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Claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz

The cop who stopped for a scone

When I was a kid growing up on a farm in rural North Canterbury, crime was never far from our minds.

There was a spike in drug-related theft — fuel, farm equipment, anything easy to pinch.

We lived 45 minutes from the nearest station.

My father bought a guard dog, though she was more likely to lick an intruder than scare one off.

But she symbolised something: out here, you look out for yourself.

But we did have support too.

The reason that wave of crime didn't spiral was an old-school country cop based in Cheviot.

He knew everyone, and everyone knew him.

He popped in for a cup of tea and a scone in farmers' kitchens and gathered the small scraps of seemingly irrelevant information that turned into arrests.

He knew the people, the farms, the backroads.

He knew which family was stretched too thin, and which teenager needed steering back on track.

He was at every school event and rugby sideline.

He was part of the community's fabric, woven into daily life in a way that made us all feel safer.

That's what we risk losing.

Canterbury Police is proposing to close or downgrade rural stations in towns like

Culverden, Amberley, Oxford, and Rakaia.

The argument is always the same: low reported crime.

But low crime is not an excuse to withdraw.

It's proof that a visible police presence works.

Take that presence away, and the risk is crime rises again.

The numbers already tell the story.

According to the Federated Farmers' Rural Crime Survey 2023, 59 percent of North Canterbury farmers experienced or suspected crime in the past two years — up from 51 percent in 2021.

Livestock theft and killings are on the rise. Yet 40 percent of farmers didn't report incidents to Police, a non-reporting rate that has surged by 24 percent since 2021. That's not "low crime."

That's crime going unreported because people no longer believe the Police will come.

And that with the current structure.

And crime in rural areas is not like crime in towns.

A stolen quad bike or broken-into shed might sound small — until you realise that's someone's ability to work their farm gone.

Isolation magnifies everything.

When the nearest officer is an hour away, a burglary, a stock theft, or a domestic incident can escalate before help arrives.

This makes people vulnerable — especially the elderly, those in violent relationships and anyone living alone.

Once rural stations close, they rarely

reopen.

Once trust between Police and community is severed, it is nearly impossible to stitch back together.

And once young people stop seeing Police as a familiar face at the rugby club or in the schoolyard, you lose the chance to shape safer futures.

Farmers and rural families anchor this country's economy.

They should not be forced to fight for something as basic and as vital as local policing.

Lose it now, and it will be gone for good.



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ACL the backbone of Mid Canterbury, building roads, shaping communities, and growing people for 30 years

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Chief Executive Gary Casey said that looking after staff is one of the most important parts of running the company.

"ACL is all about our people," he says. And it shows.

"The team at ACL is friendly, hard-working, and proud of what they do.

Workers at ACL, are supported to learn and grow he said.

The company offers apprenticeships, helps with training, and gives people the chance to move up in their careers.

Gary believes that when people grow, the company grows too.

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Stories like this are common at ACL — many people have worked there for 20, 30, or even 40 years. That's a sign of a workplace where people feel happy and valued.

Health and wellbeing are also important. ACL offers a wellbeing grant, which helps staff with things like doctor visits, eye checks, or other medical needs. Keeping workers safe and healthy is a big part of the company's culture. ACL began in 1995 with just 60 workers.

Today, they have around 165 staff and have completed many major projects across the region.

Even in tough times, Gary and the leadership team focus on staying strong and planning for the future.

ACL also works closely with local schools and is always happy to meet young people who want to learn about the industry. You don't need to have any experience — ACL will help you get the right training and licences to get started.

As they celebrate 30 years, Gary Casey and his team are proud of how far ACL has come — and excited about what's next.

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Police restructure:

Fixing urban problems at rural expense



Claire Inkson
RURAL EDITOR

Are the days of the 'country cop' over?

A proposal to close or downsize rural police stations across Canterbury has drawn strong criticism from Hurunui District leaders and farming advocates, all warning of slower response times, increased crime risk, and the erosion of trust in rural policing.

The plan would see several rural stations closed or lose frontline officers, with resources shifted to 24/7 hubs in Rangiora and Rolleston.

Amberley's three officers would be replaced with a nine-to-five Rural Liaison Officer (RLO), while Culverden would lose two community police officer roles entirely.

Hurunui District Mayor Marie Black says the proposal would cut the district's total police staff from nine to four, despite it being New Zealand's fourth-largest territorial authority geographically.

"The idea that response times will remain 'appropriate' feels unrealistic when some communities are 60-90 minutes from the hub," she said.

"It feels like we're fixing an urban problem at the expense of rural communities."

Black praised the around 350 residents who turned out to a public meeting in Amberley's Tin Shed on August 12.

"One of the things I'm most proud of in our district is the solidarity - the commitment to do what's right and the concern about what change might mean, especially in the absence of good information," she said.

She fears the loss of visible policing will lead to an increase in opportunistic crime, strain volunteer emergency services, and undermine public confidence.

"Can you imagine the impact on our volunteers to sit for an hour to wait for a police response at the scene of a sudden death or enter a volatile situation with one or more parties injured — that time may be the difference between life and death."

Black said that while the low-crime rate statistics suggest there's not much demand for law enforcement in the district, that is likely because there is a police presence with the current model.

"We have boots on the ground. Remove them, and demand could rise."

Black is also concerned about the potential for 'vigilante justice' in the absence of officers on the ground - something she describes as a "perverse outcome".

"If people feel police are absent or ineffective there may be an increased likelihood of members of



Hurunui District Mayor Marie Black says the proposed Canterbury police restructure is fixing an urban problem at the expense of rural communities. PHOTO CLAIRE INKSON

the public taking enforcement into their own hands."

Federated Farmers: 'A Cold Message to Rural Communities'

North Canterbury Federated Farmers president Bex Green says the plan has left rural residents "angry and disappointed."

"Farming families rely on local police stations to feel safe and supported. Closing them down sends a cold message that rural communities don't matter."

She says the Government's pledge to add 500 new police officers by the end of 2025 "isn't lining up with reality for our rural communities", warning that response times in places like Culverden could stretch to over an hour.

"You can't build relationships and local knowledge from behind a desk in a centralised hub," she said.

Federated Farmers is urging Police and the Government to reconsider the restructure and consult meaningfully with affected rural communities before any final decisions are made.

"This isn't just about stations and rosters - it's about the safety, confidence and resilience of the people who grow our food and support our economy," Green said.

Police Association: 'Robbing Peter to Pay Paul'

New Zealand Police Association president Chris Cahill says the restructure fails to balance the demands of growing urban populations with the needs of rural communities.

"We recognise the increased demand for a 24-7 response model in Selwyn and Rangiora, but this should not be at the expense of the highly valued contribution rural response officers make to their local communities."

Cahill says the benefits of rural policing often aren't reflected in statistics.

"The test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder and not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with them," he said, quoting Sir Robert Peel.

He warns the plan could see the closure of police stations

in Arthur's Pass, Culverden, Rakaia, Pleasant Point, and Saint Andrews, and the replacement of community-based officers with liaison roles intended to be additional rather than a substitute.

"The association asks PNHQ to prioritise the resourcing of its extra staffing needs with new staff, not at the expense of rural communities."

Canterbury Police thank public and staff for feedback on proposal

Submissions on Canterbury Police's redesign proposal closed on August 18, and Police are now working their way through the feedback.

Canterbury Police District Commander Superintendent Tony Hill thanked staff and the public for their engagement as local Police leaders looked "to ensure our people and resources are well organised to meet the community's needs."

"We received around 200 staff submissions and 800 submissions from the public or external parties, including some petitions."

"This was a very important process for our staff, as the people directly impacted by these proposals."

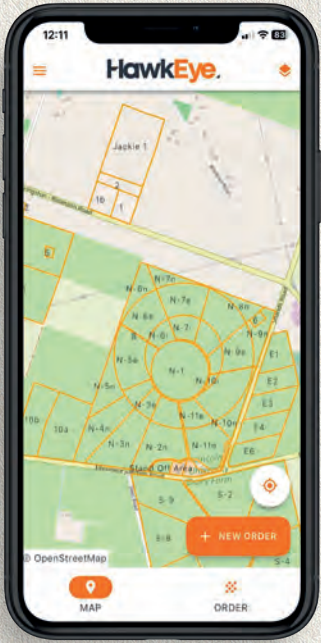
Staff sent in very well considered, high quality feedback. "Members of the public have also sent in some outstandingly articulate and thoughtful feedback which demonstrated people have taken the time to look over the proposals in detail."

"All this feedback has been invaluable and has reinforced for me that we need to take more time with some aspects of the proposal and to keep tracking with others."

"While we are keen to provide decisions as soon as possible, we also need to allow enough time to consider all the feedback thoroughly."

"Our team is now working through the feedback for us to consider before any final decisions are made."

"I hope to be in a position to provide an update on next steps and indicative timeframes in the coming weeks."



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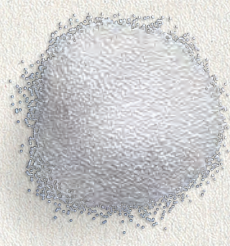
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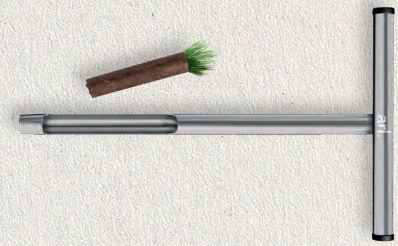
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The best part, according to a leading local pasture expert?

“This is something several hundred farmers can achieve currently. Those not far off will be looking at how they get their farm over the line.”

Graham Kerr, pasture specialist for Barenbrug, says key findings from a big new study on emissions and profitability in New Zealand dairy farming show you can have industry leading profitability while keeping emissions low.

Better yet, the effect holds true no matter what farm system you run, or how many cows you have.

And any dairy farmer can start benefiting from what has come out of this study straight away, he says.



That's because it found the best performing farms in terms of both emissions intensity and profitability had three things in common.

They all grew more feed, of higher quality, with more efficient use of nitrogen, than the others.

With spring here, there's no better time to act on this knowledge, Graham says.

“In terms of growing more, first up, do a really good job of this

spring's pasture renewal.

“That means getting the right level of renewal across the farm; identifying how many under-performing paddocks you have, and ticking all the boxes in the process of getting these back up a high level of production.

“New pasture, well planned and established, means you grow more feed at home.”

Spring's also pivotal in maintaining high feed quality.

“Eighty per cent of feed quality is influenced by management. That includes identifying and managing surplus pasture, and creating a culture of achieving consistent post-grazing residuals, day in, day out, to set up quality at the next grazing.”

What about improving nitrogen use efficiency, the third common trait of high performing farms in the emissions and profitability study?

“Clover is king here, for its natural nitrogen-fixing ability. When renewing pastures, remember clover seed must be sown shallow, no more than 10mm deep. So much is wasted every year because it never emerges.”

Growing more clover is a double win, Graham says, because it also enhances feed quality.

Other ways of using nitrogen more efficiently include sowing Array perennial ryegrass, which can extract more nitrogen from the soil in deficit periods; and introducing tetraploid ryegrasses.

“On their own or mixed with diploids, they can be grazed half a leaf stage later than straight diploids, so again, you effectively harvest more feed from the same amount of nitrogen.”

Whatever path you take using homegrown pasture to reduce emissions and lift profitability, help is at hand.

“We're always here to discuss options and provide advice if needed,” Graham says. “Just contact us.”

¹Emissions and Profitability is a joint project between DairyNZ, Fonterra and LIC that used data from 8000 NZ farms to analyse the relationship between greenhouse gas emissions and farm profitability.



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From dirty dairy to costly cream:



Mid Canterbury Federated Farmers Dairy chairperson Josh Dondertman describes the butter backlash as 'disheartening'. PHOTO SUPPLIED



Claire Inkson
RURAL EDITOR

The cost of butter in New Zealand has surged by more than 120% in the last decade, and 46% in the year to June, sparking frustration among urban consumers.

While the lingering 'dirty dairying' narrative once made farmers the face of environmental damage — is there a new villain narrative now forming — one where rural producers are seen as economically exploitative?

Mid Canterbury Federated Farmers dairy chairperson Josh Dondertman describes the backlash as "disheartening".

"The price of butter is completely out of dairy farmers' hands.

"It's pretty disheartening when you go down to the local shop, and hear people say 'Those bloody dairy farmers, they're getting us with the price of butter.'"

Much of the discourse centres around shifting blame — with many urban consumers holding misconceptions about how prices are set, who controls it and why.

The rural demographic for the most part understands how the system works — it's all driven by the export market — the Global Dairy Trade (GDT).

In New Zealand, because we operate in a globalised dairy market, domestic wholesale prices are influenced by these export returns.

If GDT butter prices rise due to strong overseas demand, domestic processors can fetch more offshore — so local retail prices often follow suit.

This means Kiwi consumers can end up paying higher prices for butter even when it's produced locally.

"Butter prices are high because

we export around 95% of our product overseas," Dondertman says.

"It's being set by international demand.

"We just put our milk in the tanker and then the price is effectively set by the market."

And farmers themselves aren't immune to rising costs at the supermarket checkout.

"Farmers are getting stung by the cost of living as well.

"We still have to go and buy butter, and all our food produce the same as everyone else."

And while milk prices are high, so are input costs, with Dondertman saying \$8.80 per kg m/s is "break even" for most farmers, so farmers need farmgate milk prices to be at \$10 to remain viable.

"Wages are continually rising with inflation, and for us with contract milking, we don't see any of that extra cream on top.

"We see it in farm development, but most farmers want to pay down debt and consolidate when we are having a good year."

Should farmers have to explain?

Dondertman questions whether the industry should be expected to defend pricing decisions.

"Why does Fonterra have to explain the price of butter? No other big organisation has to explain their cost structure."

Fonterra has addressed the issue publicly, with chief executive Miles Hurrell and a "butter explainer" outlining that around 80% of the price of a 500g block comes from the globally traded price, with the rest made up of packing, distribution, and GST.

