



Ballance
Farm Environment Awards
Promoting Sustainable Profitable Farming

DAISYBANK
JOHN AND YVONNE HARVEY, REBECCA MADDEN

2008 SUPREME AWARD

**Also winners of the PPCS Livestock Farm Award
 and the Markhams Business Planning Award**

The Harvey family's multi-generational commitment to and understanding of their unique area is recognised in these awards.

John and Yvonne Harvey and their eldest daughter Rebecca Madden made the entry to the award, but a short conversation with John leaves no doubt his family's history, and future, on this land are the drivers in all they do.

380mm and 1190mm. The prevailing north-westerly wind causes as much trouble as the lack of rainfall most years explains John, so shelter and the lie of the land has always to be considered with stock placement and welfare.

The judges commented after their visit to the Harvey property, which is spread over 1017ha just southeast of Martinborough, "you're a very passionate family dedicated to farming and your environment".

They describe the farmland that makes up Daisybank as "hard" and the Harveys agree. Summers are dry in the Dyerville district; the average rainfall on the farm is 700mm but the variation in the 40 years the Harveys have been recording is between



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The judges commended the production figures on Daisybank. They wrote: "You're good, experienced farmers who know exactly where you're going, farming difficult country, and the farm reflects all the hard work you've put into it."

John's grandfather purchased the original 166ha block known as Daisybank in 1923, leaving behind an earlier attempt at farming thwarted by the rabbits in Southland. John's father Stuart was 13 and the youngest of 10 when the family moved there to farm around 400 sheep, 40 dairy cows and enough pigs to thrive on the milk left-over from the cream sold to the local creamery.

By 1963 Daisybank was being farmed by a partnership of Stuart Harvey, his brother Harry and their sister May. It was these three who ventured to buy the 54ha farm next door when it came on the market in 1963. John happily came home to help out when his uncle died and in 1972 bought his aunt's share, leaving him in partnership with his father.

By 1978, when the McGaffin brothers wanted someone worthy to take over their 363ha farm just up the road, John had saved enough money for the deposit and got the nod. A month before John was due to take over, his father died, leading to a busy and eventful few years that included John and Yvonne marrying in 1979. They went on to have four children.

In 1988 a 247ha property across the road from both their home farm and the McGaffin block was purchased in Yvonne's name. It was a neglected farm and its purchase signalled the beginning of their now considerable experience in fighting – and winning – battles with serious gorse infestation.

Two similar blocks totalling 218ha, on the boundaries of Yvonne's land, have since been purchased and developed.

Last year they wintered 6921 sheep and 507 cattle. Before John left school he perceived a need to establish a strain of Romney sheep that withstood the conditions on Daisybank. He convinced his father to begin keeping some ram lambs and in 1972 began recording the flock that is now the Daisybank Recorded Romney flock.

Cattle on the property are bred and managed to a successful formula, using a mix of Murray Grey, Charolais and Friesian blood.

The bulk of the contour of the Harvey land is easy hill, with some flats and steeper gullies. Much of the soil is clay, with some limestone and some stony soils. The Dry River runs through part of the property, aptly named because part of it disappears underground each year.

In keeping with the adage that difficulties also present opportunities, the Harveys found themselves in the 1990s sitting on land that was in demand. The evolution of a wine industry in the area saw them sell off 32ha of light, stony-soiled land in four blocks, a fortuitous move allowing them to clear their mortgages and develop their property into the profitable business it is today.

Central to the development, according to the judges, has been the awareness by all involved of the unique set of environmental factors there.

Any gorse-infested land too steep to work has gone straight into pines, 100ha in total now. Alternative stock water, reticulated through troughs is being established. Shade and shelter for stock has been provided. Waterways and dams have been fenced off and planted in natives and pole planting has been undertaken to stabilise country where required. This work to future-proof farming on this land is on a vast scale, and ongoing.

But the truly mammoth task has been the battle with gorse, turning dense, steep areas of it into productive





farmland. “We thought it could be beaten,” says John, “it was just a matter of time, and keeping at it.”

It has been a huge undertaking. John admits in some parts of the farm, the cost of converting to pasture was more than the land purchase.

The key, he says, has been the “very impressive, very skilled” bulldozer drivers who’ve worked over ground that has slipped and the tractor drivers who have worked all the required ground up over some very difficult terrain.

