



Ballance
Farm Environment Awards®
Promoting Sustainable Profitable Farming

2011 GREATER WELLINGTON WINNERS

RAY AND LYN CRAIG
 'LYNX FARM'

SUPREME AWARD WINNERS

ALSO WINNERS OF:
LIC DAIRY FARM AWARD
BALLANCE AGRI-NUTRIENTS HABITAT IMPROVEMENT AWARD

The riparian plantings on Ray and Lyn's 178ha Carterton dairy farm rank "amongst the best achieved on a dairy farm in New Zealand" according to the award judges.

Effective too, says Ray Craig of the plantings, part of extensive erosion control work undertaken in the past 14 years on their land, which hosts the confluence of the Enaki and Mangatere Streams. "When we bought the first block here in 1995, the high silt banks along the waterways weren't fenced," he explains. "If we hadn't done something, it would have just eroded away. I used to think, it's pretty tough when you see your land ending up in Lake Ferry, it was eroding that fast."

The award judges praised the structure, management and approach across the board at Lynx Farm describing it "an excellent quality operation with above average improvements and very strong personal factor". 550 cows are milked once a day in two herds through two sheds, on the mainly flat land on the western town boundary of Carterton.

The total farmed area of 262ha includes 84ha of leased land in three blocks. The main farm is a combination of two farms; the

original 53ha, and 120ha in four neighbouring blocks purchased as they became available between 1996 and 2007. While there are two herds and two sheds, it is ensured there is flexibility in the grazing management, with consideration for cow welfare always a top priority.

The decision to switch to once a day milking was made at the beginning of this season, after careful consideration. Ray clearly has no doubt the right choice was made. Though there has been a 15 percent drop in production, this is more than offset by the reduction in running costs and pressure that the regime change has prompted.

"It makes our whole business run a lot better," he says. "Milking once a day fixes a lot of things for us." This includes not having to deal with up to 30 lame cows every spring, a reduction in empty cow rates (six percent scanned March 2011, down from 15 percent last year) allowing greater culling discretion, significantly lower numbers of retained foetal membranes at the pre-mating check and "noticeably more contented cows and humans".

"The cows are just happier in themselves. I never ever thought I'd say milking could be pleasurable, but it definitely is now," marvels Ray, who light-heartedly suggests their long-time staff



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RAY AND LYN CRAIG
'LYNX FARM'

SUPREME AWARD WINNERS



member Tim Aplin would find another job if they went back to twice a day milking. Ray believes spending more time at ease together in the paddock gives his cows more time to exhibit their “normal social behaviours”.

He is refreshingly candid about how much he enjoys seeing his cows “kick up their heels”

in the afternoon when a gate is opened into a fresh paddock for them, instead of having to make the trek to the cowshed. The judges endorsed this, writing in their feedback report how impressed they were with the condition of the herd. “The animals were very quiet and content which was very noticeable in comparison to other properties,” the judges noted.

When the change to once a day was made, Ray says they were prepared for an initial increase in mastitis issues, particularly amongst the bigger Friesian cows. However, Ray says this did not eventuate and “we’ve been able to manage everything that has come at us”. They aim for ‘cups-on’ by 5.30am. “Then we’ve got the rest of the day. It takes the pressure off you in the afternoon, you can start a job and finish it.”

Drainage is a priority consideration, says Ray. “You want to get your drainage right before you even think about irrigation or regrassing. If your drainage is limiting you the rest of the year, it doesn’t matter how good your summer is. We are on fairly heavy silt loam, which turns to mud pretty quick; it doesn’t grow grass very well then. We try to avoid pasture damage like the plague.” They have stand off areas on fenced stony ridges

on which they can contain the cows and feed out to them, and areas of the race can also be used if necessary.

One person per shed undertakes milking. In December Ray and Lyn’s eldest son, Daniel (20) began working on the farm. The couple have four other children: Sam (18), Katie (14) and twins Tony and Jessica (10) and Ray likes that all the family are involved on the farm. “They are pretty handy,” he says, “it doesn’t seem to be a chore for them, it’s really nice having them around.” The whole family enjoy extensive community involvements including St Johns, Fire Brigade, Surf Lifesaving, small bore rifle and Enaki Care Group. Young people are welcomed onto the farm for work experience and gateway placements.

The couple took up dairy farming after meeting in Wellington where they were both working. In 1990 they leased 25ha from Ray’s parents and milked 100 cows. Leasing the neighbour’s farm at Greytown, they lifted their cow numbers to 240. Once they had built up enough resources and found they had a desire for “something of our own” they took the plunge and bought the first 53ha of what is now their home block.

