



Ballance
Farm Environment Awards®
Promoting Sustainable Profitable Farming

2010 WELLINGTON REGION

GEORGE & SARAH TATHAM
 MATARIKI

SUPREME AWARD
BALLANCE NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT AWARD
NEW ZEALAND FARM ENVIRONMENT TRUST LIVESTOCK AWARD



George Tatham's commitment to his family's farming legacy is a clear driver in the operation of Matariki.

Proof that passion underpins achievement, George is perceptibly proud that, with his wife Sarah, he is running Matariki. "From a young age I was pretty keen," he says, "this is always what I saw myself doing."

He's a fifth generation Tatham farming out on the coast east of Masterton. George has been in charge of the 2070ha property for almost eight years. "Our focus is creating a better farm, in improving it for the next generation," explains George. Which is, he points out, what his parents Bob and Terry did before them.

George and Sarah appreciate there are many aspects of the property that measures put in place before their time allow them to continue to progress Matariki's productivity. "When we first took over we were able to make the decision to invest in infrastructure improvement so that it is a good place to work on for us now, and for those to coming after us."

Water reticulation has been upgraded and improved. An ambitious fencing plan is underway. The portion including the creation of a laneway system for ease of stock movement,

is completed. Further fencing is part of the extensive native planting programme which has been established, "just small areas at a time, but we'll get there".

The farm, which has 1485ha effective including five kilometres of coastline, is just south of the Riversdale Beach settlement. There is some steeply contoured land, but that has been, or will be, taken out of production and planted in either forestry woodlots or natives. The two major estuaries on the property have been fenced and work is ongoing fencing other waterways and small gullies.

George and Sarah work with 460ha of medium hill country, 495ha of terraces, which are mainly flat, and 530ha of good heavy-soiled flats. They have a keen awareness that the range of country requires careful management in consideration of use and stock classes from season to season. "Out here, we know to farm for a dry summer," says George, "that's just part of the way we work. The winters can get pretty wet so the flats can get heavy, we have to take care of them." The wind is also a consideration, with stock being exposed to coastal extremes. An effective network of shelterbelts is being established by extensive planting in a five year plan.

Last year in the cattle sector they wintered the following: 116 M/A Angus cows, 37 R1 heifers, 150 R2 steers, 45 R2 bulls,



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247 R1 Friesian bulls, 4 sire Angus bulls and 130 R1 dairy grazer cows. There were no R2 heifers due to the 2008 drought. The sheep numbers were as follows: 7580 ewes and two-tooths, 2755 ewe hoggets, 300 trade lambs and 100 rams. The hoggets are lambed. The ewe numbers include 2000 high performing composite ewes, run as a satellite flock for the Wairere Stud on an

ongoing basis.

Continuing in the tradition of his father, George is running a breeding programme producing rams for the farm's use. With a Romney base and including Texel, East Friesian and Coopworth bloodlines, George is seeking in particular progeny with medium to high fertility and high growth lambs. To combat the dry summers, they need to get as many lambs as possible away to the works at weaning, or at least by Christmas. George has set a target of 80 per cent off the farm in this time frame. The farm is currently achieving between 55-60 per cent.

George has an interest in stock breeding and a confidence gained from two years working on Wairere, a time he describes as "invaluable" and "a great learning experience". He worked as Matariki's single shepherd in his first year out of school. Prior to his Wairere job he spent two years at Lincoln

University to gain his Diploma in Farm Management.

George came home to Matariki after an 18-month stint travelling, taking over operational management immediately from Bob. In July 2002 a "family transaction" was made, allowing George to purchase a percentage of Matariki and take control of the property. George and Sarah were married in 2004. He acknowledges the role of his parents and four siblings in allowing this succession to take place. The family retain cutting rights for a number of pine plantations on Matariki.

The wider Tatham family have a long-established presence in the area through Homewood Station. Bob grew up on Homewood; part of what is now Matariki was previously part of Homewood. Extensive poplar pole planting during Bob's time in charge has addressed erosion concerns over much of the farm but George and Sarah are aware this is an area that needs ongoing maintenance attention.