"Fonterra recognises that dairy prices are high right now and the situation is tough for consumers," says Matt Bolger, Fonterra's managing director co-operative affairs. "While farmers are getting good returns for their milk and this benefits New Zealand's economy, consumers are at the same time paying more for dairy in supermarkets."



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Is butter the new villain?

Not the same as 'Dirty Dairying' — but tensions remain

But will the cost of butter erode public economic trust in dairy farmers the same way 'dirty dairying' did environmentally?

Open Farms founder and director at Dirt Road Communications Daniel Eb thinks not.

"I wouldn't go that far. It's a tricky one, because for most people — your average Joe Kiwi - it's quite hard to understand the market mechanisms of this.

"With dirty dairy, it's straightforward: cows shitting in rivers, people get that.

"But with global GDT prices, it's all based on demand, and we're tied to that price. It becomes complicated very quickly. So no, it doesn't have that same visceral nature to it."

Despite this though, Eb acknowledges the butter debate is creating tension — and he says that's fair enough — especially when dairy products are key to kiwi identity.

"If you took an American Republican's MAGA hat off them, they'd react strongly because it's tied to identity.

"The same goes for disrespecting the New Zealand flag: you'd get pushback. Butter is integral to many people's daily lives. When it becomes unaffordable, you get a significant reaction, and fair enough."

Eb said the tension around domestic prices comes down to the fact we're reaching the pointy end of what happens when you don't design for the domestic market.

"Export is great, but when you

don't intentionally design for the 10% of food that stays in New Zealand, you end up here.

"Should a mum in Hamilton have to pay inflated prices for butter produced 15 minutes down the road because of global demand and droughts overseas? That's a fairness issue, and no amount of storytelling changes the fact it's unfair."

Eb said it's not about telling our story better — it's about fixing our food system.

"I've long advocated for a two-track food system - one where some food from farms goes into a separate production, processing, and distribution model for the domestic market.

"That 10% could be redesigned to deliver health benefits for Kiwis, better value capture for farmers, and less reliance on supermarkets. Other countries do this well. We're a laggard."

Eb says the butter issue is a symptom of prioritising efficiency over connection to farming and food — and the results could be catastrophic for the dairy industry.

"If global prices spike again, butter could hit \$15, and political pressure for price controls or breaking up Fonterra would follow."

Eb says he has never seen a story stay as long in the headlines as butter — and he says that's a "signal".

"If we dismiss it as an anomaly, we'll be making a mistake. The question is: what did we do about it? If the answer is nothing, we've failed future generations in food and fibre. This isn't about asking Fonterra to change — they're built for export. The solution is building a fit-for-purpose domestic supply model."



Matt Bolger, Fonterra's managing director co-operative affairs says Fonterra recognises that dairy prices are high right now and the situation is tough for consumers. PHOTOS SUPPLIED



Open Farms founder and director of Dirt Road Media Daniel Eb says the butter issue is a symptom of prioritising efficiency over connection to farming and food — and the results could be catastrophic for the dairy industry.



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The Farmers Fast Five: Where we ask a farmer five quick questions about farming, and what agriculture means to them. Today we talk to Waikato farmer Jess McGee

1 What did your journey into farming look like?

My journey into farming started the day I was born. I spent the early days of my childhood in a woolshed helping the rousies, or in the killing house helping Dad kill the dog tuckers. I sat on the rails while dad broke in wild horses, and I'd ride my bike flat out around the lawn so that Dad could practice roping.... roping me.....I was the target, you can imagine how fast I'd come off my bloody bike when he managed to loop me!!

I grew up riding horses and holding tools, I even learnt how to hold the torch just right in the middle of the night so dad could fix a water leak without yelling at me!! My Dad was my inspiration to become a farmer, it's all I ever wanted to do and be, just like Dad.

2 Tell us a little bit about your farming operation

I realised after leaving University, that dairy farming was a far more lucrative farming option to move into, with the ability to progress in the industry faster than dry stock, so I started milking cows (seems like a stupid option now because 'sleep' and beef farmers don't get up as early as I do!).

I am currently contract milking 230 cows on a 70-hectare farm. I run a system 3 farm with inshed feed, make silage on the dairy platform and buy in feed where necessary. I run Hereford bulls with my herd over mating so calve down beef calves only and rear them all to weaning. I guess you could say that's my dry stock roots coming through!

3 What challenges have you faced in your farming business, and how have you tackled those challenges?

The biggest challenge I've faced in my career is being taken seriously as a female farmer and making my career work around being a single Mum. I'm not just the calf rearer, it boils my piss when I get asked that. I do the whole job, all of it, on my own. It bothers me less these days, reps just don't get my money if they can't have a conversation with me or if they ask me where the boss man is.... Bruh, I am the boss man.....

4 What has been a major highlight for you in your farming journey?

A major highlight in my career has been proving everyone wrong, flicking the bird at all those who said I couldn't do it, and coming out on top. Farming is my absolute passion, I literally don't even talk about anything except farming. Super awkward at family gatherings because none of my siblings are farming and they get sick of hearing my grass chat!

5 What advice would you have for the next generation of farmers?

My advice for the next generation of farmers (particularly females) is..... Don't let anyone tell you that you can't do it and don't give up because it gets hard. Because I'm proof that with enough passion and drive, anything is achievable. And in the wise words of my late father "you just find another way".



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From the farm to the frontline of property: George Fox on community, connection and Canterbury

CLAIRE INKSON

North Canterbury is in George Fox's blood. Raised on a sheep and beef farm in Scargill and with a lifelong passion for grassroots rugby, the former farmer is now firmly on the other side of the fence — selling rural property in the heart of Canterbury.

"I think my background has really helped me in this role," he says. "I have an empathy for farmers, because it's not just about a property transaction — especially with farms. There is an emotional side to it as well."

Fox now lives on a lifestyle block in Omihi with his wife Erin and their 19-month-old daughter Indie.

He joined Colliers nearly a year ago and hasn't looked back.

"It's a natural progression from farming," he says.

After studying agriculture at Lincoln University, Fox worked on the family farm in Scargill and spent time on farms in the UK.

"Working in the UK really highlighted to me how progressive and innovative New Zealand farmers are. People just think differently over here."

Fox is also a Kellogg Rural Leadership scholar. During the programme he produced a paper on boards and governance — an experience he says broadened his horizons.

"The thirty or so other people on the course were like-minded and

involved in the rural sector all over New Zealand," he says.

"It's really helped me in terms of leaning on them for advice, and it helped me think more broadly, and think bigger than just being in my own silo on the farm."

He's been involved in several rural development initiatives, including the Farming for Profit programme, which brought local farmers together in focus groups.

"It was a great way to get people off the farm and together. It's a great thing for the community, and I got a lot of value out of it as well."

Fox describes North Canterbury as a "special place" with a strong, tight-knit community that's been shaped by tough times.

"Those adverse events like drought and earthquakes have probably made the community ties a bit stronger than in other places. It's a fantastic place to live."

He still plays for the iconic Glenmark — Cheviot Rugby Club and says community remains a huge part of his life.

"I still enjoy it, and it's a great way to be part of the community," he says. "I'm kind of in the middle now — I've played with the dads and with their sons. It's really rewarding helping the next generation coming through."

Community and family are what get Fox out of bed in the morning.

"Family is a big motivator, and at the end of a marketing campaign, I just like to feel like I've done a good job for people. It's about the whole



George Fox says his background in farming and his experience with the Kelloggs leadership programme have prepared him well for his career in rural property and lifestyle sales.

For George Fox, wife Erin and daughter Indie, North Canterbury is home. PHOTOS CLAIRE INKSON

process: communicating well with vendors and buyers throughout the whole marketing process, not just the end goal."

He describes the Canterbury rural property market as "buoyant," with renewed optimism off the back of dropping interest rates and improved commodity prices.

"We are slowly seeing a bit more of an appetite for sheep and beef country, and there is a pool of active buyers in the dairy market," he says. "It's great seeing how positive everyone is after a tough couple of years. Confidence is definitely on the up."

Fox says the selling process can often begin years before a property comes to market.

"Vendors should be talking to their key advisors early to put their property in the best position when the time comes to list," he says. "It's about removing obstacles that buyers will see. Buyers are particularly well informed in the current market."

When it comes to buying, he emphasises the importance of due diligence.

"Front of mind for most buyers currently is environmental," he says. "However, we are seeing an increased amount of 'vendor

due diligence' which gives buyers confidence and removes obstacles.

"The buyers we see winning through in a competitive environment are the ones who remove as many of the 'grey areas' as possible before making an offer. This presents the cleanest offer with as few conditions as possible."

When he's not working hard for his vendors, Fox is usually on the rugby field or enjoying downtime at home with family.

"Being outside on the rugby pitch or enjoying a good steak on the barbie at home.

"Those simple things are gold."



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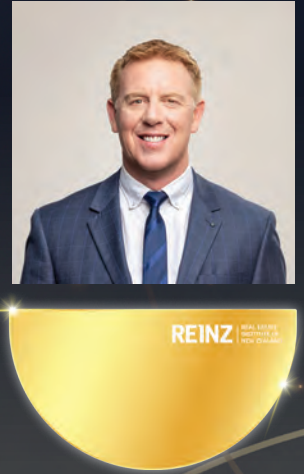
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Digital maps transform local water management



Because humans are naturally visual, maps excel at communicating intricate relationships between different factors affecting water quality and land management. PHOTO SUPPLIED

ANGELA CUSHNIE

The Mid Canterbury Catchment Collective (MCCC) has been working alongside local communities to develop Catchment Action Plans for each of their ten catchment groups.

From the beginning, maps have been the foundation for understanding what's happening in these often complex water systems.

The journey started with accessing powerful data from third parties like Canterbury Maps (Environment Canterbury), LINZ, and other government sources. This publicly available information proved hugely valuable in helping communities understand their catchments.

MCCC has invested in developing its own mapping infrastructure, creating new

possibilities for their catchment groups by building their own mapping capability.

This evolution means they can still access external data from sources like Environment Canterbury but now combine it with their own catchment groups' monitoring data in ways that maintain privacy and data security.

The result is far deeper insights, analysis and visualization of what's happening in catchments, and why it might be occurring.

Making Complex Data Visual

The power of this approach lies in transforming complex information, which might be overwhelming in spreadsheets, into visual maps most people can easily understand.

Because humans are naturally visual, maps excel at communicating intricate

relationships between different factors affecting water quality and land management.

"Without geospatial mapping, everything lacks context," explains Will Wright, founding member of MCCC and facilitator for the Ashburton Forks Catchment Group.

"Being able to visualize the data our group is gathering helps with risk assessment and management decision-making."

These digital maps layer multiple types of information: climate patterns, land elevation, rock types, vegetation cover and land management practices. By combining geological maps showing rock distribution with topographical data revealing land elevation, communities build a comprehensive understanding of their local environment.

As part of this evolution, MCCC is developing local capability

by providing 12 months of GIS (mapping software) training and support to those working directly with farmers. This investment in local expertise ensures the technology serves the community long-term.

Data-Driven Decisions with Privacy Protection

The enhanced mapping system allows community groups to integrate their water quality monitoring, environmental DNA testing and stream health assessments with broader datasets. This spatial analysis helps identify areas of concern such as pollution hotspots or erosion-prone zones, while tracking how different land uses impact water quality over time.

Crucially, this is all done while maintaining farmer privacy and data security – ensuring sensitive farm information remains

protected while still contributing to the bigger picture of catchment health.

An Exciting Next Step

This mapping evolution represents more than just new technology – it's about empowering local communities with the tools and knowledge they need to understand and protect their waterways. By combining external expertise with homegrown data and local capability building, MCCC is creating a sustainable model for catchment management.

The technology may be sophisticated, but the goal remains community-focused: bringing people together to protect the water resources they depend on, while respecting privacy and building local expertise for the future.

Angela Cushnie is coordinator for the Mid Canterbury Catchment Collective

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Cam Nelson with son Eddie. PHOTO SUPPLIED

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in the paddock



Christina Vaughan, Mackenzie Vaughan, Cam Nelson, Eddie Nelson, Wally Nelson and Jan Nelson from Nelson Farms, the 2025 Ballance Farm Awards Regional Supreme Winners. PHOTO SUPPLIED

Christine Vaughan and Cam Nelson saw the awards as a way to celebrate the farming achievement of Nelsons parents, Wally and Jan. PHOTO SUPPLIED



Claire Inkson
RURAL EDITOR

2025 Ballance Farm Awards Southland Regional supreme winner and deer farmer Cam Nelson says it's time more farmers shared their good stories - and the 2026 Ballance Farm Environment Awards are the perfect stage.

Entries are now open, and Nelson, who farms with partner Christina Vaughan, is urging farmers to throw their hat in the ring - even if putting yourself

forward doesn't come naturally.

"We need more people showing what good they are doing in the farming space.

"Bad news travels three times faster than good news, and we need to get more of these good stories out into the wider public."

Facilitated by the New Zealand Farm Environment Trust (NZFET), the Ballance Farm Environment Awards (BFEA) celebrate excellence in sustainable farming and growing, recognising the many ways landowners are working to strengthen the future of food and fibre in Aotearoa.

For Nelson, entering was about honouring the legacy created by his parents Wally and Jan, who purchased the 164-hectare property in 2003 and gradually transitioned from a mixed sheep-

deer operation to solely deer.

"It was a chance to celebrate what my parents' achievements, and a sort of changing of the guard.

"We thought we would enter and see what it's all about."

Today, the Nelsons run 250 mixed-age stags, 400 breeding hinds, 180 R2 velvet stags and 180 R2 hinds sold in-calf - a high-performing operation that benefits from continuous improvement.

That drive for excellence is at the heart of the BFEA programme, which is supported by a wide network of agribusinesses, sector organisations and regional councils.