The name Lynx Farm evolved around that time. It began when the Craigs were still living on the Greytown farm, and they referred to the new farm, on Lincoln Road, Carterton, as ‘the Linc farm’. This became Lynx Farm, “because it is the link between leasing and ownership, and being a peasant and an indebted peasant,” laughs Ray.

He happily admits a quiet satisfaction with their current situation. “I know we haven’t got a particularly high stocking rate but we are mostly self contained. How we are doing it now is really sustainable, we are farming without creating any significant issues. It all just works. Where we are at the moment is where we want to be.”



JUDGES COMMENTS

- Great work life balance for both family and cows.
- The best riparian planting the judges have ever seen on a dairy farm.
- All streams and drains have been fenced to exclude stock and all major crossings are culverted or bridged.
- Once a day milking comes with a very low cost structure of \$2.60/kg MS.

LARRY MCKENNA
'ESCARPMENT VINEYARD AND WINERY'

BALLANCE AGRI-NUTRIENTS NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT AWARD



Growing, monitoring and production practises in place at this respected 24ha Martinborough property impressed the award judges.

Established in 1998 on a spectacular strip of terraces of alluvial gravel in the Te Muna Valley, Escarpment is a joint venture between the

McKennas and Melbourne couple Robert and Mem Kirby. It is accredited with Sustainable Winegrowing New Zealand. Between 15-20,000 cases of wine are produced annually from grapes grown on Escarpment and those bought in from 16ha of other local plantings.

The judges rated as "excellent" Escarpment's plant health, production per hectare, soil management, land use, management of limitations, irrigation, energy use, chemical use, waste management and health and safety policies. They made particular note of the systems in place ensuring efficiency of water use and the monitoring of plant and soil health.

As pines are removed from the steep areas between the terraces, natives are being established and irrigated with winery wastewater. Bore water, fed through drip lines, is used to target the roots of the grape vines. "Our irrigation is tied back to underground sensors that give a reading of the percentage of water saturation in the soil profile," says Larry. "The optimum percentage for the vines varies through the growing season.

We are able to make sure we are using enough water but also make sure we are not wasting any."

Soil testing is undertaken annually. Petiole samples are also taken and tested from each block at flowering and a repeat sampling is made if necessary. A professional is paid to analyse the results and give nutrient recommendations.

The Escarpment site was chosen with much deliberation and is rewarding all involved with three tiers of wines – Kupe, Escarpment and The Edge. "We are really enjoying the site," says Larry. Escarpment's planting breakdown is 70 percent Pinot noir, 15 percent Pinot gris, 5 percent Chardonnay, 8 percent Riesling and 2 percent Pinot blanc. The emphasis on Pinot noir is apparently unsurprising, given the vineyard's ownership by the McKennas and the Kirbys. According to Escarpment's website: "It goes without saying the impetus behind establishing this vineyard came from the four's deep love for Pinot noir."

Larry came from Australia in 1980 as assistant winemaker then winemaker at Delegates in Auckland. In 1986 the McKennas moved to Martinborough Vineyard where Larry was managing director and winemaker until entering into the Escarpment joint venture. The judges noted Larry's "mana" in the wine industry and his marketing skill, and described him as "an astute businessman and proven winemaker". Although now a New Zealand citizen, Larry declares he is "still a Wallabies supporter". This foot-on-either-side-of-the-Tasman stance is no doubt handy as around half of Escarpment's wines are exported, with Australia being the largest volume destination.

Seven staff are employed at Escarpment. The management team are Larry, winemaker Huw Kinch, viticulturist Dave Shepherd and administration manager Catherine Ellis.



JUDGES COMMENTS

- A well run vineyard setting a high standard.
- Good marketing strategies for the fully integrated business.
- Larry is clearly an astute businessman and a very good/experienced winemaker with accolades to match.
- Most of the wine varieties produced are applicable to the Martinborough soils, with 70% in the popular pinot noir varieties.

JEFF AND SHIRLEY RAVENWOOD 'FERNGLEN'

BEEF + LAMB NEW ZEALAND LIVESTOCK AWARD

A combination of hard work, family support and passion for farming has resulted in recognition by these award judges of Jeff as “a top operator” of an 1150ha (610ha effective) sheep and beef unit in the Homewood district on the Wairarapa coast.