Some of the erosion protection work undertaken in the past "has worked a bit too well though" says George. Willows planted along some waterways are now hindering water flow. With regional council assistance, one stream has been cleared and more of this work is planned. "The clearing work has gone really well, been a great success," says George, "the water is flowing again now, and we are fencing off the banks to protect them from erosion where possible."

Areas of native bush to be fenced have been identified on the property. So far two areas of about five hectares each have been protected from stock and will be left to regenerate. They are becoming aware of the possibilities of taking advantage



JUDGES COMMENTS

- Pasture planting, feed recording & fertiliser records with nutrient budgeting makes this all work to good effect.
- Monitor farm has added huge value to the management of this business.
- Good understanding of carbon farming opportunities on the marginal land, recognise strengths of areas of the farm.
- Focus on increasing soil fertility, careful calculation of fertiliser application policy.



of carbon credits by investigating and “schooling up” on how it works. “I think I’ve got my head around it,” says George with a grin.

With Bob and Terry, George and Sarah have already registered a large number of trees on the property. Last year they took advantage of the related afforestation grant scheme to plant 22.5ha of pines and have

another 20ha “booked” for this winter. “Eventually, we’d like to retire all the worst hills that are scrub and just a bit of grass by planting them in trees.”

The contour and soil type on part of the farm allows for some cropping. Most years around 30ha of seed peas and between 30-50ha of seed barley is produced and sold off-farm. In addition, around 50ha of summer forage and 30ha of winter forage is grown for the farm’s own use.

George completes a nutrient budget in consultation with his fertiliser company. The variation in country and soil types means specific considerations, so the budget is calculated broken into two blocks. Such careful scrutiny and recording is usual practise on the farm and something George obviously enjoys and places importance upon.

Matariki is one of three Monitor Farms in the Wairarapa providing data used by Baker and Associates to compile Pasture Pro reports. These reports are distributed to and used by about 150 farmers and associated organisations each month. George supplies detailed feed budget information and in-depth comments around this and other aspects of the farm and conditions.

The Tathams’ long-term commitment to their industry is also evidenced by George’s active participation, with Sarah’s support. He is on the steering committee of the Wairarapa Monitor Farm group and a member of the East Coast sheep and beef council.

Staff on the farm are valued, and stable. It is important to the Tathams that the property is enjoyable to work on; this was a major factor in their decision to invest in the laneway and fencing infrastructure improvement. There are two shepherds and a long-serving tractor driver-general hand who, George says with a grin, “came with the farm, he’s been here as long as I can remember!”

George and Sarah have two children, Poppy aged two and Freddy who is almost one.



JUDGES COMMENTS

- *Focus on subdivision & shelter belts, good retention of native cover; effective shelter will enhance production.*
- *Good use of consultants, bankers, GWRC, Massey courses.*
- *Succession plan allowed George to farm effectively whilst siblings well accommodated.*
- *Stable staff, clearly delegated areas of responsibility.*

BRYCE & KYLIE BARON AND PATRICIA SMITH

LIC DAIRY FARM AWARD PGG WRIGHTSON LAND AND LIFE AWARD

Bryce and Kylie's attention to sustainability reaches well beyond that they are sharemilking on a family property.



Operating with, in the words of the award judges “brilliant drive and enthusiasm”, this young couple clearly see farm ownership as their objective, with excellence in business and a balanced family lifestyle identified as their means to arrive at their goal successfully.

“We would be putting the same into any other place, whether it had a family connection or not,” says Kylie. Bryce explains they understand they are operating a “business within a business”, therefore they aim for their results to “reflect all the energy we are putting into it”.

The Barons' children Caleb (7) and Charlize (5) are sixth generation family members on the 180ha (153ha effective) property just west of Carterton. The farm belongs to Kylie's grandmother Patricia Smith. In this their seventh season, the Barons are milking 385 cows as 50/50 sharemilkers, though they began on the farm as lower order sharemilkers with 115ha effective and 360 cows. The growth of their dairy business continues; next season 40ha of adjoining lease land will be added to the milking platform and they will be milking 485 cows. Bryce and Kylie separately lease a 65ha block nearby, used for young stock, winter grazing and supplementary feed.