Many of these partners provide technical insights and feedback to entrants as part of the judging process.

For Nelson, that feedback was

invaluable - and it came with silverware.

Judges were impressed, awarding Nelson Farms the Rabobank Agri-Business Management Award.

"It was also a way to see if we were on a par with where we were heading, and get some advice, and see what they have to say."

The business also took home the Beef + Lamb New Zealand Livestock Farm Award, with judges noting superior stockmanship and a well-optimised system that allowed the team to successfully manage their high stocking rate.

On top of that, Nelson Farms claimed the NZFET Biodiversity Award, with judges highlighting Cam's exceptional attention to detail in enhancing biodiversity.

His commitment to native ecosystems includes native plantings, pond creation and replacing eucalyptus with native species. Soil and water conservation measures, such as sediment traps and water flow management, were also praised, along with significant investment in shelter and shade.

Nelson admits he may never have entered without a gentle

nudge from Thriving Southland.

"Farmers are pretty humble sort of people."

He describes the judging process as straightforward.

"There were two rounds of judging for the regionals, and it was basically an hour and a half sitting around the coffee table having a chin wag about what we do."

While the awards evening pushed him out of his comfort zone, the experience was worth it.

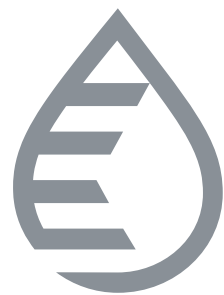
"It was pretty inspiring to meet other regional winners and hear their stories and how proud everyone is of their wee bit of dirt and how they are looking after it.

"You come out of that room buzzing."

Entries for the 2026 Ballance Farm Environment Awards close in October.

Initial farm visits will take place later this year, with regional awards events scheduled for March and April 2026.

The Catchment Group Showcase will also return in 2026, highlighting the impact of rural communities working together to improve water quality, protect biodiversity, and achieve sustainable land management outcomes.



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Water rehab project gets consent refund ahead of Environment Court fight

JONATHAN LEASK

Environment Canterbury is refunding the Hekeao Hinds Water Enhancement Trust about \$64,000 for not meeting statutory timeframes in handling its resource consents.

The regional council confirmed a 50% discount has been applied to the processing fees for the Rangitata Diversion Race Management Limited (RDRML) and Hekeao Hinds Water Enhancement Trust's (HHWET) consents to expand the water rehabilitation project.

The consents, initially lodged in 2022, are to source water from the Rangitata Diversion Race to operate water aquifer and recharge sites at 37 locations, 15 existing and 22 new sites.

Independent commissioners granted the consents on April 30, but Te Rūnanga O Arowhenua, which had opposed the consent application, appealed to the Environment Court on May 21.

Environment Canterbury (ECan) regulatory implementation manager Paul Hulse said they are required to automatically apply a discount to consent processing fees if they exceed statutory timeframes.

The discount is 1% of the processing fees for each working day the application is delayed, up to a maximum of 50%.

"The discount is applied at the time of the final invoice being

issued, and whether there's a refund made or just a lower invoice issued depends on the amount the applicant paid during the processing of their consents."

In the case of Hekeao Hinds Water Enhancement Trust's consents, the total consents processing fee was \$337,846.

"Given the amount already paid by the Trust to date, and then the discount applied, a refund of \$64,301.63 will be made."

There have been other applications that ECan had to give a discount on the processing fees, Hulse said.

"Since addressing our [consent] backlog, our statutory timeframes have significantly improved over the last year and currently sit at around 80%. This means fewer refunds have been required."

HHWET's consent issues and costs were raised at a recent public meeting in late July in Hinds, with around 50 locals and four ECan staff attending.

Trust executive director Brett Painter said that since the meeting, HHWET had received a letter from ECan responding to some of the questions raised at the meeting, including details on the consent refund.

Painter said the meeting provided a comprehensive update on the HHWET's activities in the 2024-25 year and its proposed next steps.

"Despite ongoing delays stemming from our current



HHWET Trustees (from left) Ian Mackenzie, chairperson Peter Lowe, Neil Brown, and Evan Chisnall. PHOTO SUPPLIED

consenting process, the update was largely positive," Painter said.

"The trust's environmental initiatives have contributed to the best water quality results to date in groundwater and surface water bodies that HHWET is able to influence.

"These achievements support the community's long-standing commitment to improving ecosystem health."

However, catchment-wide groundwater nitrate concentrations have risen in the last year, due to higher rainfall and consenting challenges restricting MAR and NRR operations, he said.

"The attendees recognised the importance of continuing on-farm efforts to reduce nutrient leaching contributions to groundwater nitrate concentrations."

The meeting also addressed

the appeal lodged by Te Rūnanga O Arowhenua against the independent commissioners' decision to grant resource consents to expand the rehabilitation sites and utilise water from the Rangitata Diversion Race.

"This appeal, now before the Environment Court, will cause further delay in expansion of HHWET activities and unnecessary financial burden, in addition to the \$520,000 already spent on this consenting process to date."

HHWET funds put aside for delivering water to new sites will be reallocated to the appeal costs, Painter said.

"This extra cost and further delay present a significant missed opportunity for improved environmental outcomes across the Hekeao Hinds Plains.

"Meeting attendees voiced

strong concerns about the actions of ECan staff during the early stages of the consenting process, which have contributed to delays to date.

He said the community showed "overwhelming support for HHWET's continued efforts".

"There was a clear mandate to robustly defend the appeal."

"HHWET remains committed to its goals and will continue to work collaboratively with stakeholders to ensure the long-term health of Hekeao Hinds water systems," Painter said.

Independent commissioners granted the resource consents on April 30.

In approving the consent decision, the independent panel stated that the consent applications were only about what RDRML's existing allocation could be used for.

Te Rūnanga o Arowhenua argue that the panel got that aspect of the decision, and some other factors, wrong.

They are seeking to have the decision overturned and the consents declined.

The matter is now before the Environment Court.

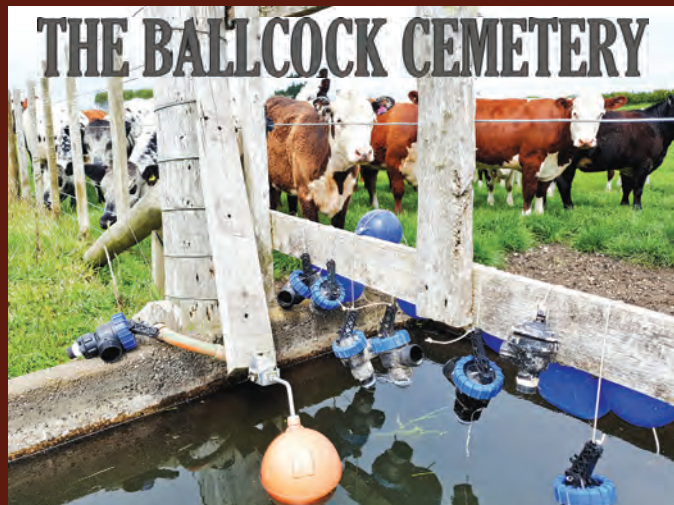


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Hanzon: Turning on-farm learning into recognised skills

CLAIRE INKSON

When the COVID-19 pandemic shut New Zealand's borders, the ripples across the agricultural sector were immediate.

Contractors suddenly faced a shortage of skilled seasonal workers, and the government's suggestion that "anyone can drive a tractor" struck a nerve.

"When COVID hit, borders closed, and we couldn't get staff in. Contractors were left scrambling," says Golden Bay-based recruitment consultant and farmer Richard Houston.

"We went to the government asking for exemptions, but they dismissed it, saying tractor driving was easy — bus drivers, baristas, or taxi drivers could do it. We pushed back, explaining that it takes time and skill to operate expensive machinery safely. Their response was, "Where's your proof?"

For Houston, that moment highlighted a glaring gap: the industry lacked a way to prove the skill and training required to operate farm machinery and carry out essential seasonal tasks.

From that frustration, the Hanzon app was born.

"We needed a way to demonstrate the complexity of the work, and the training involved. So, we created a program to capture exactly what junior staff were doing: logging their hours, tasks, and responsibilities. It started as evidence for government, but I quickly realised how valuable it would be for the industry itself."

The web-based app provides an easy way for students to log their work and record "micro-credentials" — the skills developed by practical, hands-on learning so employers can see a potential employee's experience and skill set.

The idea evolved into a digital logbook that records not only hours behind the wheel, but also the specific tasks, equipment, and responsibilities a worker undertakes.

"It gives the student a tangible record they can take to job interviews or use to step into new opportunities.

"We trialled it with Primary ITO courses, where our logbook



Hanzon supports learning on the farm, an approach that appeals to students who have a more practical mindset and learn better on the job where real skills are developed, rather than in the classroom. PHOTO SUPPLIED

replaced the traditional paper version. What we saw confirmed it: formal training often doesn't stick, but real learning happens on the job. Our system captures that. Employers love it too, because they can see at a glance how much practical work a trainee has really done."

Traditionally, learners working towards micro-credentials like a tractor licence recorded their experience in paper logbooks.

Hours, weather conditions, and terrain were noted down, then signed off by tutors or employers.

The Hanzon app takes this process digital.

Learners can log their daily work in as they go, and tick off specific tasks such as setting up a mower or carting silage. Employers and tutors can view the data, validate it, and provide feedback.

The app supports learning on the

farm, an approach that appeals to students who have a more practical mindset and learn better on the job where real skills are developed, rather than in the classroom.

"The reality is, a two-day course won't turn someone into a great tractor driver," he says. "They learn by doing, by having good employers who mentor them and give them time to develop. What we've built is a tool that captures that learning and gives young people a way to prove what they've done."

The app is not limited to machinery. Its database now covers a wide range of agricultural activities and is already being broadened into other farm tasks.

The app isn't just for paid work either.

It can be used by students working on the farm on the weekends or helping out the

neighbours.

"It's a way for a 16-year-old working on grandad's farm in the school holidays to capture that experience. It might only be a few weeks here and there, but when they're ready to apply for a job, they've got evidence of what they've done. That's powerful," Houston says.

Employers, too, benefit from a clearer picture of a candidate's abilities.

"As a farmer, you want to know: can this person hook a mower onto a tractor? Can they milk cows unsupervised? This system shows you in black and white," Houston explains.

All information in the app can be exported and printed or submitted as part of formal assessments.

Students register on the website www.hanzon.co.nz with no need to download an app — and currently

the platform is free. Houston is hoping to keep it that way and is hoping to attract funding to achieve this.

"My goal is to keep it free, or very low cost, so that any young person can use it," he says. "I'd love to see a couple of thousand rural kids on the program, all capturing their experience and building their careers. That's the vision."

With ongoing interest from training providers and potential expansion into other sectors, Hanzon is well-placed to play a central role in shaping how agricultural skills are taught, validated, and valued.

As Houston puts it:

"Farmers want to know that a person can do the job safely and well. Certificates show the learning, but Hanzon captures the practical experience behind it."

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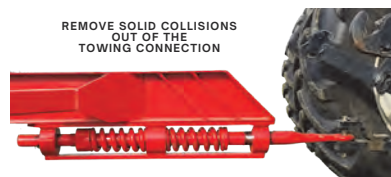
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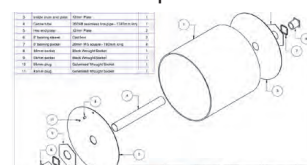


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Bargains, banter and bacon butties: Greendale's sale day is back

CLAIRE INKSON

Everything, including the kitchen sink.

That's what buyers can expect at the fourth annual Greendale School PTA clearing sale this year.

As well as the big-ticket items such as balers, ploughs and even the occasional tractor, Greendale School PTA chairperson Chris McDonald says there is something for everyone when the auction returns on Friday September 5.

"Last year we had a kayak and even kitchen sinks. This year there's a TV surround, a jet boat, vintage cream cans, and wooden gates from the old Addington sale yards," McDonald says.

What began as a small-scale fundraiser has grown into a major annual event, attracting hundreds from across Canterbury, and even further afield.

"Last year we had someone from the Chatham Islands turn up.

"We've also had people from Otago and Southland. Word gets around."

The sale has evolved into a well-oiled operation that has become the school's major fundraising event.

"The first year was a small group's idea, with the PTA mainly handling food. It did well financially for the school, and by the second and third years, it went gangbusters," McDonald says.

Funds raised go towards



The Greendale School PTA clearing sale has something for everyone – from farm machinery to sporting and household goods. PHOTO ASHBURTON GUARDIAN

There are 200 lots already entered, and more are expected to roll in over the coming week.

The event has become much more than just a fundraiser though.

It is a day out for the community and it's all hands on deck – including the students.

"The PTA is well supported by parents, extended family, and even past students help on the day.

"It's a huge team effort. That community spirit is what makes it such a great day."

The Year 5-6 students will be running a bake sale to raise money for their school camp.

There will also be two coffee carts, and a bar that gives locals the opportunity to connect even after the auction closes.

"It's a good excuse for people to get off the farm, catch up over a bacon butty or a beer, and maybe bid on something they didn't know they needed," McDonald says.

Event Details

- **When:** Friday 5 September, auction starts 11am (gates open 9am)
- **Where:** 1087 Coaltrack Road, Greendale
- **Entry:** Free
- **Entries Close:** Friday 29 August
- **Register to Bid:** Email greendalesale@gmail.com, call Chris on 027 552 4488, Earl on 027 270 8066, or register online at <https://tinyurl.com/3dvz7bez>

everything from classroom resources and swimming lessons to teacher aides and pool maintenance.

"Rural schools can't survive without fundraisers like this.

"One event like this raises more than half a dozen smaller ones

combined."

The sale is a mix of donated goods and items sold on commission, with professional auctioneers from PGG Wrightson Livestock, Hazlett, and Rural Livestock volunteering their time

on the day.

"It's great for the younger auctioneers too.