The judges acknowledged the “tight cost control and high debt levels” under which the Ravenwoods worked and commended Jeff’s “mature management style”. They wrote that he was “analytical and aware of his position” and “recognised locally as a top stock manager and this is very apparent in the presentation of his stock”.

The Ravenwoods' property consists of two farms. Last year 5600 stock units were wintered, a lower-than-expected number due to successive dry autumns. The proportion of sheep to cattle has been 60/40, but this is being altered to about 75/25. The home block, 'Fernglen', is 750ha (390ha effective) purchased in half share with Jeff's mother and stepfather, John and Diane Le Grove, in 1995. 'Motunui', three kilometres further south, is 400ha (220ha effective) and was purchased in 2007. Motunui has a small coastal frontage.

The properties vary in contour from coastal flats to steep hill country, but a feature of them is the relatively high (for the district) proportion of cultivatable land. About 10ha of peas are grown annually as a cash crop as part of the farm's regressing programme. As well as providing a helpful extra income stream, the peas are invaluable for their nitrogen contribution to the soil says Jeff.

The judges considered Jeff had shown them “an excellent ability to apply sustainable land practices to his soils”. On the flats he was allowing for “drainage, subdivision, pasture management and grazing practises”. They also wrote: “On the hill country he has retained native vegetation, waterway protection and on the hard hills he has seen opportunity to apply both conservation and carbon forestry.” There are QEII covenants on six blocks of regenerating native bush, totalling 110ha.

Shelterbelts have been established to prevent wind erosion, a prime consideration in this coastal area. Despite their cost, the shelter belts are worth it, believes Jeff. “I do like the aesthetics, but it's mainly the peace of mind that the shelter brings. I find it easier to sleep knowing stock have shelter.”

Jeff and Shirley have three children, Ben (17), Baeley (15) and Cameron (13). Prior to purchasing Fernglen they leased Summer Hill Station in partnership with Stu Henson. Jeff has also worked at shepherding, shearing and fencing. These days Shirley works in a Masterton accountant's office, living in their town house five days a week with the children while they attend school. The family and their friends enjoy the locality of their land. Jeff lived in the area with his family in his later teenage years and says he always felt drawn back to it. “There's always plenty to do,” he explains. “You've got fishing on your front door and hunting on your back door, it's a great place to live.”



JUDGES COMMENTS

- Tremendous focus on development and production.
- Excellent production figures, both in terms of individual per SU and per ha performance on a summer dry property.
- Excellent application of woodlot and conservation plantings on land susceptible to erosion.
- Areas of heavy native bush protected by QE II Covenants.

ED AND MELODY HANDYSIDE 'TE HOPAI'

HILL LABORATORIES HARVEST AWARD

The Handysides achieved “significantly above average returns per hectare” from their cropping, trade lamb and beef business, according to the award judges.



But importantly, the judges noted, financial return was not at the expense of other factors on the two properties; 349ha 'Te Hopai' south of Featherston, and 756ha 'Blue Rock' and adjoining leased land 20 minutes drive to the north east of Te Hopai. They commented: “The Handysides’ love and respect of their environment is clear in their approach to their land tenure.” The judges described Te Hopai as “one of the most attractive properties that has been visited”.

With an effective area of 345ha, including a 20ha lease, Te Hopai is a flat farm with 15ha of stopbank on its eastern boundary holding back the Ruamahanga River. Flooding and stock loss plagued Ed’s great-grandparents when they farmed this land from 1910, however the construction of the stopbanks in 1969 changed forever the viability of farming there, and justified the grim perseverance of that generation.

Ed operates conscious of his family’s connection with the land, and the importance of the wetlands they have protected there, but says, “the history doesn’t limit me”. He sees his overarching responsibility as keeping the family legacy sustainable; to farm progressively and ambitiously and keep the business growing.

Stock was excluded from the 16ha Te Hopai wetland four years ago. Another two-hectare wetland is now being fenced and native planting is ongoing. This smaller roadside area is an important home to rare bitterns. “They are some of the last remnants of swampland around this area,” says Ed, “so it is important to preserve them. They are under our stewardship so they are safe, but if we were ever to sell, we’d do something about covenanting them first.”

Blue Rock is southeast of Martinborough, of rolling to steep contour. It was purchased by the Handysides in several blocks totalling 325ha between the 1980s and 2000. They lease 431ha next door, giving them an effective total of 560ha there. Being dry land, this comes into its own as complementary to Te Hopai in the winter, invaluable for bulls and the store lambs on an Ovation grower lamb wintering contract.