The couple have created a mission statement which they say helps keep them on track and focused: “To maintain a profitable business, to build equity to give us options to achieve our long-term goal of farm ownership, while maintaining a balanced family life for our children.”

The couple appreciate their relationship with Pat Smith, saying that being able to stay on the same property but expand is an “ideal” situation for them. The judges noted: “This is a very good, balanced partnership, delivering benefits for both parties.” Says Bryce: “She is pretty open to us, she knows we have to grow.” The judges wrote: “Bryce and Kylie have a very positive attitude towards the farm, they treat it as if it was their own and work really well with the owner.”

Despite this, the Barons are candid about the unlikely situation of this farm being the one they will eventually own. “In a family situation, there are no guarantees, we understand that and just really appreciate the opportunity we have now, for what it is – a chance to work and expand, and stability to bring up our children here.”

Early in their time on the property, they recognised the benefit of lowering the stocking rate. When more land was added, they reduced the stocking rate from 3.13 cows per ha down to the current 2.5 cows per ha. “This has enabled us to bring our farm working expenses right down,” explains Bryce, “and has been a good move all round, reducing pressure.” Costs per kgMS have lowered from \$2.90 to \$1.50. The judges wrote: “They have reduced costs right down, they are basically grass farming.”



JUDGES COMMENTS

- *Tidy, well organised operation in all aspects from production through to administration.*
- *Exceptional production per cow & per hectare with low irrigation inputs, excellent pasture quality.*
- *Reduced stocking rate reduced input costs right down; basically grass farming.*
- *Environmentally pro-active; fenced waterways & bush areas.*



The past few seasons they have averaged 162,000 kgMS. Just 15ha of the property is irrigated and there is, commented the judges, “exceptional production per cow and per hectare.” Annually, 420 kgMS per cow is being achieved. Their herd is a mix of Friesian and Jersey; all young stock is artificially inseminated with DNA proven Kiwi Cross semen.

The couple are working on ensuring all waterways on the property are fenced. The mainly flat land has Beef Creek running through it. Soils range from stony to heavier silt loam. It is management policy to use a standoff platform and a feed pad area but the variable soils also provide options seasonally; the paddocks with stonier soil useful in wet winters, and the loam holds moisture longer in the summer. The nor’wester is the prevailing wind “and this can really dry the farm out in the summer,” says Bryce.

Recently, at Bryce and Kylie’s initiative, two stands of Kahikatea totalling one hectare have been fenced and protected. Their current project is the incorporation of the new 40ha lease block into the existing property. Laneways are being built; the most distant walk to the shed for the cows will be 1.8kms.

Bryce began his dairy farming career in the South Wairarapa. He and Kylie, who met at Wairarapa College, have also pursued the industry near Taupo and in the South Island. Kylie is a hairdresser and works part-time from home, allowing her an outside income whilst still being available for farm and family. One full-time staff member is employed on the farm, and they also have a regular relief milker. The judges commended how “staff are encouraged, valued and rewarded” and that Bryce’s time was maximised by “very good use of planning and systems”.

Off-farm and family time is recognised as an important component in operating sustainably. Bryce is a former and current holder of national kickboxing titles. The couple are involved with the Masterton Martial Arts club, operating out of a gym in the city. Bryce is president and trains and mentors there. Kylie takes care of administration and management of the club and tournaments. Kylie is vice-president of the New Zealand branch of the World Muaythai Council, which oversees kickboxing internationally.

Motocross is a treasured family activity for the Barons. “It’s really good to have a family sport,” says Bryce, “we travel all around the country together for motocross events.” Motorbikes have always been a passion for Caleb; he had his first race at five years old, two years ago. Charlize, though still only five, appears to be following suit. She couldn’t wait for her first race on a two-wheeled bike at four years old! “They are both naturals on the bikes, we want to give them every opportunity we can,” say their proud parents.