Pakohe Agriculture Ltd, with their big dual wheeled tractors pulling giant discs, went over the ground many times. Winter crop has been sown, followed by summer crop and then grass.

“By the time you work it over that third time, you get on top of the gorse seedlings,” says John.

In keeping with the history of the place, ownership and responsibility is flexible, and innovative. Acting on what John says “turned out to be very good advice” from his accountant and lawyer, John set up a family trust when he and Yvonne married. Consequently the Daisybank spread sits in six titles with the trust owning three, John two and Yvonne one.

All the pastoral land is leased by a company formed to

farm it. John holds $\frac{3}{4}$ of the shares and Rebecca $\frac{1}{4}$, but this is changing and Yvonne is being brought into the company.

“All of these things are ongoing and evolving,” says John. “The main thing is we wanted to keep it flexible but workable, enabling us to try to treat all the family fairly.”

Eldest son Stuart is enjoying a career in the Army, Sarah lives and works in Melbourne and John and Yvonne’s youngest, Owen, is working on an Otago farm.

Eldest in the family Rebecca takes care of the day-to-day management of the McGaffin block. Earlier this year she married Scott Madden, who manages the local Mitre 10 Timber yard and is happy to leave the farming to his wife.

Another family company owns the pine trees. A forestry right protects the land they are on. John says it’s possible the proceeds of the forestry venture can be used to help the children who don’t come home to the farm.

He’s grateful for the life Daisybank has afforded him, and those he loves. “If you want to be the richest corpse in the cemetery, don’t go farming,” he says. “But if you want a really good life there’s nothing better.”

JUDGES POINTS

- Structured approach to succession planning and farm ownership options for family members
- Clearly defined land use and development plan
- Pragmatic financial management
- Principled approach to animal breeding
- Refinement of stocking policy to fit property attributes
- Good management around the climatic variations and variable soil types
- Retirement of land prone to erosion, supplemented with pine or allowed to revert to strong native vegetation
- Native bush protected and more trees planted around dams
- Good levels of silviculture and tree management
- Multiple community interests and participation
- Respected farming leaders



FLAXBURN KEITH AND JO DENNIS

LIC DAIRY FARM AWARD



Flaxburn, a windswept 215ha Featherston dairy farm, benefits from sharemilkers and institutional owners sharing the same commitment to and vision for the property.

50/50 sharemilkers Keith and Jo Dennis are in their sixth season on the farm, which is owned by the Presbyterian Church property trustees.

Says Keith: "We just believe in good stewardship of the land, whether it's ours or not. We want the place to be able to meet the goals of future generations, and so do the owners."

Noted the award judges: "This is a well-run dairy unit which is progressively improving. The increase in production in such a short period says all that needs to be said about Keith's overall management."

At the beginning of their first season the cows owned by the farm were sold to make way for Keith and Jo's herd of 430, and the money was immediately put to use getting the irrigation operational and effective on as much of the farm as possible. Flaxburn is flat land, situated on an old riverbed in the "Wairarapa dry" area.

There were other burning issues too, explains Keith: "We had more weeds than grass, and the fences were such that we had no way of controlling stock."

The five-year average of Flaxburn's milk production prior to the arrival of the Dennis family (Hamish is now 11 and Sophie 9) was 90,000kgMS.

Almost six seasons on, with the addition of just 30ha land into the mix, and a jump in carrying capacity up to 530 cows, production from 210ha effective (with 90ha support land) is estimated to break the 200,000kgMS mark this year.

Keith and Jo enjoy the relationship they have

with the entity that owns Flaxburn. "With it being an institution everything has to be extra well documented and organised," explains Keith.

Wind is "a big issue" on the farm says Keith. It can be equally destructive from the northwest and the south with speeds up to 120kph. In the past, milking has had to be shut down due to the danger in the strength of the winds, but Keith is happy to report progress, and success.

A five-year shelter and waterway-planting plan with Greater Wellington Regional Council is complete. "With the big planting around the cow shed on the prevailing wind side, you can hardly feel the wind in there now," says Keith.

A senior herd manager and an assistant herd manager are employed on the farm and all who work there are enjoying the advantage of using new technology being used, like the MinderPro software from LIC. The "total traceability" of stock work which is collected via input to a palm pilot and cell phone improves management hugely says Keith. He specially likes the DNA testing option, which ensures no mix-ups at calving time.