Cropping is undertaken only on Te Hopai, growing peas and ryegrass for seed, winter wheat, and maize for silage. Last year over both properties the Handysides wintered 8600 lambs (the Te Hopai ones on an Ovation live weight gain contract), 216 in-calf cows and heifers, 300 R2 bulls, 65 replacement heifers and six breeding bulls.

On Blue Rock there is 11.9ha of QEII covenanted native bush. Ed’s parents Dennis and Andréé are building a house there; using the Handyside Family Trust, succession of the business into Ed’s care is almost completed. He came home in 2000 with a degree from Lincoln and two years overseas experience under his belt. Ed and Mel are bringing up the next generation of Handysides at Te Hopai – Maya (4), Guy (2) and baby Louis.



JUDGES COMMENTS

- An aesthetically pleasing farm, well subdivided with numerous shelterbelts and aesthetic tree plantings.
- Excellent production levels both from cash cropping, feed harvesting and trading stock with very high revenues/ha.
- Wonderful vision for riparian plantings along the old Ruamahanga River channel.
- Efficient use of irrigation for maximisation of crop yields.

MILES AND JANET KING 'KINGSMEADE ARTISAN CHEESE'

PGG WRIGHTSON LAND AND LIFE AWARD

New Zealand's first commercial sheep milk production and cheese-making operation was established 13 years ago on 11.5ha of flat land north east of Masterton, on a dream and \$40,000 of borrowed money.



The Kings, owners of the dream and the pioneering business, admit "absolute perseverance" has been required to establish Kingsmeade Artisan Cheese, but they believe "finally, after years of hard work we are starting to crack it," says Janet. The award judges acknowledged this, describing Kingsmeade as a "unique paddock to plate business" and commenting of Miles and Janet: "Their farm is aesthetically pleasing and they have achieved a great deal along the way."

The Kings were recipients of the Innovation and Dairy Farm Awards in this region's BFEA in 2005. At the time Miles and Janet had just one employee, who helped with the twice a day milking of their 200 East Friesian sheep, and three sheep milk cheeses in their range. In 2011 they make 8 sheep milk cheeses, buy in cows' milk from a nearby Jersey herd to make six cows milk cheeses and have eight employees, including two full-timers. They are regular stallholders at Farmers Markets in the bottom half of the North Island and their products are now also sold to luxury lodges, delis and restaurants throughout New Zealand.

Though not the type to rest on laurels, Miles and Janet do concede a sense of satisfaction, in the business, and in themselves. Miles

is in charge of the ewes and pasture management, accounting, and cheese production. Janet takes care of the orders, staff, packaging, marketing and runs their retail outlet in Masterton. "If you can stay married and run a business together you are doing pretty well," laughs Janet. "The business was not an instant success but the personal growth in us both has been huge. We are the acorn of the business, the two people with an idea which is now a very small oak tree."

The judges noted how the couple's passion is reflected in all aspects of their business: outstanding plantings on the farm; calm and friendly-natured sheep; excellent stock quality and productive ability; increased product range; very good financial and cost control; careful use of resources including reuse of water; strong community involvement; excellent staff management.

The Kings clearly take pleasure in the profile and role that Kingsmeade enjoys and, despite their days being "very busy", they happily share their time. They are invited to speak and demonstrate to a range of community and industry groups. Miles holds cheese-making courses and regularly gives tours and demonstrations to school, agricultural training school and culinary school students who visit the farm and factory. He is also an active Lodge member. Janet is a judicial JP and church treasurer.

The couple have three adult daughters. Helen has a bakery producing New Zealand food in Darjeeling, India. Sarah has two young sons and lives in Perth. Lucy manages a horse ranch in Cambodia and takes tourists on horse treks up to the temples in the area.



JUDGES COMMENTS

- A fully integrated and unique business, from sheep's milk production through to the marketing of Kingsmeade cheese.
- Pioneering commitment to cheese making.
- Excellent network of shelterbelts protect paddocks and stock from the desiccating effects of northwest winds.
- Strong branding established through retail shop and farmers markets.

PETER (PJ) AND JUDI FERRIS
'WAIRARAPA MANUKA LTD'

MASSEY UNIVERSITY DISCOVERY AWARD

Five years ago PJ and Judi attempted to retire by selling the beekeeping business and shop they had established 24 years earlier. They bought a house in Masterton to retire to, but that's as far as "calling it a day" got.