JUDGES COMMENTS

- Great balance of life to business, excellent mix of family & business ideals.
- Strong team of consultants, bankers, peer groups around this couple, both in support & encouragement.
- Good clear vision of where they want to be, farm ownership is end objective.
- Strong off-farm community interests & involvements.

MARINUS VAN DER PUT AND FAMILY

HILLS LABORATORIES HARVEST AWARD MASSEY UNIVERSITY DISCOVERY AWARD

A year after the van der Put family emigrated to the Wairarapa from the Netherlands, Marinus began what has become, 25 years later, a sizeable horticultural export business.



Currently the only commercial witloof grower in the country, Marinus heads what the award judges described as “a very impressive operation”. The judges commended Marinus, who they said was an excellent example of “what one man can achieve in his working lifetime”.

An engineer specialising in central heating and plumbing, Marinus had no knowledge of commercial horticulture when he began. His decision to go market gardening was borne out of a sad necessity. His wife Hendrina was diagnosed with a leukaemia in 1985; she was pregnant with the youngest of the couple’s five children. The couple was told Hendrina was likely to pass away within three years, and she did.

“We had our 12 acres just out of Masterton,” explains Marinus, “so when my wife and I found out about her illness we thought, what can we do with the land so I can be at home too. That was when we came up with the idea of the witloof.”

While Marinus did not have any experience with growing, he did have contacts in the horticultural industry through his work in the Netherlands and had previously thought, “growing would be interesting”. He learnt the business – and continues to operate it today - by a combination of hard work, trial and

error, asking for help from experienced people and a personal ability for innovation that thoroughly impressed the judges.

When he began, he found there were three commercial growers of witloof in the country. Back then there was a tidy little export market for New Zealand’s witloof, with much of it going to the northern hemisphere for sale during the seven months of the year it couldn’t be grown there. However, the industry underwent a massive change in the early 1990s. A new variety of the Belgian root vegetable (also known as chicory or endive) became available that could be grown year round. Suddenly the southern hemisphere advantage was gone.

Marinus prevailed where others didn’t. By then he had established the Wairarapa climate and his own ability to build “from scratch” the grading, packing and cultivation machinery that wasn’t available in this country meant he could produce a quality product all year. Now he supplies Turners and Growers in New Zealand but his main markets are the French-influenced Pacific Islands of New Caledonia and Tahiti.

The business operates with 35ha of land either owned or leased long-term. A four to five year rotation is required, so at any given time around 12ha is producing. Five part-time staff are employed.

Hendrina passed away in 1988. Marinus has since married Corrie. Between them they have seven adult children – Nelly, Henk-Theo, Ilse, Teunis and Pieter, and Daniel and Stephanie.



JUDGES COMMENTS

- *Huge infrastructure, built from scratch and all precision equipment, very impressive.*
- *Tremendous ingenuity designing machines for specific applications.*
- *Only witloof grower in New Zealand.*
- *Totally inclusive business from sowing seed to financing the exporting.*
- *Strong networking with fellow growers in Europe; soil testing and advice comes from Holland.*
- *Fungicide and weed sprays very selective and specific, uses specialist spray machines.*

BILL & JILL MAUNSELL (MANAGERS ROD & ANDREA EASTON) WAIO

GREATER WELLINGTON REGIONAL COUNCIL SPECIAL PLACES AWARD

The transformation of this striking coastal Wairarapa property began in 1960, when Bill's father bought it because it was "going cheap".



"It was one big paddock," recalls Bill, "rough scrub and gorse, and plenty of it." The only improvement was a three-roomed bach on the north-eastern corner of the property. Situated just north of Castlepoint in the Whakataki district, the bach is part of a tiny beachside settlement now known as Sandy Bay.

The Maunsells lived in that bach after they were married in 1972. When Bill's parents retired from the long-established main family farm in the Tinui Valley, Bill and Jill took over there, but, as Bill puts it, they kept "chugging away" at the development of Waio.