"It gives them experience they might not get elsewhere, plus a chance to network with clients," McDonald explains.



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Young Farmers are the future of New Zealand agriculture, so each issue we shine a spotlight on a Young Farmers Club member. Today we talk to Tasman Young Farmer Georgia Steele.

- 1 What is the name of your club, and how long have you been a member?**
Tasman Valley Young Farmers. I have been a member with them since February 2024, but I signed up to my first Young Farmers Club in 2021.
- 2 What has been the highlight for you of joining Young Farmers? What are the benefits and experiences that you feel have helped you most?**
I think the highlight for me is meeting new people. I've learnt so much through different members of the club. Everyone is so willing to help each other and it's amazing to watch people grow and become more confident in themselves.
- 3 How did you become involved in agriculture?**
My family owns a sheep and beef farm in the Auckland region. I always loved being outdoors and working with the land. All of my best memories have been outdoors.
- 4 What is your job now? Tell us about your role, and what your journey has been like so far.**
When I moved to Nelson in 2024, I searched for dairy farming jobs as that is all I had done in the past six years, but sadly there were not many around. I now work for JS Ewers, the South Island's largest market garden company. I drive tractors, doing irrigation, fertilising and working ground, and I love it. I love working with big machinery now. It was a huge adjustment from dairy farming, but I've learned so much about the industry and thoroughly enjoy it.
- 5 What do you think the future of farming will look like, and what would you like to see happening in New Zealand agriculture going forward?**
That's a hard question; I would like to see agriculture and horticulture supported more by the people of NZ. For more knowledge about where and how our food is grown to be shown all over the world. For younger people to be given more opportunities to go into our agriculture sectors. I think the future of farming will bring more and more incredible technology that helps farmers and growers to become more efficient and knowledgeable.
- 6 What are your future plans?**
Another hard question! It is tough to say, I really enjoy the Top of the South. It's a beautiful place full of amazing people and I really love my job and the variety it brings. But I would love to go back to my family's farm and be the fourth generation that works it.
- 7 Who has been your biggest inspiration in agriculture, and why?**
I don't know if I can pick just one! The people in Tasman Valley Young Farmers Club show such dedication in their jobs, whether it's sheep, beef, velveting or horticulture. They all show such passion and drive for their own respective industries that it fuels me as well. And one of my previous dairy bosses, Brett Rossiter, he taught me so much, many of those life lessons I still use to this day. I owe him a lot.



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Success squared – top crop wins twice over

High yielding Kea keeps heifers happy

Bumper growth from a new kale has impressed both two and four-legged judges in mid-Canterbury this season.

Yielding 18 tonnes dry matter/ha, Kea won the kale section of the local winter feed competition, and kept dairy heifers full and content during May and June.

“It’s very utilisable,” says farmer John Duncan. “Heifers ate it right to the ground, with hardly any residue left, and they cleaned it up because it’s good quality feed, not because they were hungry!”

Always keen to try new plant genetics, John sowed 5 ha of Kea last spring on a dryland corner of his 70 ha, predominantly irrigated grazing and finishing block at Dromore.

“I heard about it from my rep, and it sounded good. I was able to use that small area as a trial planting; the rest of our kale area (14 ha) was sown in a different variety.”

Running a mix of dairy heifers, dry dairy cows over winter, and store lambs, John says kale plays an important role in his system.

“It’s a very versatile winter crop; you can feed most animals on it, there’s very little transitioning required and it’s easy to feed.”

He wasn’t expecting such a high yield from Kea, especially after a dry spell in early establishment, which saw young plants struggle for four or five weeks.

But regular rain through late December and January made all

John Duncan in his Kea Kale crop which won the Kale section in the 2025 Ashburton Winter feed competition.

PHOTOS SUPPLIED

the difference.

“Once we got rain at Christmas, it just took off. I got one dressing of urea on it but by the time the second one was due, it was too high to get the spreader over.”

It’s the first kale he has entered in the Ashburton A&P Association annual winter feed competition and while he was pleased to win that section, he was more interested in how his client’s animals felt about it.

“Kea kale has small stems, and is very leafy with good quality. We have found that the animals are utilising it extremely well. I would definitely plant it again.”

The paddock was ploughed and sown on 30 October following a good rain.

Sowing rate was 4kg/ha; early inputs were limited to base fertiliser, pre-emergence herbicide and insecticide.

Kea is a new intermediate kale from Cropmark Seeds, bred for quality, yield, high leaf percentage, disease tolerance and flexible grazing management. Seed is available for sowing this spring.



The Kea Kale crop in Mid Canterbury.



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Is tribalism getting in the way of real reform?

EVA HARRIS

By rare good luck, I found myself with a free evening. So, like any boy-mum, I did the obvious thing — watched *Mean Girls*.

One of my favourite scenes is when the new girl is marched around the cafeteria and introduced to the school “tribes”: The Band Geeks, The Jocks, The Cool Asians and, reigning supreme, The Plastics. Once you picked your tribe, that was it. No crossing over. Your entire school experience was locked in.

It strikes me that New Zealand’s parliament isn’t much different.

Take the Resource Management Act (RMA). Every three-year election cycle, whichever tribe forms government feels compelled to “do something.” Out comes another policy statement or yet another re-write of the RMA. Since 2011, there have been seven major changes to national environmental regulations. Not one has been left in place long enough to make a difference on the ground. What we do see are staggering costs — hundreds of millions of dollars in taxes, rates, and levies — all for reforms that barely make it out of the starting blocks.

Last week’s announcements were just the latest round: tweaks around the edges that do nothing to tackle the deep failings of our resource management system, or the way it has been weaponised by activists.

The pattern is familiar. A National-led government frames reform around property rights and cutting costs. A Labour-led government swings hard towards improving water quality or environmental protection. Each pushes so far in its direction that the changes become politically toxic, unworkable, or both. The result? A pendulum that swings furiously but never moves us forward.

Meanwhile, the people most affected — farmers, councils, iwi, developers, communities — are left with uncertainty. Rules change faster than they can adapt. Long-term projects stall because no one trusts the current framework to last. And ordinary New Zealanders foot the bill for a cycle of endless reform that achieves very little.

Here’s the irony: with everyone so quick to demand the RMA be scrapped, maybe that actually means we’ve struck the right balance. I’ve always thought you know you’re close to fair when everyone’s grumpy.

But even if the balance isn’t entirely wrong, the process is. Meaningful reform can’t happen if governments insist on staying in their tribal corners. What we need is stability — rules that last not just through one electoral cycle, but through decades. That’s the only way we’ll get the certainty required for multi-generational infrastructure, resilient farm systems, and the environmental improvements everyone agrees are needed.

That kind of reform takes courage. It means leaving the safety of your tribe, sitting down with your political opponents, and hammering out a deal that no one loves, but everyone can live with. Geoffrey Palmer did this in 1991, and for all its flaws, the RMA has survived for 35 years. In political terms, that makes him a legend.

So here’s the challenge for today’s leaders: stop playing *Mean Girls*. Be brave enough to break free from your tribes, talk to the people you least want to, and find a version of reform that might actually stick. Because New Zealand deserves better than this endless cycle of expensive, short-lived fixes.

Eva Harris is principal environmental advisor for Enviro Collective



Eva Harris is principal environmental advisor for Enviro Collective PHOTO SUPPLIED

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When dairy does well – NZ does well

TRACY BROWN

It's a unique New Zealand story — when an export does well, it's good for the economy but, unfortunately, tough for locals.

Cyclical food price stories are a reminder that 95% of our dairy products are exported, which means we pay international prices locally.

The demand for dairy overseas dictates the price to farmers and on the supermarket shelves (notwithstanding well discussed margins at the latter).

I buy butter too, so I can appreciate that double edge very well, as can every dairy farmer across New Zealand. Every farmer can also appreciate the increasing cost of farming inputs, which puts pressure on our margins as well.

While these stories come and go, they remind us of what we're good at as a country.

We earn our living on exports – mostly food and fibre and, of those, mostly dairy. \$27 billion over the past year alone.

That's income for the Government in tax take, which gives us the public services we rely on like our schools, our hospitals, and our roads.

We received a cheeky thank you

from an MP at our Farmers Forum recently for the extra addition to their tax coffers this year as the sector delivers well for the country.

New Zealand's economic recovery is being led out of the regions, by the 360,000 people working in the primary sector, of which 50,000 work in dairy, in a country of over 5 million.

That's been the case before and it'll be the case again.

New Zealand dairy farmers have tackled challenges head on over the past decade, including biosecurity incursions, more extreme weather events and regulatory uncertainty.

Over the past decade, significant strides have been made on reducing our environmental footprint to ensure we remain competitive among the most sustainable and low-emissions farmers on the planet.

All of this equals demand for NZ dairy on the world stage.

It also ensures we benefit from a growing global appetite for more natural and nutritional food and fibre that comes from responsible sources.

I recall it wasn't that long ago that butter was very unfashionable and deemed unhealthy, and so it follows that the swing back to more

natural products has driven the increased demand and subsequent increase in price.

While the world shouts for our butter, let's remind ourselves at home the reasons why New Zealand dairy is a world-class exemplar and so in demand:

- **We export most of what we produce** — so we are exposed to world trade and must be customer focused
- **We are primarily family businesses and farmer-owned cooperatives** — and that drives values-led innovation
- **We have a temperate climate where we grow pasture well** — and that is the ultimate starting point for this story
- **We are unsubsidised.** We have to make a living at world prices competing against the best
- Therefore, our pasture-based dairy farming system delivers highly nutritious milk, with a comparably low environmental footprint, and happy cows who graze outdoors

A story that has clearly spread around the world.

Tracy Brown is the chairperson of DairyNZ



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Growing the value of precision dairy farming

New Zealand tanker drivers are the un-sung heroes of the dairy industry. We have a chat with Synlait milk tanker driver Kate Reynolds about what its like to be the driving wheels behind the sector.

Work & Daily Routine

Can you describe a typical day (or night!) in your role as a Synlait milk tanker driver?

At the start of each shift (normally 7am), we have a quick meeting and then we get given our run, or maybe two runs, and then we just crack on and drive. Health and safety is king for us so we always check our trucks before we head out. Once on farm, we double check we're in the right place, hook all our hoses up and take a sample, load the milk, clean up and away we go. We end the day together, cleaning the trucks and debriefing any issues.

What regions or routes do you usually cover?

I'm usually in the Ashburton area. Occasionally, I'll go up to Culverden or down south to Temuka.

How many farms might you visit on an average shift?

About six to eight. Not as many when we're in peak season because each farm will produce so much milk the tanker fills up quickly!

What's something about the job most people wouldn't know?

It's mentally taxing, because you've got to pay attention to a lot of different things.

There are cars on the road and

dozens of checks to make whether you're driving or on farm. People are also surprised that we actually test the milk and physically check its smell and temperature. Sometimes on night shift the hours can be quite long, so that can get taxing.

Career Journey

How and when did you get into milk tanker driving? Was this always the plan?

I always wanted to drive trucks growing up, but I never did. Two and a half years ago I broke my knee dairy farming, which meant I had to change careers. The team at Hilton's were kind enough to give me a job, they trained me up, and now I'm driving.

Did you have any previous driving or rural experience before joining Synlait?

I grew up on a dairy farm, so I've always been around dairy. My background means I have a good understanding of the farms when I go there, and what I'm looking at. It's great to still be connected to farming, although I do miss the close contact with the animals.

What kind of training or qualifications were required, and what was the learning curve like?

I came to Hilton's with just my class 2 (heavy vehicle) licence. They provided me with all the



training I needed to get up to class 5. There was a lot to learn but I was often able to jump in with another driver who was happy to teach me - we'd just go out on a quick tiki tour.

Highlights & Challenges

What do you enjoy most about the job? Any moments that stand out over the years?

I just enjoy driving. I've always been a car person and wanting to drive all the time. I also love the company - you get a good family in Hilton's, but you also get time on your own driving every day. My most bizarre day was when I did a video for A2 milk, so I had to go out and pick up milk while they were filming me. That was quite strange.

What are some of the biggest challenges you face on the road or in the role?

Being prepared for what other drivers do on the road is probably one of the hardest things. You have to be prepared because the trucks don't stop quickly. They take 150 to 200 metres to come to a full stop, that means you have to be paying attention 24-7. That can be mentally taxing, for sure.

How do you manage the long hours, varying weather, or night shifts?

Luckily I only live 10 minutes away from work, so at the end of a shift I don't have a big drive home. I'm used to shift work, so I can sleep any time of the day or

night. Definitely important to eat right, drink lots of water - all your standard good healthy practices.

How important is safety and technology in your role?

Very, very important. There's a lot of new technology to help with our safety. They're just about to put in what we call our yellow line system, this is a GPS that provides us with up to date, detailed routes.

As I said before, safety is king. If we're not safe, the public can get hurt or we can get hurt so it's a complete non-negotiable. Hilton's give us all the training we need, and if we ever need new safety gear, we just order it. If we raise concerns, they also act quickly.

Advice for Aspiring Drivers

Any tips for young people or career changers looking to get into the transport or dairy support industry?

Definitely come to Hilton's, because they may help you get fully qualified.

What's next for you?

I'd like to have a go in the office with the dispatching side of it - sending out the trucks every day and managing the drivers.

What does being part of New Zealand's dairy supply chain mean to you?

Given I can't work on a farm anymore, it's great to be ensuring farmers' milk gets to the factory and is all safe. I've always been in and around dairy. It's where I'm comfortable, and I love it so much. I don't think I'll be leaving any time soon.

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Carbon Credits for Native Restoration

Written by Emma Warmerdam, Technician for Verity NZ based in Methven.

At Verity NZ, we believe hill and high-country farmers need a viable land-use alternative. We operate at scale throughout New Zealand. We offer a unique option that rewards landowners for native restoration on their land through the Voluntary Carbon Market.