Now, PJ oversees production from more hives than ever (5500 and rising) as part of an innovative "win-win" structured honey company that is thriving, exporting mostly medical grade manuka honey to more than 40 countries. "That's been the focus of the whole thing right from the start," says PJ, "everybody wins and to do that it has to be about relationships, not just one person in there trying to make a whole lot of money."

The award judges appreciated PJ's long-term commitment and leadership in the beekeeping industry and his approach, noting that the Wairarapa Manuka Ltd partnership "safeguards and strengthens the business" which has hives throughout the Wairarapa and in parts of Taranaki.

There are three equal partners in the company, each with distinct roles. The marketing and sale aspects are taken care of by Manuka Health, a Te Awamutu firm. Gary Diederich, owner of Mt Adams Station near Martinborough, is also a one third partner in the company, his land providing the necessary initial guaranteed place for hives to be positioned amongst dense manuka. The Ferris' third share currently involves the commitment of three family members; PJ, who is in charge of hive management and production, Judi who is involved with

administration at their Carterton factory base and one of their three daughters, Lottie.

There is currently 14 staff working-at or based-from PJ and Judi's Carterton factory. Eight are employed year round, six are casual staff. "Lottie is one of our permanents," says PJ proudly, "she's a little gem, she runs the royal jelly division now, she's in charge of three staff."

Lottie is a rare – for New Zealand – fourth generation beekeeper. Judi's stepfather and his father were beekeepers. Judy was 15 when PJ met her and discovered two passions: Judi, who would become his wife, and bees and their hives, "which completely fascinated me from the moment I saw them."

PJ takes responsibility for training all their beekeepers, passing on operational skill gleaned from his 38 years of experience in the work, and the necessary insight into the strong hive management programme he has established. Every hive visit by staff requires completion of a series of checks ticked off on the "run sheet" PJ provides. This is a comprehensive look at all aspects of the hive health and production and provides the information for a report supplied to the landowner. It also begins the honey traceability from hive to market.

While the amount of manuka growing has been diminishing as land is developed, PJ says he still regularly has farmers approaching him wanting hives. Whether they are paid rental for placement by the beekeeper, or own the hives but half share of the profit with the beekeeper in return for hive management, the landowners appreciate the opportunity to gain income from what is often marginal manuka-clad land.



JUDGES COMMENTS

- Tremendous dedication to the honey industry.
- Provided a potential income stream to owners with reverting marginal land.
- Peter has developed business partnerships and contract agreements to safeguard/strengthen his business.
- Multiple income streams being developed from medical grade manuka honey to the production of Queen Bees and Royal Jelly.

MALCOLM BATCHELOR AND ANNA-MARIE KINGSLEY 'HATTENBURN'

GWRC AKURA CONSERVATION CENTRE LIFESTYLE FARM/SMALL BLOCK AWARD

When Malcolm and Anna purchased their 27ha Carterton property in 2004, the home they built on it was their first. It's fair to say it's likely to be their last, Malcolm reckons.

"The intention is to be dragged out of here feet first," he grins. The couple bought the bare block from Malcolm's parents. They like that Malcolm's parents, sister and her family still live up the road on the family farm.

But family isn't the only attraction. It is, says Anna, "idyllic and peaceful". A wind generator and solar panels power their home. Water is heated by solar or a log burner. Just a five-minute drive west of Carterton, it is a package of rural living close to this town and proximity to a city like Wellington.

Malcolm is a computer programmer. Anna is an artist and home schools Allen (7). She puts her horticulture

degree knowledge to good use on the property; the couple have planted an estimated 3500 trees and natives. The Enaki Stream runs through the property, one of 17 under the care of the Enaki Stream Care Group, of which Anna is secretary.



Of flat to rolling contour, with some steep sidings, 20ha of the block is leased to a neighbouring dairy farmer, the income used for further development and planting. Coppicing eucalypt and acacia are planted each year for firewood. A wide range of friends and visitors are welcomed onto the place. Artists stay; Anna runs art classes and the couple stage alternative energy seminars every second year.

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 10th year in the Greater Wellington region.

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.

UPCOMING EVENT – FIELD DAY TO BE HELD AT THE SUPREME WINNERS PROPERTY

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

Who: Ray and Lyn Craig. **When:** 11th May 2011. **Time:** To be confirmed. **Where:** 'Lynx Farm' 78 Lincoln Road, Carterton.

For more information, contact: Angeline Colquhoun on (06) 378 8008 or email wellington@bfea.org.nz.