"We don't have to worry about which calf came from what cow, we can just pick the calves up out of the weather and get them into a nice warm dry shed."

Keith and Jo were successful in these awards in 2006, taking out the dairy farm and nutrient management sections. They are both active in their community. Keith's currently the chairman of South Featherston School BOT and Jo is also a parent board member.

JUDGES POINTS

- Excellent dairy production on drought prone country – very good annual increases.
- Good evidence of protecting biodiversity
- Efficient use of irrigation from multiple bores
- Good working relationship with land owner
- Long term vision includes sustainable production
- Proactive as a leader in the community and dairy industry
- Keith has strong awareness of building his capital base
- Excellent farm recording systems



ICHI BAN AARON AND MEGAN SLIGHT, JOHN AND RONNIE PERCY

PGG WRIGHTSON HABITAT IMPROVEMENT AWARD

An investment and a homeplace for an international sports star, a retirement home and project for a farming couple, a healthy slice of farmland for finishing stock from a bigger farm, and a hospitable habitat for wildlife and humans – Ichi Ban is all these things.

It is, commented the judges “an excellent family operation providing a win/win situation.”

Aaron and Megan Slight bought the 110ha property at Kopuaraunga, just north of Masterton, 12 years ago in consultation with Megan’s father John Percy and her brother Mark.

All parties had all of the above in mind, and they’re succeeding according to the judges. They referred to the achievements on the property as “dramatic and a tribute to dedication and hard work” and further commented; “aesthetic values and infrastructure are excellent”, as was the communication between the families.

Megan Slight’s father John Percy has been managing and developing the property since it was purchased. He and wife Ronnie moved onto their one hectare of it in 2001, leaving Megan’s brother Mark on the family farm, Oreti, at Tinui, an hour to the north-east.

Ichi Ban is leased by Mark Percy and used as a fattening block in conjunction with Oreti. On 100ha (effective), approximately 300 Friesian bulls and 2000-3000 lambs are finished annually. Ewes and surplus ewe lambs are also grazed there as seasons allow.

“It was meant to be a retirement job for me,” laughs John Percy, “but I think I’m busier here with all the fattening and developing than I was at Tinui. At least it’s flat here, that makes it easier.”

The farm’s unusual name has two sources. Ichi Ban means “No 1” in Japanese. Before recent renumbering on their road, the address was 1 Miller Rd. But “No

1” also refers to Aaron’s will to win in the highly competitive world Super Bike championship series.

The Slights lived overseas for 15 years while Aaron was competing at top level so they were happy to reinvest the first 10 years worth of Ichi Ban lease money straight back into the farm. The farm has been their NZ home base, with their young daughter Miela, for the past 18 months.

For his part, John Percy says life on Ichi Ban has been a “very rewarding” stage. “It was a pretty rundown block, no water, hardly any trees and the fences were marginal.”

Now the 3.2ha stand of native bush adjacent to the Slight’s house is fenced and regenerating well. A bore has been sunk and gravity fed troughs are in all paddocks. The eroding riverbanks have been protected, cleared of crack willow and planting with more suitable species here and for shelter is ongoing.

But the jewel Ichi Ban’s crown is a 2.4ha spring-fed wetland that has been enhanced in the past four years to create several ponds. “Strictly native” planting has been done in this area to complement the few large native trees still standing and already bird life is “building up quite nicely” says John.



JUDGES POINTS

- Protection and isolation from stock grazing of native bush, wetland and riparian river areas
- Development and enhancement of these areas with native plantings and weed control
- Balancing the owner desires with an intensive farming operation
- Considerable mixed species tree plantings enhancing practical and aesthetic qualities
- Good visual balance of natural and physical environment



THOMSONS TRAIL/URLAR ANGUS AND DAVINA THOMSON



HILL LABORATORIES HARVEST AWARD GALLAGHER INNOVATION AWARD

When the Thomson family emigrated to the Wairarapa from Scotland in 2004, Angus Thomson consciously took a long-term view of the foundations they would lay, and the business they would build

He candidly admits he's benefited from the economic stability of six generations of landed forebears, and he's driven by proud family traditions in Scotland. So it is his firm intention that this continues for his own family in New Zealand with the establishment of their vineyard and winery.

While grape growing and winemaking is new to him, the organic and biodynamic pathway chosen is a logical one, says Angus, "because the whole business is revolving around economic and environmental stability."

