and Louise Harrington (managing partners) Awatahuna

BEEF + LAMB NEW ZEALAND LIVESTOCK AWARD



This 863ha flat to medium hill country property north east of Masterton has progressed appreciably in the 10 years since the Harringtons came to manage it.

Accountant John Roseingrave owned Awatahuna, but died a month after the Harringtons arrived. Four years ago Ross and Louise formed a trading partnership with John's son Tom and his wife Michelle and leased the Bideford district property from the Roseingrave Family Trust. In March this year the farm was sold outright to a new partnership, which includes Ross and Louise and two North Canterbury farming couples.

The award judges noted the Harrington's "strong passion" for Awatahuna and commented: "Given the ownership structure this property has been very proactive around conservation, and it is commendable the levels of land protection that have been achieved. This is an appealing and well improved sheep and beef property achieving above district average production."

"It's been a good 10 years really," says Ross, understandably happy to now be a part owner of the property. "It's a pretty nice farm, it just needed to be kicked into gear."

Awatahuna is 740ha effective and carries 7200su with an 80/20 percent sheep to cattle ratio. 123ha has been retired, including

three blocks totalling 16ha of remnant bush covenanted with the QEII National Trust. Running through the middle of the farm is 74ha of flat country and 86ha of rolling contour. Permanently flowing waterways are fenced and riparian areas are being planted. In the past six years between 300 and 600 poplar poles have been planted annually in erosion-prone areas, and this is ongoing.

It is a summer-dry, winter-wet area with an average annual rainfall of 1080mms. However a flexible stocking policy is essential as the rainfall has varied in the past 10 years between 650mms and 1450mms.

The ewe flock of 4200 is Romney-based. The judges noted the early season decision to graze hoggets off-farm in the summer. Explains Ross, "our focus is on looking after our capital stock". The best lambs are sold off the ewes, the mediums sold as stores and generally the lighter ones kept to fatten. Weaning weight of 28kgs is targeted.

The judges noted: "Ross and Louise carry a high level of energy and passion for the property and its subsequent performance. They are respected amongst their peers as very good operators."

There has been concentrated development including realignment and replacement of fences, track replacements and upgrades, drainage and capital fertiliser application. One fulltime shepherd general is employed. Says Ross: "It's a nice farm with a good balance of country, a mix of aspects, it's an easy farm to work."

Ross and Louise have a daughter, Olivia (1).



JUDGES' COMMENTS

- Strong performing Wairarapa sheep and beef unit; managers take huge ownership of performance and profitability.
- High level of protected biodiversity achieved in short time.
- Stock health a credit to operation; good lambing percentages.
- Respected amongst peers as very good operators.

James and Jane Smallwood, and Wilfred and Rachel van Beek *Berwick Holdings Ltd*

LIC DAIRY FARM AWARD WATERFORCE INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT AWARD MERIDIAN ENERGY EXCELLENCE AWARD



The Smallwoods and their sharemilkers Wilfred and Rachel van Beek embrace dairy farming in the public eye, on the Greytown town boundary.

They milk 490 cows through two sheds on a 155ha milking platform spread over their neighbouring farms 'Berwick' and 'Platform'. The 173ha Berwick Holdings property has 38 neighbours, 5.5kms of road frontage and a public walkway through it. "We definitely see part of our role as helping to make sure people understand how agriculture works," says James, who before taking on and enlarging his family farm gained a Bachelor AgSci, and had a successful corporate career.

The award judges praised the Smallwoods' approach noting they were "very clear to their vision of having a top producing but very sustainable dairy operation". The judges commented: "The Smallwoods have developed a terrific relationship with the

community and bonded together a very symbiotic relationship of education and understanding that promotes excellent sustainable farming practices and a shared ownership of the environment."

Large totara trees are a feature of the property; James and Jane appreciate their value, despite their presence preventing the installation of centre pivot irrigation. Instead of cutting down the trees to accommodate a centre pivot they have invested in technology that enables them to get the best out of their combination lateral and K-line irrigation system.