Native restoration projects are not commercially viable without external funding due to the high upfront costs and delayed returns. Carbon finance is therefore essential to enable this land-use shift by covering the cost of implementation, maintenance, and long-term stewardship. Verity NZ can remove the financial barrier to landscape-scale native restoration. We fund projects for the entire life cycle, managing projects from “seed-to-credit”.

The graph to the right shows the estimated costs per hectare if landowners were to fund this restoration work themselves over a 60-year period, without a carbon project in place. This shows the significant capital and ongoing costs involved in native restoration. The costs are based on 25 metres of fencing per hectare at \$25 per metre, repair and maintenance costs are set at \$1 per hectare per year and weed and pest control at \$5 per hectare per year. The land

under restoration would not be registered as a carbon project in the Voluntary Carbon Market, meaning landowners would not be able to reap the rewards from the carbon sequestered and the associated biodiversity gains.

Our projects are designed to have a positive impact on the land while not impeding the landowner’s ability to enjoy their land.

1. The landowner retains full legal title and ownership of the land.
2. The only improvements Verity NZ can make to the land are fencing, gates, tracks and the enhancement of native

vegetation. The vegetation is not meant to be harvested or removed (as opposed to, say, production forestry).

3. The landowner is a beneficiary of the carbon and co-benefit revenues.

Our model targets marginal land where the carbon and co-benefit revenue will be the highest and where this is the best use for that land. We do not want to displace livestock or reduce the ability of the property to produce protein.

The lifecycle of our projects can be broken down into **8 steps**:

1. **Pre-development:** We

conduct research and source project funding.

2. **Community engagement:** We get landowners onboard and employ locals to keep money in our local economy.

3. **Project implementation:** Carry out baseline data collection and our project activities (installing fencing, carrying out weed and pest control, and aerial seeding where needed).

4. **Project verification:** An independent third-party validation and verification body checks the integrity of our project. The project is then able to be registered in the Voluntary Carbon Market.

5. **Monitoring and Reporting:** We report on the changes in our project areas since project implementation, such as the measured increase in carbon stocks.

6. **Credit issuance:** Credits are issued for the carbon sequestered (1 credit = 1 tonne of carbon dioxide).
7. **Credit marketing and sales:** We sell our credits for a premium price due to the co-benefits associated with them.

8. **Pay the landowner:** Money lands in the pockets

of landowners for the carbon and co-benefits their land produces.

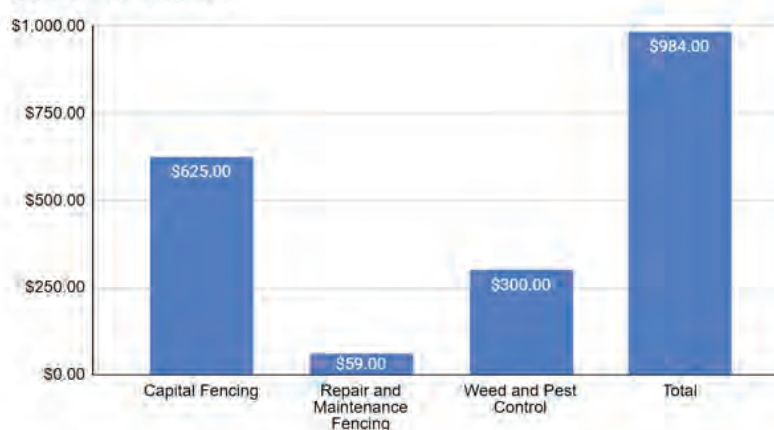
Verity NZ’s project activities align with New Zealand’s goals of tackling climate change, enhancing native biodiversity and becoming predator-free. We can achieve this in a way that benefits landowners.

Our project outcomes include:

1. **Alternative income:** Supporting sustainable agriculture and generating economic diversity for landowners in New Zealand.
2. **Biodiversity gains:** Restoring biodiversity by delivering landscape-scale restoration projects.
3. **Employment:** Training and employing local people to carry out our project activities.
4. **Climate change mitigation:** Enhancing the carbon stocks in our vegetation and soils.

Get in touch with our team in Methven for further information. The Voluntary Carbon Market is the perfect solution for farmers who want to implement native restoration projects to protect our unique biodiversity and steward the land for the future. Verity NZ is the genuine one-stop-shop, seed-to-credit company who will deliver for you.

Costs Per Hectare



Cream of the crop: how The Good Cow is redefining small-scale dairy



In addition to supplying Fonterra, The Good Cow sells milk from vending machines direct to consumers from the farm gate. PHOTOS CLAIRE INKSON



The vending machine is open 24/7, and operates without the need for staff, freeing up Acton-Adams to work on-farm.



Claire Inkson
RURAL EDITOR

Making a small farm operation work requires diversification and a think outside-the-square mindset.

At The Good Cow in Sefton, owner Tammy Acton-Adams is doing just that — and challenging traditional farming models with a rare farm two-tier system that’s proving sustainable and popular.

The small dairy farm sells fresh, raw milk direct to consumers through a farm-gate vending

machine that offers milk to consumers 24/7 without the need for a staffed farm shop, and now also supplies Fonterra.

The idea was inspired by a similar operation that was located in Oxford.

“The vending machine was already proven in Oxford. With the Rountrees retiring, it provided the opportunity to buy their cows and the vending machines. We decided to open 24 hours a day as there are a lot of commuters and shift workers who can come in when it suits them. Customers pay cash or use a prepaid memory stick system.

“Security hasn’t been an issue — people are very honest,” says Acton-Adams.

Acton-Adams and husband Andrew McKenzie didn’t set out to run two businesses in one.

“The intention was always to milk once a day, keep it small and simple,” Acton-Adams says.

“But the cows were too good. Last October, two calved and were producing 50 litres a day - huge volumes. You can’t milk once a day with that output, so we had to switch to twice a day. That meant we had to re-look at the business.”

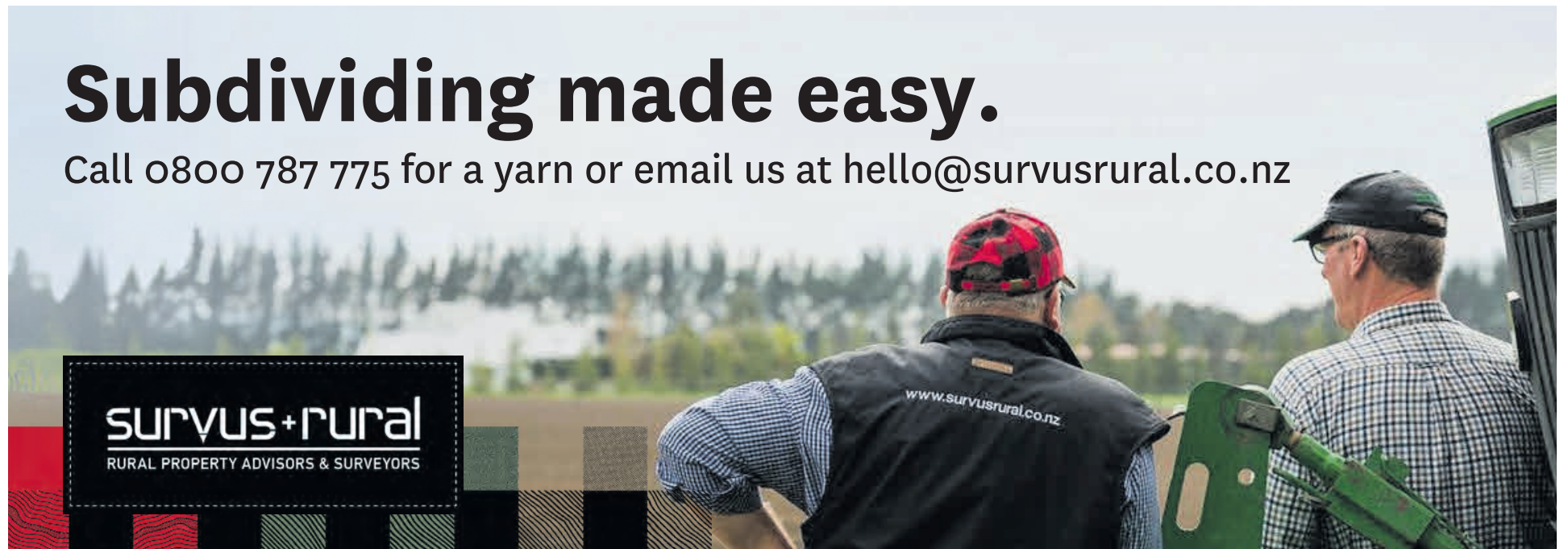
Joining Fonterra wasn’t part of the original plan, but it made sense.

“We’re small — the milking platform is only eleven hectares, aiming for a maximum of 35 high producing cows. Fonterra’s a numbers game, but when you combine it with raw milk sales, it works. They complement each other.”

For her, the drawcard isn’t just the ‘raw’ label — it’s the taste and freshness.

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"This is 4.8% fat — all the goodies are still in there. Nothing's been taken away. "It's straight from the cow every morning, with all the flavour intact."

The milk is offered in plastic or old-school glass bottles that echo the nostalgic milk bottles of the past — something that isn't just sustainable, but which Acton-Adams says improves the taste of the product.

"The glass bottle does something to the milk. It changes the flavour. It really does bring it up to that next level."

Selling raw milk in New Zealand is legal but heavily regulated.

"It's basically Fonterra's compliance process on steroids," Acton-Adams says.

"If I hadn't had those four years on a dairy farm, I couldn't have done it. You learn with every audit, and it's about seeing it as a process — and a cost — that you manage."

A career pivot

Acton-Adams grew up on a farm, but dairy wasn't her focus.

She has been rearing calves for 20 years, while the family also runs a beef and cropping operation, agricultural contracting and a transport business.

The shift to milking came unexpectedly when a client asked them to help with the milking on a small pedigree Friesian generational dairy farm nearby.

"I had never worked in a commercial dairy shed before, but within ten days we were leasing the farm and cows," she says.

They ran it for four years until the family took the farm in a different direction.

Not keen to return to supermarket milk, Acton-Adams looked into the Oxford raw milk business and took advantage of the owners wanting to retire.

"We're on State Highway One — location's important — so we purpose built a nine-a-side herringbone cowshed

and opened for business 15 months ago."

The milk operation is part of a wider business structure.

The family runs SWC Contracting, specialising in hay baling, and keeps trucks under Northport Transport, mainly now for their own freight needs.

The couple also fatten beef and grow around 200 tonnes of barley each year.

Multiple income streams aren't just smart business, they're essential and they are all connected to make the dairy farm more sustainable.

The calves are farmed on the support blocks, the barley is feed to the cows, and the hay baling equipment helps provide the supplement feed.

"We are now building our own pedigree Friesian herd to be able to sell high-value heifer replacements."

Community connection

Close to Leithfield and Waikuku, The Good Cow has become a social hub.

Locals meet in the car park, swap news, and recommend the milk to neighbours.

"Word of mouth is our best marketing. We advertise in local papers, post on Facebook, and now have a website, but nothing beats someone telling a friend."

The farm also sells free-range eggs from three local families.

When her main supplier stepped back, Acton-Adams bought her 90 hens to keep up with demand.

"It's another reason for people to stop in — and another way to support locals."

Today, The Good Cow is milking at its sweet spot: around 35 "spoiled rotten" Friesians.

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With the cream rising to the top — literally and figuratively — The Good Cow offers a taste of dairy the way it used to be, while proving that small-scale, direct-to-consumer farming can thrive alongside the giants of the industry.

Acton-Adams didn't come from a dairying background. The shift to milking came unexpectedly when a client asked her to help a grandson, who was struggling to run the family's small Friesian herd alone.



The Good Cow has been operating for 15 months in a prime location on State Highway One. Visitors to the shop also enjoy seeing a real milking shed in action -and meeting the livestock first hand.

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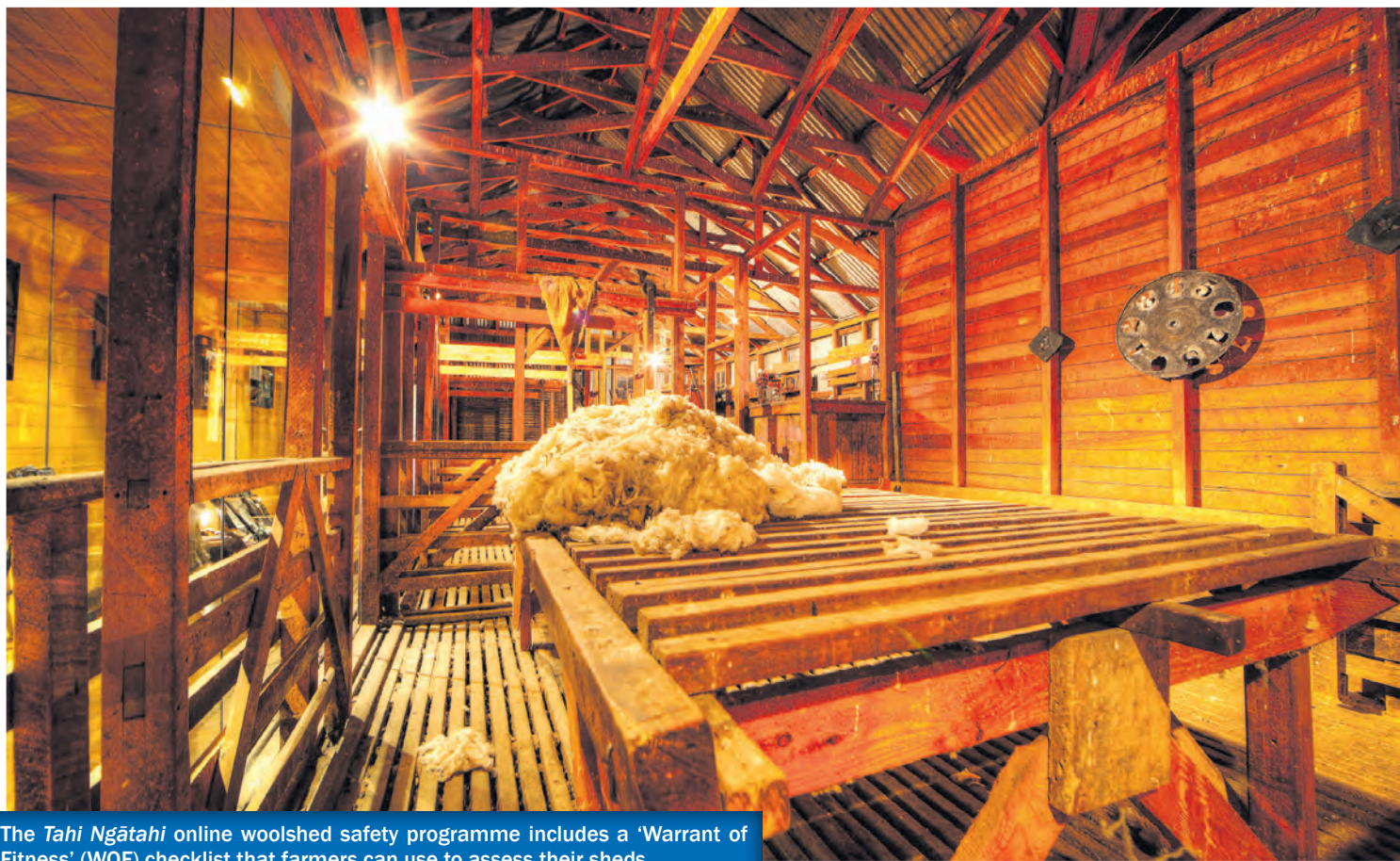
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Woolshed WOF:

Raising the standard for shearing safety



The *Tahi Ngātahī* online woolshed safety programme includes a 'Warrant of Fitness' (WOF) checklist that farmers can use to assess their sheds.