His quest for sustainability, and commitment to his family – past, present and future - are factors that prompted Angus to look beyond Europe. Seeing little future in the subsidy-driven direction of agriculture there Angus cast his eye wider and hit upon NZ.

Their 40ha estate in the Gladstone district southeast of Masterton is currently known as Thomsons Trail, but it is soon to become "Urlar". The significance and use of this Gaelic word has several layers for Angus and his wife Davina. It means "the ground or earth" or "low lying place at the bottom of a hill"; an apt description of the old glacial terrace the property spreads over. The vines and winery are on the flat at the base of the hill their house is built upon. In addition, Urlar is the name of a Scottish estate on which Angus spent years as a boy, building lasting positive memories; the kind of memories they wish for as grounding for their three children, Rory (8), Safi (6) and Hamish (2).

"We want what we are doing to become iconic, and a generational thing for our family," says Angus. "I have a deep appreciation and awareness of my background and I want to replicate that for our children, and the generations to come."

The state of the art Urlar winery is being built to complement

organic production principles. Innovative measures include thin steel framed panels with huge insulation properties that also have a structural function and refrigeration allowing heat to be recovered for other purposes while it cools product. Variable speed drives on all pumps on the property are expected to save an estimated 35 percent on electricity.

"It will be as efficient and sustainable as the best in the country," says Angus proudly.

The winery sits on the shore of a large irrigation dam created for frost fighting purposes. This lake is being landscaped to become a beautiful habitat. 1500 natives have been planted around the water and on the hill above it to guard against erosion. The winery wastewater is being filtered and used to irrigate these plants, and the 3000 more to come.

The Thomsons chose the Wairarapa "because it grows the best pinot noir". Next season they'll harvest their first full crop from their 31 ha of plantings of pinot noir, sauvignon blanc, pinot gris and syrah varieties.

They began using biodynamic practises a year ago and expect to be BioGro (organic) certified in March 2010. Biodynamics works around the moon and gravitational forces, enhancing soil activity and microbial life and building up plant immunity to disease and pests.

Angus and winemaker Guy McMaster were convinced to make the switch when a Central Otago vineyard owner invited them to compare his soil to that which was 20 metres over the boundary. "I've farmed all my life and thought I'd seen a bit," recalls Angus. "I just couldn't believe the difference."



JUDGES POINTS

- Carefully structured development plan, well researched and implemented
- Organised marketing and distribution arrangements
- Strong family consideration
- Focus and adherence to organic principles
- Wise use and reticulation of water including recycling, composting and waste
- Ability to work and think outside the square
- Exploring the wider potential of organic production
- Excellent monitoring of climate, soil moisture and plant health
- Innovation in winery design and construction – highly effective insulation, minimising energy requirements
- Promotion of improved organic matter and bioactivity in soils
- Created a unique appeal factor and ambience to the total development



**WINGPOINT FARM
(LANDCORP FARMING NEW ZEALAND)
ANDREW AND JOY GASH**

**BALLANCE NUTRIENT
MANAGEMENT AWARD**



Getting the best out of a property like Wingpoint requires an excellent understanding of the farm's particular climatic and soil conditions.

Andrew and Joy Gash are leading a team that's meeting the challenge say the award judges who commented: "A very well run and profitable enterprise and a great pleasure to visit."

This 352ha Landcorp dairy farm south of Featherston sits exposed to cold, wet southerly weather in the winter and a moisture-sapping northwest wind in the summer. The farm is flat and ranges from half a metre below sea level to half a metre above. Flooding is a constant consideration.

The Gashes are in their sixth season at Wingpoint – they came to develop it into a dairy unit – and their results speak volumes. Formerly a lamb and bull finishing unit, Wingpoint is this season milking 1075 cows, achieving 1250kg/ha and 400kg per cow of milk solids. The effective land area on the property is 323ha and there is a 155ha support block. There is no irrigation.

All drains are now fenced and an extensive shelter planting and renewal programme is in place.

"Managing around the elements," is how Andrew describes his job. Wingpoint is typical of many of the farms in the Landcorp portfolio he believes. "It's land no one else really wanted to farm back in the 60's," he says, "so is not necessarily always ideally suited to what you're trying to do with it."