TracMap GPS placement is used, and there is a comprehensive soil moisture monitoring system in place. Variable speed pumps keep energy costs down. GPS technology on the farm quads allows accurate placement of urea and fertiliser spreading contractors also use GPS placement. "We have spent money on technology," says James, "we take a long-term view."

With the Harvest Electronics remote monitoring system soil moisture probes are located around the farm. A weather station records evapotranspiration, solar radiation, humidity, wind speed and rainfall, enabling a wealth of information from which to make informed water use decisions.

Production average for the past three years is 1129 kgMS/ha. This year they're on target for 1,300 kgMS/ha. Per cow production last season was 424 kgMS. Consideration of gross margins and production costs puts Berwick Holdings in the top group for dairy farming profitability in the Wairarapa. A nutrient management plan and budget are in place; their endeavour is precise application of nutrients for maximised production, with minimum environmental impact.



JUDGES' COMMENTS

- Top performing dairy farm with a clear vision around sustainable farming practises.
- Careful use of water for irrigation with sensitivity to existing mature totara trees in the design of the irrigation application methods.
- High tech monitoring of soil moisture levels and water use allowing targeted irrigation activation; minimising wastage.
- Unique property with urban boundary.

James and Jane Smallwood, and Wilfred and Rachel van Beek *Berwick Holdings Ltd*

LIC DAIRY FARM AWARD

WATERFORCE INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT AWARD

MERIDIAN ENERGY EXCELLENCE AWARD

(continued)



There are numerous cost-saving practices in place; for example, yards are washed once a day to minimise water usage and cooling water is recycled back into the hot water cylinders to reduce water-heating costs. Noted the judges: “ Spending is focused on technologies and systems that improve productive efficiency gains or improve sustainability.”

The van Beeks have been involved in the business for two years as variable order sharemilkers. The judges said both owners and sharemilkers had “created an outstanding team where ideas are freely shared, challenged and developed”. James says he and Jane feel privileged to have the van Beeks as sharemilkers. “I can’t speak highly enough of them,” says James. “And I freely acknowledge Wilfred is a lot better at converting grass to milk than I will ever be!”

The Waiohine River runs for 1.5kms along the northern boundary. This and all other waterways have been fully fenced for the past 10 years. Planting of these areas is continuing. The large totara are a legacy from the first European settlers in the area; in the

mid 1850s Greytown became the first planned inland town in New Zealand. Bush was milled in the area now part of Berwick Holdings, however smaller trees were left. Those small trees have now become the magnificent large totara that dot the property.

James’ grandfather bought the original 50ha farm, which he named after the property on the edge of his home English village. He was involved with finance; Berwick was his “weekend place” says James. “It was low intensity farming, there was no irrigation, he was a great tree planter.”

James’ parents built the farm up to a 90 cow dairy unit. In the early 1990s James went into partnership with them but continued his agribusiness career. James and Jane married in the late 1990s but worked off-farm; Jane as a policy adviser and James specialising in change management in the agribusiness sector.

In 2003 they returned from working in Europe and purchased the neighbouring farm. They were employing a manager but five years ago, in keeping with a commitment to prioritise family life, took a large step out of full-time corporate work and turned their attention to their farm business.

“We work well together,” says James of he and Jane, “I tend to create a great big bow wave and Jane’s very good at dotting the i’s and crossing the t’s. Consequently our farm has now become a financially prudent business!”

The couple now also have an equity share in a 2000 cow Wairarapa dairy unit, of which James is business manager. With their children William (8) and Anna (7) they take care of the calf rearing at home each spring.

Wilfred and Rachel have four children: Leon (8), Pieter (6), Amarita (4) and Frits (1).