Claire Inkson
RURAL EDITOR

While many farmers keep their woolsheds in good shape, others still fall significantly short of industry standards, says Bronwyn Campbell, Community Facilitator for the *Tahi Ngātahī* online woolshed safety programme.

"I've seen some real shockers over the years," Campbell commented.

Based in Winton, Campbell works with farmers through the online platform to help create safer, more efficient workplaces for shearing contractors. The programme includes a 'Warrant of Fitness' (WOF) checklist that farmers can use to assess their sheds.

"There is a detailed checklist on the Worksafe website and an interactive version on the *Tahi Ngātahī* website, with a WOF

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checklist where you can go through and check things like whether the lights are adequate, no nails are sticking out, and shearing machines are well maintained.”

While farmers may only use their sheds once or twice a year, Campbell points out that shearers and wool handlers are working in them day in, day out.

“That’s why making the woolshed a comfortable and safe workplace for everyone is crucial.”

Communication is Key

Campbell says strong communication between farmers and shearing contractors plays a vital role in health and safety.

“With anything in health and safety, it’s all about conversations between parties, and if you’ve got a farmer and shearing contractor talking to one another to make the environment the best it can be, that’s really important.”

Although wool returns are currently low, she says investing in woolshed maintenance matters: not only for health, safety, and animal welfare, but for consumer confidence too.

“It’s the paddock to garment story.

It’s about being able to tell a good story and have the reputation of good people looking after each other while the work gets done. It’s the social conscience side of things.”

Hygiene Matters

One frequently overlooked issue in woolsheds is hygiene.

Campbell emphasises the need for basic facilities.

“People need access to handwashing facilities and a flushing toilet,” she said.

Worksafe general inspector

Elaine Cowan agrees.

“We still see a number of sheds that rely on long drops,” Cowan said.

She adds that with more women now working in shearing teams, proper facilities are essential.

“This is a basic thing for women; they can’t just go up to the farmhouse, it’s too far.”

Designing for Safety

Good woolshed design also plays a critical role in safety. Clear, well-marked entries and exits, safe steps and landings, and adequate lighting - both inside and out - are all key.

Shedding areas should have non-slip boards, free of hazards like missing boards or protruding nails.

“They can catch shearers’ feet because they are usually only wearing moccasins,” Cowan said.

Additional safety measures include padding on gates since shearers often open them with their backs, and installing strong fixing points for back harnesses.

Rethinking the End-of-Day Shout

Worksafe also encourages farmers to consider the social aspects of safety, including the long-standing tradition of the end-of-day beer shout.

“We encourage farmers to rethink offering alcohol after a long day,” said Cowan. “Instead, consider providing a recovery snack or a sausage sizzle with a soft drink.”

Offering alcohol, she explains, raises concerns about drink-driving and next-day performance.

“Many shearing contractors no longer support this practice,” Cowan said.



Bronwyn Campbell, Community Facilitator for the Tahī Ngātahi online woolshed safety programme says that while farmers may only use their sheds once or twice a year, shearers and wool handlers are working in them day in, day out.



Bronwyn Campbell says strong communication between farmers and shearing contractors plays a vital role in health and safety.



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Glow with purpose

CLAIRE INKSON

Three Year 13 St Margaret's College students are spreading the shimmer with a new body oil that comes from woolly beginnings.

Friends Maggie Hamilton, Emma Richards and Ruby Glackin have taken a classroom project and turned it into Radiant, a handcrafted lanolin-infused body oil that combines natural ingredients, a subtle vanilla scent, and a soft shimmer.

The product began as a business studies project but has grown into something more: a chance to celebrate New Zealand's wool industry, support rural mental health, and create a product that helps people feel good in their own skin.

"Lanolin is incredibly hydrating, but it's usually marketed to older women," says Maggie. "We wanted to flip that on its head and make it fun, modern, and something people our age would actually want to use."

The idea was born through the Young Enterprise Scheme, which encourages students to design and run their own businesses.

All three have rural roots, and they quickly recognised an opportunity to reconnect young

consumers with New Zealand's struggling wool industry by re-imagining lanolin - long seen as an old-fashioned product - as something youthful, trendy, and nourishing.

A hands-on process

It all starts in Maggie's kitchen, where the girls make each batch of Radiant Body Oil themselves.

The formula wasn't perfected overnight; early trials with coconut oil left them with a hard, unusable mixture.

"It took a lot of trial and error," says Emma. "But once we got something that lasted on the shelf and felt good on the skin, we knew we'd cracked it."

The vanilla fragrance was no accident, but the result of careful market research after surveying over 100 students and teachers.

The shimmer, made from natural, skin-safe ingredients, was also based on feedback. "Girls love a glow, it's a trend right now," says Ruby. "We wanted Radiant to feel uplifting and fun, while still being gentle and natural."

And at \$23.99 a bottle, Radiant is at an affordable price-point.

Building a brand

So far, Radiant has been sold through a mix of online orders,



St Margaret's College students Emma Richards (left), Ruby Glackin and Maggie Hamilton have turned a class project into a glowing success. PHOTO CLAIRE INKSON

Instagram DMs, and word-of-mouth, with appearances at markets such as the StAC market and plans to expand to Riccarton and Lyttelton markets.

Social media has been a key tool, with Instagram forming the backbone of their marketing. "We keep a strict bright and summery aesthetic, and we've spoken at school assemblies and used posters to spread the word," says Emma.

Giving back

From the start, the students wanted Radiant to have a community impact.

For every bottle sold, 50

cents is donated to the North Canterbury Rural Support Trust, an organisation that helps rural families through tough times.

"The Trust has been so supportive, they even promoted us on their website," says Maggie. "It's not just about the money; it's about raising awareness too. A lot of girls at our school might never think about the challenges farmers face, but through Radiant, we've been able to bring that conversation into a new space."

What's Next

And while the girls will go their separate ways after school, they're

open to continuing the business if demand remains.

"It's simple enough to produce that we could keep it going," says Ruby. "We'll re-assess at the end of the year, but we'd love to see how far it can go."

For now, they're proud of what they've created: a product that helps people feel confident in their own skin while shining a light on rural New Zealand.

As their tagline puts it: "Shine from within, starting with your skin."

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Udderly Delicious: A rural mum's farm-baked fun



Claire Inkson
RURAL EDITOR

Mooove over chocolate chip — there's a new biscuit in town.

Thanks to one creative West Coast farming mum, biscuits now come shaped like calf tags, gumboots, and even LIC notebooks.

Dairy farmer and mum-of-four Tiana Baxter has found a sweet escape in the kitchen, turning everyday farm life into icing-covered art that's winning fans on social media.

"I'm always picking up new hobbies — crocheting, knitting, glitter on bottles — I just get inspired and run with it," Baxter says.

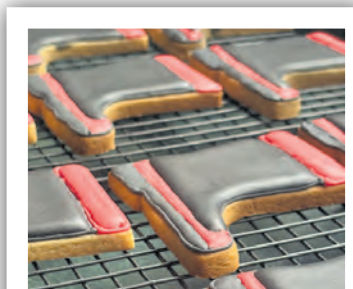
"One day TikTok started showing me decorated cookie videos, and it's huge in America. I thought, 'That looks really cool, I could do that.'"

Although she doesn't claim to be a great baker, Baxter threw herself into the craft, splashing out on a 3D printer to make custom cutters that reflected her farm world.

"TikTok showed me people just printing their own cutters, so I researched printers, watched tutorials, and bought one. The first ones — Mickey Mouse ears, dinosaurs, cactuses, Lego heads —



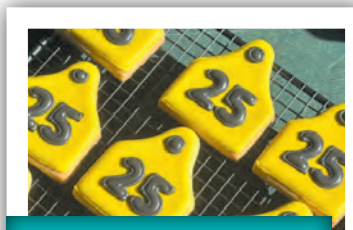
Tiana Baxter says making biscuits is her happy place.
PHOTOS SUPPLIED



Her gumboot biscuits are a hit — and \$5 from every sale is going to support Barrytown School's camp fundraiser.



Tiana Baxter chose gumboots for her school fundraising biscuits because she says 90% of students wear Redbands.



The calf tag biscuits were Tiana Baxter's first farm-themed biscuit — and they have been a hit.



LIC notebook biscuits resonated with the local dairy farming community.

they weren't good at all."

Her breakthrough came during calf feeding.

"I thought, 'wouldn't it be funny to make an ear tag cookie?' That was the first set where I thought, 'Wow, that's actually really cool.'"

Finding her tribe

When Baxter shared her creations on the Farming Mums NZ Facebook group, the response was instant.

"Then I created gumboot cookies as a fundraiser for Barrytown School's camp. Out here 90% of

kids wear gumboots, so I thought that would be unique. Some turned out great, some not so much, but when I shared them on Farming Mums NZ, everyone loved them. "The kind comments really encouraged me."

Since then, the group has become both a source of inspiration and support.

"Now I design shapes as I'm inspired, or from suggestions in Farming Mums NZ. The LIC books were a mums idea — my husband eating one was hilarious."

She says the page is more than just recipes and ideas — it's a lifeline.

"It's an important group, especially when you're isolated. You can ask questions, get advice from people who've farmed for 30 years, or just vent. If you've had a crap day, someone else will say, 'Me too.' It makes you feel less alone."

A happy place

Beyond the laughs, the cookies have also become therapeutic. "Decorating cookies is my happy

place. My mind goes quiet — I'm not thinking about the farm or kids, just focusing on staying inside the lines. It's like an escape. Teachers even tell me my kids proudly show off their biscuits at school each week."

Baxter now sells cake toppers, T-shirts, and custom cookie cutters through her Facebook page The Creative Cow and may eventually add biscuits to the lineup. But council regulations — and her own nerves — have made her cautious.

"Everyone keeps pushing me to take biscuits further, but I'm a stressy person — I worry if I got 50 orders, they'd all burn! Still, I've looked into the council rules and might explore it. The cutters feel like an easier business option."

Her advice to other rural mums looking for a creative outlet? Forget the self-doubt.

"Go with what you love, and just do it. Don't let doubt hold you back. Not every hobby has to become a business — sometimes it's enough to create something that makes you or someone else happy. It's also great for mental health, getting off screens and doing something with your hands."

What's next?

At the Baxter dinner table, future biscuit designs are always up for debate.

"We've been spit-balling — overalls, tail paint, chainsaws, even a quad bike. The boys want me to try a quad, but I'm not sure I could get all those little details!"

"But on the positive, TikTok has absolutely made our business, it's incredibly effective advertising"

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Barking on the big stage



Amelia Dunbar (left) and Emma Newborn following a live show. PHOTO SUPPLIED



Windwhistle's Amelia Dunbar (left) and Lyttelton's Emma Newborn are the comedic duo behind "The Bitches' Box". PHOTO PHOTO LIESHA WARD KNOX

From Windwhistle to the world stage - Local actor Amelia Dunbar has found herself in front of movie cameras as she and Emma Newborn tell the story of two local dogs, observing the world around them. Anisha Satya got to the bones of their story.

ANISHA SATYA

It is absurd that, pretty much my entire acting career, I've played a dog."

That about sums up the last 12 years of life for Windwhistle comedian Amelia Dunbar.

She's one half of the comedic duo responsible for "The Bitches' Box," a comedy series that explores the psyche of dogs as they go through life.

The live shows have gained so much praise in Aotearoa and abroad that the women are making their first feature film - and bringing rural Mid Canterbury to life on the silver screen,

Dunbar and fellow actor Emma Newborn came up with the concept at a performance arts workshop in Auckland.

"I was trying to get into the theatre scene in Auckland. Emma is like a fourth-generation actor."

The two were paired up and given two weeks to come up with a small show.

"I really liked the idea of confined spaces, she liked the idea of talking animals, and somehow, we came up with the idea of two bitches on heat.

"[Emma] didn't know what a bitch box was at that point. She hadn't even been to the South Island."

For those unfamiliar with the

term, a "bitch box" is a kennel where female dogs are kept out of reach of male dogs when they're... aroused... to prevent them from... making love.