In 1990 an adjoining 404ha was added and so began a new phase of development, creating the 879ha property visited and appreciated by the award judges recently. Such is the extent of native bush preservation and retirement of marginal land, that just 504ha of the total property is effective for farming. From the outset, any land in a catchment area or very steep was fenced off, so there are now many patches of either regenerating native bush, or woodlots. The second block purchased has 300ha of bush, including 60ha that has been protected by QEII covenanting.

The Maunsells have managers on both the Tinui Valley property and Waio now, but it is to Waio that they are drawn. They are now back in the old bach. "Yep, we've gone the full circle," muses Bill. "We like it here. The bach has been renovated. It's still not big, but quite smart now compared to the old days."

Bill is still actively involved in the farm. The self-appointed 'chief weed controller' keeps a weather eye on the weeds. The Maunsell family's half-century battle with gorse on Waio is ongoing, "but we're winning", says Bill. He's also in charge of poplar pole planting and has lifted his annual tally from 100 to 200 poles. "I'd better hurry up," he jokes, "I'm getting older now."

The property's contour ranges from flat to steep. It is, noted the judges, "a difficult environment" in which to farm. Fertility is low and the nor'wester that can blow sucks the moisture out of the ground with fearsome efficiency. For the past three summers they've endured drought conditions and accordingly have dropped 1000 stock units. "On a small place like this, that is severe," says Bill. Last year they wintered 120 cattle and 3461 sheep.

While farming sheep and beef in the current economic and climatic conditions can be a battle, the property has an enduring appeal for humans, and for native species. Their five grandchildren, children (Matt, Kate and Lucy) and children's spouses all spend time there. Soon, more may enjoy the place; Bill has been creating walking tracks and is investigating the possibility of opening them up for public access.



JUDGES COMMENTS

- Successful record of development on difficult soil types & challenging climatic conditions.
- Strong focus on quality of pastures, stock & production; does very well considering the environment.
- Retired marginal parcels of land to trees & reserve (including QE II), looking to utilise these blocks for public access.
- Marginal land developed into forestry, good for succession planning; excellent aesthetics all round.

DOUGAL & DENISE MACKENZIE TE RAKAU

AKURA CONSERVATION CENTRE LIFESTYLE FARM/ SMALL BLOCK AWARD

Farming was the reason the MacKenzies came from the South Island to coastal South Wairarapa in 1984, but it is not why they are still here.



They bought their 13.6ha property overlooking Lake Onoke in 1992 to plant as a forestry block. When they ceased their farming partnership with Landcorp the following year they realised they didn't want to leave the area. "We decided we loved it, and wanted to stay," recalls Denise.

Building a house on their bare block, they adopted

their theme 'Bring Back The Birds' and set about working with nature to create the environment they gain so much pleasure from today. The award judges appreciated Dougal and Denise's efforts and their love for their place, describing Te Rakau as "a well balanced property giving the owners a peaceful, pleasing living".

When they bought Te Rakau (and before they bestowed the name relating to trees) it was just a couple of exposed paddocks. There was rough pasture, scrub and the only trees were kanuka remnants that were looking, according to Denise, "pretty sick".

The MacKenzies planted a mix of pines for milling and gum and acacia for firewood and they underplanted the kanuka with natives, using the natural shelter to encourage establishment. The campaign to bring back birds has been a resounding success, says Denise. "We are delighted with the results so far. The variety of bird life we are seeing now is really exciting."

Guests staying in their converted railway carriage accommodation also appreciate Te Rakau. The position nestled under the Rimutaka Ranges but almost at the Palliser Bay coastline means both native bush and coastal birds, and some wonderful views can be enjoyed. The couple work off the property, Dougal in real estate and sharing his passion for the area tour guiding and Denise teaching.

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, Manawatu/Whanganui, Wellington, Canterbury, Otago and Southland.

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.

SEMINAR

Instead of a Field Day, a seminar will be held. Details to be advised at a later date. For more information, contact Angeline Colquhoun (Greater Wellington Regional Co-ordinator) on 06 378 8008, email wellington@bfea.org.nz, or visit www.bfea.org.nz.

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