JUDGES’ COMMENTS

- Structured management decisions around the best approach to farm practices that are in the public eye.
- Water conserved by only washing down the yard once a day.
- Solar power for the effluent irrigator; updating pumps for more efficient energy use.
- Sophisticated weather station assists decision making.

Jim and Marilyn Law (owners), and Kurt and Lisa Portas (managers) *Palliser Ridge Ltd*

**PGG WRIGHTSON LAND AND LIFE AWARD
DONAGHYS FARM STEWARDSHIP AWARD
MASSEY UNIVERSITY DISCOVERY AWARD**



Multifaceted consideration for people, community and the environment clearly underpins the Palliser Ridge operation.

The award judges remarked on the tremendous contribution to the local (Pirinoa) community and a “very genuine” awareness of a rural community spirit. The judges wrote: “This benevolent mindset is very much part of the overall business strategy.” The judges also highlighted the effort that had gone into protection of “high value” archaeological sites and native areas writing, “there is no doubt this is an excellent example of commercial farming in conjunction with a high biodiversity ethic”.

This coastal South Wairarapa sheep and beef business comprises three blocks totalling 1010ha (823ha effective) with a high contrast from very good flats through to some hard, salt-challenged hill country. Situated within 10 minutes drive of each other, the three units collectively run 9500su with a sheep to

cattle ratio of 70:30. Jim and Marilyn purchased the block known as Burnside in 1988, Cranford in 1998 and began assembling the five titles that now comprise the Palliser Ridge block in 2001.

The Laws’ stated vision is: “Create and maintain a large scale, coastal, sheep and beef breeding and finishing property, achieving first decile industry performance factors on a sustainable basis.” The award judges commended how both this vision and the Palliser Ridge mission statement “were strong determinates of the direction” of “this particularly well-organised commercial operation”.

They noted the strength in having both owners and manager “obviously very passionate for the common objective”. The judges described Jim Law, a retired business executive and former chairman of the Taratahi Agricultural Training Centre as “a highly motivated owner with a professional approach.” Jim and Marilyn spend extended periods of time overseas so while Kurt is “fully in charge” they keep in regular contact electronically, have a clear budget for Kurt to work within, and a mentor who can visit or be phoned should Kurt feel the need.

Kurt admits to being taken aback three years ago when Jim offered him the job after a year on the place as stock manager. He was just 23 years old. “I asked for a couple of days to think about it,” recalls the graduate of the respected Smedley Station cadet training farm. “I was confident I had the practical side sorted, it was just the management, the planning and the staff that I’ve had to learn as I go. Jim has put people in place around me to help me and I haven’t looked back.” Kurt is now in his second year studying for the Lincoln Regional Diploma in Agriculture.



JUDGES’ COMMENTS

- Strong owner/manager relationship; good corporate style of communication around farm strategies and goals.
- Innovative experimentation with pasture mixes for stock feed.
- Great property with wow factor of Palliser Bay views; scope for variety of stock types from breeding to finishing.
- Very focused on enhancing the property; remarkable restoration achievement.

Jim and Marilyn Law (owners), and Kurt and Lisa Portas (managers) *Palliser Ridge Ltd*

**PGG WRIGHTSON LAND AND LIFE AWARD
DONAGHYS FARM STEWARDSHIP AWARD
MASSEY UNIVERSITY DISCOVERY AWARD**

(continued)



The two couples are in the process of further deepening their ties with shared ownership of a neighbouring property. The judges commented of Palliser Ridge: “The opportunities provided here to young motivated people are outstanding. Staff education and development is a high priority for Jim and he has a deliberate policy of employing and progressing high potential young people.”

Much resource has gone into protection and enhancement. The judges wrote: “Establishing a strong biodiversity ethic has been a priority from the beginning. Jim and Marilyn have established an almost park-like feel to the properties. This is particularly noticeable on the original Burnside property where stands of native vegetation are regenerating in all gullies and streams where remnant species have been supplemented with eco-sourced plantings.