"We thought about what they would do to pass the time," Dunbar said.

It was an original concept that stuck and morphed into a proper gig for the women.

They've seen success abroad with it, earning praise at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and Melbourne International Comedy Festival.

And now they're making a movie.

But despite the heights the show has reached, it's stayed rooted in rural New Zealand, something Dunbar's extremely proud of.

The shows are designed with farming communities in mind, both content wise and in the way they're delivered.

When they ran national tours of their shows, instead of performing on big stages in the cities, they'd set up in actual woolsheds in farming towns.

"We'd [take] a couple of hundred chairs, great big red curtains, some stage lights," Dunbar said, touring with Kiwi indie-folk singer Mel Parsons.

While the show's concept took some explaining for city slickers, it was a day in the life for most rural

folk. "It's content that they know, it's not something that's completely removed from their world, so it's an easy sell."

Those woolshed shows would regularly see 200 seats filled, and they'd stay full for hours after the show as people caught up with friends and family they hadn't seen in a while.

The combination of local venues and familiar topics turned The Bitches' Box's performances into mental wellness hubs.

"When we started out, we didn't have it front of mind as a wellbeing thing; we were just actors wanting to put on a show and get people along," Dubar said.

"People would stick around for ages, and you don't often get that at city events.

"It has been amazing to realise there is a need for it."

Dunbar said there's a need for the duo to give back to rural New Zealand, especially Canterbury, after the success they've seen.

That's why they're taking Ashburton to the silver screen.

"About three or four years ago, we were approached by Rialto Distribution to create a feature film.

"So we've adapted our second show, 'Sons of a Bitch', which is about two Jack Russell farm dogs who annoy the farmer a little

too much, and they get taken to Ashburton, to the vet, to get their manhood removed.

"The story is about the different dogs that meet at the vet."

The movie is being shot on location at High Peak Station in Windwhistle - Dunbar's family farm - and in Ashburton and Christchurch.

"We've got an amazing crew, all Canterbury based, committed to keeping the story rooted [here]."

About half of the film has been shot already, partially as a proof of concept when they pitch it to businesses.

ASB, wool scourers Woolworks and even meat processor ANZCO have gotten in behind the project.

Dunbar said those farm-adjacent businesses see the value in such a film going public.

It's a harder sell to New Zealand's film industry, which is mostly rooted in the urban North Island.

"The film industry in New Zealand... there's just not enough money to go around.

"We're still a little budget, just under \$1 million, but we can do a lot with that."

The film will get finished once the money's there, Dunbar said, but they're hoping to get back into filming by November this year.

That's partially because the movie's being made in conjunction with the University of Canterbury's new Kōawa Studios film

department. When Dunbar takes a step back, it can be hard to believe how far both she and the show have come.

"It's grown far greater than we could have ever anticipated.

"It's also been amazing to be so rooted in rural New Zealand."

But she reminds herself it's not luck so much as persistence that has gotten her a movie gig.

She and Newborn have spent years perfecting their shows, turning sheds into stages, and pitching their strange horny dog show to people so far removed from paddocks that they've had to explain the concepts of "knotting".

"Sure it takes a bit of graft and a bit of work," she said.

"[But] by writing your own show, you can tweak jokes as you're going, we've got the freedom to do it.

"We're just really excited to showcase Ashburton on the Silver screen."

They're near that \$1 million budget goal, and are open to any investments that might push their production over the line.

"We've very close, it feels really within reach now.

"We would love to be able to authentically integrate products or companies into it."

When she's not on stage, Dunbar paints farm life under her maiden name, Amelia Guild, and tends to over 500 beehives with husband Tom on their High Peak property.

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"The Proven One"

This profile is part of a series by the Otago-based Wild Women Workshops initiative where women teach other women practical skills.

Georgina Wratten-Lowe is a butcher, hunter, hockey player, and mum who's spent most of her adult life in trades often seen as "masculine".

From dairy farming in Southland to carving out a career in butchery in Central Otago, she's no stranger to hard work, heavy lifting, and proving people wrong.

When we spoke with her about Wild Women Workshops, she lit up at the idea of women learning traditionally male-dominated skills and sharing her own along the way.

Here's what Georgina had to say about butchery, confidence, and life as a Wild Woman

1 What is it like being a wāhine in a trade that is predominantly seen as a 'masculine' career?

Most of my adult life I have worked in male dominated 'masculine' jobs. I was a dairy farmer before getting into butchery, though farming has definitely evolved more over the years in regard to being 'female friendly' compared to butchery.

In butchery you have to be able

to take shit as well as give it back, and starting out, males tend to think you won't be able to lift 20-30 kgs and offer to help... but like most women in the industry, I can carry my own.

2 Walk us through how one goes around getting a butchery apprenticeship, and a little bit about what it involves.

The most common places that offer butchery apprenticeships are supermarkets because of the retail side to the apprenticeship.

There are some stand-alone butchers who still do retail AND home-kill, which are called dual operators. They can offer these too.

It takes 3-4 years to finish the apprenticeship, and there are add-ons available to learn if something additional piques your interest.

The apprenticeship involves learning health and safety, retail (display, customer service, added value etc), breaking down carcasses, and then working with chicken, lamb, pork and beef.

3 Is there anyone in particular who has inspired or encouraged you along the way?

I needed to find a new job when I moved up here (to Alexandra) from Southland, given there aren't many dairy farms around here. I took the opportunity to look into jobs that interested me and had a go at applying for them. That's pretty much how I got into butchery. No one in particular

inspired me to get into it, although having a background in hunting helped me choose this path.

Since getting into butchery though, I do get inspired by other women who are in the industry or choosing to enter it. It makes me feel less alone and gives me someone to relate to, and someone to talk to about my journey and what I'm experiencing within the industry.

My partner, as well as my Mum, Dad, friends, and wider family, are my biggest supporters. They encourage me to keep going even when things don't go to plan.

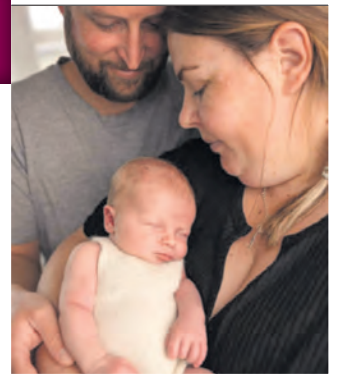
4 What strengths do you think women bring to the butchery trade?

We have more patience and possibly more 'finesse'. We probably also care more about how things look and how they are presented to customers. From experience, we look after our gear better too!

5 If you could teach women one butchery skill, to help them feel more confident in the kitchen or on the farm, what would it be? And why?

I would teach women to break down an animal. Regardless of what animal it is. If you know how to break down one animal, you can break down any animal as they are all pretty similar in one way or another. You can also save money at the supermarket by knowing how to break down a whole chicken into its different cuts.

Georgina Wratten-Lowe with her partner Sheldon Whittaker and their baby Finn. PHOTOS SUPPLIED



6 Outside of work, what fills your cup? (What are your hobbies/are you passionate about/makes you feel good?)

I love hunting with my partner, and also enjoy four-wheel-driving and camping which often go hand in hand. I also fish and during the winter I play hockey. I used to ride horses but that has been put on hold, and I would like to get back into it when we are more financially stable.

Something that really fills my cup is helping people out with hunting and butchering, especially other women. Teaching them how to make their life easier whether it's by bringing them confidence with hunting skills or breaking down an animal etc.

7 What were you most excited about when you heard about Wild Women Workshops? And is there something you are really looking forward to learning from a WW workshop?

I'm mostly excited about seeing other women getting to learn the more "masculine" skills and having the opportunity to be able to offer my skill set to others. Also the chance to make some new friends!

Using a chainsaw is one thing I am really keen to learn. It's one thing I've never had the opportunity to do, or been in a situation where I could have learnt.

8 What is something about being a woman that you struggle with at times?

It's something that has stuck out to me now since becoming a mother, but after having a baby my body is not the same. I was expecting to be able to just go back to the gym, do this, do that... but now I'm a lot more tired, and my back gets sore very easily. I've lost core strength from having a c-section as well as from being pregnant. I have to ease back into fitness, but need to find the time and energy between looking after my three-month-old Finn.

9 And what is something about being a woman that you enjoy/are proud of?

I enjoy being able to show people I'm stronger than they think I am. I can lift things they don't expect me to be able to lift and do things they don't expect me to be able to do!



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Planting pines, losing people?

Study explores mental health impact of forestry conversions



Claire Inkson

RURAL EDITOR

Can planting trees cost more than farmland? Kathryn Wright is investigating how forestry conversion is impacting the mental health and social fabric of rural Southland and Otago.

While land-use change continues to make headlines, the Te Anau-based counsellor and rural mental health advocate is breaking new ground by being possibly the first to research how forestry conversion is affecting the mental wellbeing of rural communities.

"I have two aims for this research: Firstly, to be able to inform government policy about land-use change - whether that is forestry or other changes - but what happens to the people left behind? How does it affect the ability of the community to meet and connect, and what social connection opportunities will be lost if populations dwindle?"

Wright says dwindling numbers in rural areas can have ripple



Te Anau counsellor and rural mental health advocate Kathryn Wright says there's an urgent need for more attention on the mental health of rural New Zealanders - particularly young men.

PHOTO SUPPLIED

effects; threatening the viability of local schools, shops, and services that rely on community support, often through volunteer efforts.

Secondly, Wright also hopes her research will help strengthen the case for funding grassroots initiatives - everything from

community sports and playgroups to hobby and support groups.

"The research will also act as proof for social and health services that may be more likely to come to small rural towns if it can be proven that it will benefit the people."

Wright, who is doing her

PhD through the Centre for Sustainability at the University of Otago, is surveying residents across Otago and Southland to understand how farmland-to-forestry conversions and the resulting population shifts are affecting the social fabric of rural towns.

The survey, which is open to people aged 18 and over in the region, runs until early-mid September and could be the first study of its kind in New Zealand.

"Mental health and well-being are also lacking a strong research, evidence base to understand the issues that are affecting individuals in areas with high rates of farm conversions.

"Rural mental health is a severely under-researched area in New Zealand with scant offerings on the topic."

Wright's study also includes qualitative interviews: one-on-one conversations designed to explore participants' personal thoughts, feelings, and life experiences - rather than relying on statistics alone.

These interviews aim to uncover shared experiences of connection - or disconnection - in communities facing change.

She is currently looking for participants from Lawrence and Omakau.

Lawrence was selected due to its prominent forestry conversions,

while Omakau provides a useful comparison due to its active clubs and rural groups.

"The study is only in Otago and Southland because I needed to keep it manageable - I still work part-time and have a family. It is hoped that the findings will be generalisable throughout the country however though, as this is an issue that really is nation-wide."

"The interviews are semi-structured, so there may be extra insights, depending on the situations of the participants."

Wright has deep rural roots and works primarily with people in the agricultural sector, giving her a clear view of the challenges rural communities face.

"There is barely any research on rural mental health in Aotearoa. I think it just takes someone with enough interest to come along and actually do it - research is a big commitment, and most researchers are urban, that is the only explanation I have."

She says there's an urgent need for more attention on the mental health of rural New Zealanders - particularly young men.

"We have a particular set of issues in rural mental health that differs from other countries - it is overwhelmingly our young men who suffer the very worst statistics. This is the most rewarding research that I can think of, and I love what I do."

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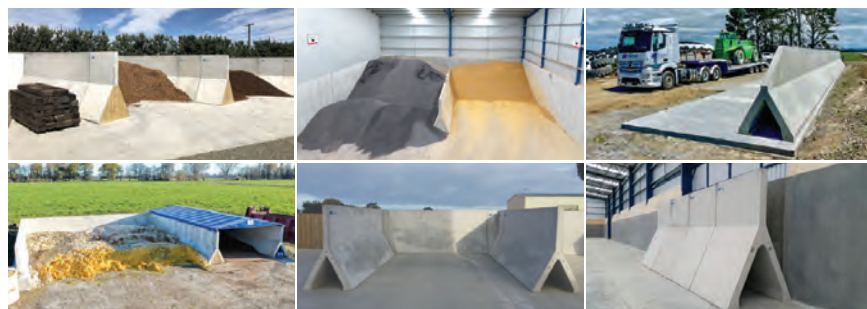
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Dig in: The Food Farm serves up a cookbook



Claire Inkson
RURAL EDITOR

When EatNZ chief executive Angela Clifford and her husband Nick Gill first bought their property in Waipara, it was little more than bare paddocks and an old man pine.

Fast forward twenty years, and the once bare paddocks have been transformed into a thriving Food Farm, abundant with seasonal produce and guided by permaculture principles.

The farm also serves as a hub for workshops, where the couple share their deep-rooted knowledge and passion for growing food.

To celebrate the twenty-year milestone, the pair are releasing The Food Farm Cookbook - a collection of recipes, reflections, and memories that document their journey of creating a life on the land.

"We really wanted to reflect on our learnings and our lessons and all of these foundational recipes

that we collected along the way, as you do when you're growing and cooking your own food," Clifford says.

"It's a way to celebrate how far we have come and to reflect on the milestone and to have a line in the sand that said, 'this was our first 20 years.'"

But this is no ordinary cookbook. Designed for those who grow their own food, its structure reflects the natural rhythm of the land.

"When you grow your own food, you kind of start with what you've got in the garden and on the farm, and then you develop meals back from there."

Clifford describes the book as a "gentle invitation" to return to a way of living more in tune with nature like our grandparents once did.

"You could take it as a sort of a homesteading handbook or a self-sufficiency story, but actually we wrote it because we want to invite people to live a more seasonal life."

For Clifford, it was important that the book be more than a simple recipe collection.

"What I find is that recipe books are great, but you just sort of dip in and dip out of them. 'I really wanted this to be a good read as well.'"

In addition to recipes, the book includes sections on local grains,

the best plum varieties to grow, and seasonal celebrations from the farm.