There are solutions though and what's being achieved at Wingpoint is a clear example of corporate farming working. The formula, as Andrew describes it, is combining good management with the utilisation of technology and innovative practises, and top staff.

The people factor is a huge consideration believes Andrew. "You can drive it, but without the buy-in of staff, it's just not going to happen."

Andrew's comment that he treats the farm "100 percent" as his own means he neatly slots into his own category as an essential staff member.

There are five other full-time staff. Andrew and Joy are the farm's relief milkers and Joy is in charge of the calves both spring and autumn.

Significantly, the farm is not irrigated, but it's still a top producer. "I find it interesting," says Andrew, "that all around us people are chopping trees down and putting in centre pivot irrigation, and we're doing the opposite yet we're still in the top five percent in the district for milk production."

Some of the practises that Andrew believes contribute to success at Wingpoint are:

- Leading edge technology use – hi-tech systems monitoring each cow, each cowshed bale, cowshed procedures and fertiliser application
- Split calving; two-thirds in the spring (mixed age main herd and a herd of younger, older and lighter cows) and one third in the autumn allowing for decrease in stocking rate at critical times
- Sawdust standoff pads, two being used, another on the way
- Large concrete feed pad at the cowshed
- Aerating the heavy clay soils during pasture renewal
- Embracing the corporate structure of the operation, using expertise available and working within the high standards set by Landcorp

JUDGES POINTS

- *Understands the particular soil requirements and dealing with issues like pugging, soil compaction and the impact of iron pans*
- *Good use of technology and professional advice to balance both nutrient use and pasture production/feed supplements*
- *Judicious use of nitrogen fertiliser*
- *Advanced water treatment system to deal with high iron content*
- *Excellent paddock records*
- *Excellent milk production from a non-irrigated property*
- *One third of farm used for cowshed and feedpad effluent – improved control of dispersal by separating solids and fluids*



HAREWOOD ESTATE PAUL AND SUZIE ADAMSON

AKURA CONSERVATION CENTRE LIFESTYLE BLOCK/SMALL FARM AWARD



The Adamsons are ensuring their small block of land is giving their life plenty of style.

Harewood Estate, on the south-western outskirts of Masterton, may only be 1.25ha but Paul and Suzie Adamson are getting the most out of it, both in enjoyment factor and economically.

In doing so, they have a clear recognition of their role as stewards of the land and in ensuring the property they purchased over 25 years ago as a bare block retains it's environmental value.

Both teachers, Paul and Suzie moved onto their land in 1986, bringing up sons James (18) and Tom (16) there.

During their early years of running coloured sheep and pigs on the property they thoroughly researched some long-term options that would give them the lifestyle they were seeking, without the tie of stock care.

A wide range was explored, but it is olives that have come up trumps for the Adamsons. They planted their first 280 trees in 2001 and now have much of their property transformed into a 400 tree olive grove.

Paul's parents grew olives on their small block, but it was a fact-finding trip to olive properties at the top of the South Island that convinced them. Recalls Paul: "We were pretty keen on the whole package, the whole concept, but once we actually saw some of these places, we knew that was exactly what we wanted for our place too."

While there is income from their produce – last season's beautifully packaged Harewood Estate Olive Oil has sold out – it is not, says Paul, "liquid gold".

"You've got to be passionate about it, and we are."

They are members of the Valley Oil collective and take their turn marketing for the group.

Absolute quality, every step of the way, is their aim. This ranges from the close scrutiny Paul gives the trees each evening as he walks the dogs (they breed Labradors) to check on the bird life in the small dam at the back of the property, to ensuring the olives are pressed within hours of picking, and a website for purchases which also offers comprehensive information on olive use, tasting and health giving properties.

The Adamsons enjoy sharing their slice of life. They host fundraising dinners, with long trestle tables set amongst the trees, for the Te Omanga Hospice. They call on good friends and family for help with the annual picking, but make sure there are enough hands on deck so it's a pleasure, not a chore. The Italian music wafting through the well cared for trees and social approach makes for a great atmosphere and the promise of finished product means Paul and Suzie never find themselves short of willing helpers.

COMMENTED THE JUDGES: "A very interesting and productive enterprise on a small area."

UPCOMING DATES - FIELD DAY

There will be a field day to showcase the supreme Award winning farm, "Daisybank" on Wednesday 30th April. Details to follow.

NEED MORE INFORMATION - www.bfea.org.nz

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