“Numerous gradient control dams on each property have strategically created a string of wetlands, which provide habitat for waterfowl and other species. This is a truly commendable accomplishment which adds tremendous amenity value and has undoubtedly created a stand-out property in this regard.”

Burnside and Cranford are one kilometre apart and about 10 minutes drive from Palliser Ridge. The eastern boundary of Palliser Ridge is about 200 metres from the coast. The judges

noted how the beneficial aspects of the different blocks and soil types were utilised by the movement of stock classes to cope with seasonal variations and maximise growth.

Commented Kurt: “We’ve got everything here. Gnarly hill country, clay terraces, alluvial silt loam, river flats.” There is 187ha retired, 296ha of hill and 527ha of flat terrace country. On 30ha of arable land maize for dairy silage is grown, with winter wheat in behind it. Peas for seed are also grown.

Kurt is successfully creating excellent lamb-finishing pastures and budget and resource efficiencies with an innovative system borne from his experimentation. In one drill he is planting plantain and rape; the rape lasts for the summer and the plantain through the winter. In spring chicory and clover are broadcast onto the former rape/plantain areas from the same pass as the maintenance fertiliser. This ensures there is no lag for new grass and allows coding of the maintenance fertiliser as a cropping expense in the budget, freeing up more to spend on fertiliser for the hill country.

In another innovative move, they are sharefarming lambs with five neighbours. “We have a unique formula where the price is dictated by the schedule so there is a fair margin for all. This is a sustainable issue as all parties are moving in the same direction working together to create a quality, saleable product,” explains Kurt.

The Laws support much community activity including scholarships for post-graduate ecological science students, funding the re-opening of the petrol pumps and Pirinoa Store, Ducks Unlimited and Wairio Wetland. Kurt is a team manager and Lisa is secretary of the Tuhirangi Rugby Football Club. The couple have a baby son, Beauden.



JUDGES’ COMMENTS

- Considerable plantings; weed control a strong focus; development of a significant wetland.
- Respected owners and managers fully involved in community, committed long-term to maintaining a community nucleus.
- School scholarships and book prizes are donated to the local school; benevolent mindset.
- Keeping the Pirinoa store and petrol pumps operating for the local community, providing a much needed local asset.

Wayne and Philippa (Pip) Della Barca Kahikatea Partnership

GREATER WELLINGTON REGIONAL COUNCIL AKURA CONSERVATION CENTRE LIFESTYLE FARM/SMALL BLOCK AWARD



It's been 25 years and 3000 trees planted since the Della Barcas came from Eastbourne in the city to the seven hectare bare block that is now clearly a cherished homeplace.

They were among the first wave of lifestylers in their corner of the Taratahi district, north of Carterton. Their block, which consists of three wide, flat terraces, is on land which runs down to the Waingawa River and has, in Pip's words, "stunning views" of the Mikimiki Hills and up to Mt Holdsworth.

They have eight calves, 15 sheep, three horses, two goats, two cats and six dogs. The dog count is fluid, as Pip is a veterinary assistant and dog trainer. A stand of 400 pines, five years from commercial harvest, is a valued dog exercise area.

In the past five years they have successfully established 70 Tahitian lime trees in the almost frost-free environment on their bottom terrace. The limes are used in their restaurant, 'Iberia' in Masterton.

Northern rata, grown from cuttings taken from a large roadside tree nearby, have also been nurtured. One is 20 years old, and Pip gives away many young trees, which are flowering within three years.

The couple have two adult children, Brita and Mario, who grew up on the place.

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 twelfth Year in the Greater Wellington region. The 2013 Greater Wellington Ballance Farm Environment Awards were held at the Carterton Events Centre on Thursday the 18th 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 Ahiaruhe Farm on the 15th of May (to be confirmed).

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE BALLANCE
FARM ENVIRONMENT AWARDS, VISIT: www.bfea.org.nz**