Recipes are grouped by season, not by cuisine or course.

"Each recipe sort of sits within the framework of its season.

"But then, of course, it does: because that's what happens when you grow food."

The cookbook offers an eclectic mix.

Some recipes are quick and easy, others are more instructional, covering traditional techniques such as sausage-making.

"It's cooking from scratch, but there's also some really simple, easy recipes, that don't take much time or effort."

Many of the meals featured are those shared around the family table as the couple raised their three children, along with favourites from their own childhoods.

While Clifford hopes The Food Farm Cookbook will become a well-worn, everyday reference - "a sign of a good recipe book" - it's also a personal legacy, something for her children to cherish.

"Your children remember those meals and they become a thread woven through the framework of their life.

"And now my children are starting to leave home, and they ask for these recipes because those recipes bring them comfort.

"They bring them connection back to us.

"To keep and collate and photograph and to record your recipes is an absolute gift for your children."

The Food Farm Cookbook is published by Bateman Books and will be released in October. Preorders are available now at www.thefoodfarm.nz.



Angela Clifford hopes The Food Farm Cookbook will become a well-worn, everyday reference - "a sign of a good recipe book" - it's also a personal legacy, something for her children to cherish.

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Dahl

Recipe from the Food Farm Cookbook
Courtesy of Angela Clifford and Nick Gill

This is one of our foundational recipes here on The Food Farm. Our children were raised on this recipe and it's the closest meal we get to fast food. As a result everyone in our family knows how to cook it.

It's made from pantry ingredients at a time of year when there's not much growing in the garden. It does include homemade passata or tomato sauce, which brings the sunshine from summer and our tomatoes into our winter kitchen. Because the ingredients are simple, the flavour relies on the best possible quality passata and garam masala.

If you're using canned tomatoes or a supermarket bottle of passata, add a teaspoon of sugar to make up for the lack of homegrown intensity of flavour.

And if you have time, make your own garam masala. When you start with whole spices and roast them yourself, the flavour is incomparable to powder, already made, bought in a packet.

While it's a meal on its own when served with rice, we often cook it as an accompaniment to a curry, full of seasonal vegetables such as pumpkins, cauliflowers, potatoes and frozen peas or beans. We also make a zucchini kasundi (a super hot indian relish) each year, with friend Kate McMillan, and this makes a wonderful side to dahl.

Ingredients

- 50g butter or ghee
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 1 clove garlic
- 750g passata
- 25g ginger, grated
- 2 teaspoons garam masala
- 1 teaspoon turmeric
- 175g split red lentils
- 1 litre vegetable stock

Directions

1. Melt the butter or ghee in a large saucepan, adding the onion and garlic and cook gently until soft. As with so many recipes, it's important to take this step slowly. If you brown or burn the onions and garlic it will change the flavour of the whole dish. You want to soften, not colour them.
2. Add the passata and cook for about 15 minutes until it reduces a little.
3. Add the ginger, spices, lentils and stock. Cook further for about 25 minutes until the lentils are cooked. Make sure the heat is low so it doesn't catch on the bottom. Add more stock if it becomes too thick.
4. Serve. If the final dish is too spicy for your guests (it depends on the amount of pepper in your garam masala recipe), you can add coconut cream at the end, or yoghurt on the side. If you like a spicier dahl, you can add a chopped fresh chilli when you add the ginger.

Should I take Co Enzyme Q10? (Part 2)

We usually make all the Co enzyme Q10 (CoQ10) we need. Some however should take extra as a supplement. CoQ10 is mostly made in your liver from the same enzymes that make cholesterol. This is why drugs that reduce cholesterol can significantly reduce CoQ10 and can cause side effects that are so common they are now diagnosable diseases. Many Pharmacists recommend CoQ10 to people collecting statin prescriptions.

The main role of CoQ10 is to move hydrogen electrons within your cell mitochondria to produce energy. Inadequate CoQ10 levels reduce cell energy usually felt as tiredness and muscle weakness. These are the main side effects of statins.

I have a client who had experienced significant muscle pain while on statins. After a few months taking a quality CoQ10 the pain had gone and can now tolerate the medication without side



effects. I generally find it takes 1-2 months to improve muscle function and energy. Muscle issues from statin use are one of the most common reasons

for muscle and tendon pain and weakness. I spoke to someone recently whose muscles had started to break down while on statins. It is a shame that many suffer needlessly as in most cases resolved with a high quality CoQ10.

I recommend CoQ10 for those with health issues known to reduce energy especially those with autoimmune or neurodegenerative problems. While CoQ10 is not a cure, it can help to lift general energy and well-being.

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John Arts (B.Soc.Sci, Dip Tch, Adv.Dip.Nut.Med) is a nutritional medicine practitioner and founder of Abundant Health Ltd. For questions or advice contact John on 0800 423559 or email john@abundant.co.nz. Join his all new newsletter at www.abundant.co.nz.

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Pies are a crowd favourite at Shelley Sims Bakery Fresh Bake in Brightwater. PHOTO SUPPLIED

Shelley Sims:



In the words of Canadian rockstar Bryan Adams, 'It cuts like a knife — and it feels so right.' For Nelson baker Shelley Sims, that knife isn't just slicing through a golden steak-and-cheese pie. It's carving out a whole new chapter in her life.

After more than a decade running Fresh Bake, Sims became an unlikely social media sensation when a cheeky Bryan Adams concert video went viral.

Going viral overnight

"I'd been building Fresh Bake's Facebook since 2014, but the big moment was in January 2025 at a Bryan Adams concert," she says. "Security kept telling us off for dancing. I said to my friend, 'I'll probably get kicked out,' and she filmed it. I posted it, and suddenly I was doing 20 interviews and ended up on TV. My followers jumped from 6,000 to nearly 25,000 in a matter of months."

Since then, Sims' mix of humour, honesty, and old-fashioned baking

has earned her tens of thousands of fans, boosted her business, and landed her national headlines.

From small shop to Factory Road

Baking wasn't always smooth sailing. Sims originally owned Brumby's Bakery, but in 2014 in the turbulence of the global financial crisis, she opened Fresh Bake in a tiny 64-square-metre shop.

"We quickly outgrew it, so in 2016 I designed and built the bakery we're in now on Factory Road. It was a massive risk, but on opening day over 600 cars pulled up. That's when I knew we'd made the right move."

Learning to pivot

The ability to adapt has been her survival strategy.

"During the financial crisis, business dropped by 60%, so I went into wholesale. When COVID hit, wholesale collapsed overnight. I went from 14 staff and three trucks to just me and two others. It was brutal, but scaling back saved the business. Now we run shorter hours, fewer staff, and I'm happier."

For Sims, resilience has been as important as recipes.

"You've got to know how to do everything yourself. If you can't make the coffee, bake the pies, or do the books, then you don't have a business. I've made mistakes, I've trusted the wrong people, I've been stolen from, but I learned

resilience. Business isn't easy. If it was, everyone would own one."

Social media a game-changer

Social media has transformed Fresh Bake, with TikTok, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube posts sometimes boosting sales by up to 40% in a single day.

"People come from Auckland just to visit the bakery. The exposure has been huge, but it can be overwhelming."

But with fame came trolls — especially when Sims documented her recent facelift surgery in Thailand.

"Some people called me vain or 'mutton dressed as lamb.' But I never did it for anyone else. I wanted to feel good about myself. I'm 51, fit, active, I love fashion — and now I feel like me again. Short-term pain, long-term gain."

Owning the narrative

Sharing her surgery journey was a brave move, but she says other women posting similar experiences gave her the courage.

"I spoke to women on TikTok who had documented their journeys, and without them, I never would've gone through with it. I wanted to be that person for someone else."

Her followers find it refreshing to see a middle-aged woman online.

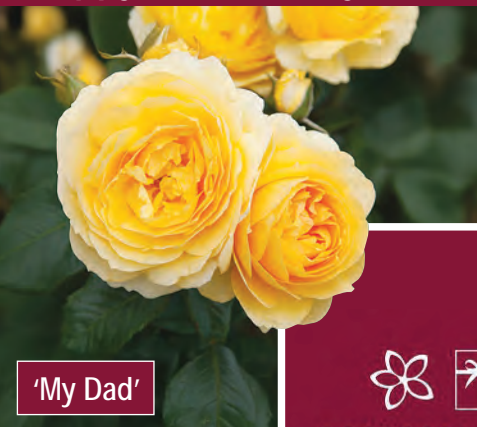
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From Pies to Posts

their fifties show up online, we get told we're cringe, old, irrelevant. That's not okay — everyone ages. Honestly, I feel and act at least ten years younger than I am."

Sims is candid about the impact on her mental health.

"At first, I was spending four hours a day online. Now it's just an hour, and I walk away. Otherwise, you get addicted. Ninety percent of comments don't bother me — they're idiots. But you have to set boundaries, or it consumes you."

Pies, people and personality

Her humour and rawness are part of the appeal. Her videos are sassy, energetic, sometimes a bit swearsy, and often involve wine.

"I dance behind the counter, I crack jokes about pies, I clap back at trolls. People say, 'You've made my day,' and that's the coolest thing."

At Fresh Bake, pies remain the star attraction. Sims credits her long-time employee Sarah with their success.

"She was a hairdresser for 18 years, applied as a cleaner, and now she makes pies that should be winning awards. Honestly, even though I'm the owner, she's the boss. I couldn't do it without her."

Sims' own favourite is Chicken, Cranberry and Brie, but the bakery's best-seller is a Kiwi classic.

"If we filled the warmer with nothing but steak and cheese, everyone would be happy."



Shelley Sims has become a viral sensation for her sassy, swearsy videos — and followers have resonated with her authentic and unfiltered approach. PHOTOS SUPPLIED

What's next

Looking ahead, Sims hopes her online presence will grow into a sustainable income stream.

"Right now, it's 80% bakery, 20% influencing. In the next two

years, I'd like to flip that and focus more on content, maybe even start earning from it properly. But I'll never give up the bakery. I still love what I do. Every day is new, exciting, and I'm lucky to have that."



Sims' social media following has increased sales by up to 40% some days.



The bakery is popular — with everything from pies, and sausage rolls, to an array of slices filling the cabinets.

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Ironmax Pro[®] slug control advocate practices what he preaches

BioGro certified product gets the ultimate ‘thumbs up’

Reed Pace has more experience checking crops for slug damage than most. And he takes his job very seriously.

The four-year-old golden retriever belongs to Ash Pace, UPL NZ Ltd. Regional Manager Central South Island, and often accompanies Ash on field visits.

Ash says, next to looking after clients, ensuring Reed's safety on the job is a priority. He says BioGro certified Ironmax Pro bait is much safer for beneficial insects, farm dogs, and other domestic pets. "But, when it comes to slugs themselves, it packs a real punch! It's a bit of a rural myth that BioGro certified means 'soft'

"Naturally, you want a product that is efficacious, and Ironmax Pro is. But there are other important considerations. Farmers need to know that while they're protecting their crops, their animals are protected too. So, if stock break out, or your heading dog, which you're looking at up to \$10,000 to replace, is racing around a paddock, they're not going to come to any harm.

"I would never put Reed at risk, and I have no concerns of him being around Ironmax Pro, otherwise he wouldn't be out there with me." Ash jokingly adds that the product has Reed's exclusive pawprint of approval.

Pieter Van Der Westhuizen, UPL NZ Ltd Regional Manager Upper North Island, has seen plenty of slug damage too. He has a few tips.

"Ideally, you should be monitoring the slug population early, using a damp sack

and checking under it regularly. Even one slug can indicate that there's a problem. Unfortunately, slugs are a pest you just need to assume are there.

"Looking for dead slugs is not the best way to access a bait's efficacy. Instead, check for crop damage. No damage indicates an effective bait programme."

Once crops are planted, Pieter says Ironmax Pro should already be on the ground. "Slugs are aware of seedlings, even as plants are just breaking the surface. By the time slugs are feeding on emerging seedlings, it's already too late."

Seedlings damaged by slugs usually won't recover. The goal is to protect the crop. Once feeding damage has stopped, that goal has been achieved. "We don't have to see dead slugs to know we were successful."

Pieter says, Ironmax Pro is highly attractive and palatable. It will also be the slugs' final meal. "Slugs prefer the bait to seedlings and won't stop until they've consumed a lethal dose. At that point, slugs will go back underground to die."

According to experts, slugs have multiple olfactory receptors and can detect their preferred food by smell, even from a distance. Ironmax Pro plays to that by using Colzactive[®] technology. This technology utilises specially selected oil seed rape extracts, which slugs can't resist as, Pieter says, it's literally their favourite food.

While slugs may have a low profile, they can chew through several times their own body weight every night and can leave behind a trail of destruction in a very short



Reed with Ironmax Pro

time. "Seedlings are just one to two bites for a slug, and the plants are history."

Ironmax Pro contains the optimized active ingredient IPMax (ferric phosphate anhydrous), which works as a stomach poison on slugs, and is highly effective.

Pieter adds that both Ironmax Pro and sister product Metarex[®] Inov have significant advantages over old-school coated baits. "Coated baits only have a lick of the active on the outside. Ironmax Pro is manufactured with the finest durum wheat using a unique wet manufacturing process ensuring the active ingredient is mixed all the way through. Not a bite is wasted. The unique slow drying process makes the bait very rainfast, unlike some

baits, which dissolve in the wet."

The optimised pellet size and consistency ensure even distribution and a wide spread width. "Every pellet has the same size and weight, which equals excellent ballistics. Every load is the same as the one before. This eliminates any fiddling with the setup of spreaders."

Ironmax Pro has won over many farmers and contractors since entering the market a few years ago, convinced by its efficacy and safer profile.

For more advice on Ironmax Pro talk to your technical advisor or contact Ash Pace, UPL NZ Regional Manager Central South Island, on 021 987 735, or see Reed and Ash on the UPL NZ Facebook page.

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