

# RURAL GUARDIAN

South Island  
wide 

MAY 2024

TO EVERY FARM IN THE SOUTH ISLAND



SOLAR SPLIT

P03



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WITH Claire Inkson – OPINION

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- We reserve the right to edit or not publish.
- Send all letters to: [claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz](mailto:claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz)



# Our farming story

As farmers, we have been storytellers since the beginning of time.

Knowledge has been passed from generation to generation.

From the sides of the sheep pen at an A&P Show to the bar leaner at the local pub, farmers have shared the stories of farming through the good times and the bad.

Those of us who grew up on farms can recite stories passed down from our parents and grandparents about how the land was developed and how our primary industry advanced.

But our storytelling has evolved as technology has progressed.

Through digital media, we now have the ability to share our story with the world at a time when there is a growing disconnect between consumers and growers.

Whether that disconnect is just that, a disconnect or the famed urban-rural divide that may or may not exist, telling our farming story has benefits beyond simply bridging that disconnect or changing urban dwellers' perceptions of our primary industry.

It is a powerful tool for highlighting career pathways for the next generation of farmers and growers.

It is a way to connect consumers with food producers, putting provenance at the forefront and potentially increasing sales of New Zealand food and fibre products.

Digital media provides an opportunity for farmer-to-farmer storytelling, which can educate, share ideas, and grow networks.

Telling our story can also be a way to advocate for amendments to regulatory policy and effect change.

There are multiple mediums available to tell that story, the most obvious being social media.

The internet has the potential to break geographical barriers and connect farmers with audiences like never before.

When used carefully and wisely, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and TikTok are effective visual channels that farmers have at their disposal.

Social media pages like Chloe Payne's Cows of New Zealand reach hundreds of thousands of viewers in the urban and rural sectors daily, showcasing positive farming practices.

Facebook pages like NZ Farming and groups like NZ Farming Mums create online agricultural communities for those in the primary industry.

While social media is effective, it isn't the only way we can tell our farming story.

Initiatives like Open Farms and Farmer Time educate the urban demographic by seeing first-hand from farmers what goes on behind the farm gate.

Competitions like the FMG Young Farmer of the Year, Ballance Farm Environment Awards, and the Dairy Industry Awards showcase best farming practices and the skill, knowledge, and dedication required for modern, sustainable farming.

A&P Shows are invaluable for 'bringing the country to town', providing a one-stop

shop for showcasing all things agriculture and bringing the community together.

Agritourism also has its place in storytelling, with farm stays immersing guests in farming life.

No matter who we tell our farming story to, how we do it, and why, the most important thing is to be brave enough to tell it.



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# Solar farm divides community

By Claire Inkson  
[claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz](mailto:claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz)

A proposed solar farm in the Waipara Valley, North Canterbury, has some Waipara residents calling for public consultation as concern grows for the development's impact on the region's wine and tourism industry and the micro-climate.

Far North Solar Farm, an Auckland-based renewable energy company, is developing the solar farm on Tom Kidner's sheep and arable property on State Highway Seven.

The proposed farm will generate enough electricity to power around 28,000 homes.

A group of residents have formed Save the Waipara Valley to oppose the farm and push for public consultation as part of the consent process.

Save the Waipara Valley, co-founder Lizzie Kelsey said the group believes the solar farm will change the character of the area.

"It's changing the area from rural, agricultural, primary production and viticulture to more industrial."

"When you hear the word solar farm, you think it's farming, but in reality, it's a power plant and an industrial structure."

The proposed farm will cover around 200 hectares of flat land and four kilometres of visible

panels alongside the state highway.

"It's about 300,000 panels, and the panels themselves are four and a half metres high, and the whole thing will be surrounded by a two-meter fence with three strands of barbed wire."

"People are coming to the wine region for peace and natural beauty, not a barbed wire fence."

Kelsey expressed concern about the farm's effect on the local economy and businesses as the region strives to be known for its boutique wine industry.

"The area has been trying to develop a reputation as a wine region and a tourist destination in its own right."

"There are a lot of good things happening around this place with different businesses, and the thought of that just being dampened down by a proposal like this is devastating."

The group is concerned that the panels will also impact the Waipara microclimate by raising temperatures in the valley. However, Kelsey admits studies researching whether temperatures around solar farms are higher, in other parts of the world, have had varied results.

"We can look around the world at studies where you have large-scale industrial solar farms, where you get temperature increases not just at the site itself but at the area



Lizzie Kelsey, co-founder of Save the Waipara Valley, says the solar farm will negatively impact the character of the region. PHOTO: CLAIRE INKSON

around them. Other studies show that doesn't happen, but there is a concern it might happen here."

The group is also concerned that highly productive land is being lost to the solar farm and that other areas would be better suited for the purpose.

"Only 15 per cent of land in New Zealand is deemed highly productive and is supposed to be protected for primary production, not for putting in four-and-a-half meter high buildings."

"There is a lot of land in New Zealand that isn't next to communities and isn't highly productive agricultural land."

It's not the first time Waipara residents have opposed

developments in the area.

A proposed wind farm and the Kate Valley Landfill have both received opposition from segments of the community in the past.

"I think for the community that has been through two things like that, they have come out the other side with the overriding impression that it doesn't really matter what we think."

"I think that's a real failure of local Government."

Tom Kidner disputes that the land pegged for the solar farm on his property is productive.

"It's not highly productive land. Without irrigation, it's some of the least productive."

"We are doing our best to farm it, but in this day and age, we need to diversify."

Sheep will still be able to graze underneath the solar panels, he said.

"We are trying to do both."

"We should be able to strengthen our farm income while still running the same amount of lambs under the panels."

Kidner said he doesn't see how the solar farm will impact the wine region, as trees will screen the perimeter, and the noise levels will be below ambient road noise.

"Nobody's going to hear it."

"They are planting around 30 hectares of native bush that isn't there already, and they are planting trees around it, so you won't be able to see it, and there will be no glare."

Kidner said those opposing the farm had all the hallmarks of nimbyism. He said the site was chosen due to its close proximity to the Waipara sub-station.

"I don't want to drag anyone out, but it's got that 'not in my backyard' feeling."

"Because there is no way it will affect the tourism scene."

Following a mid-April residents' meeting that around fifty people attended, Save the Waipara Valley has recently started a petition calling for public consultation on the solar farm.

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# Weathering the storm

Hawke's Bay farmer and author of "Many a Muddy Morning" Mark Warren says the current trifecta of low commodity prices, high on-farm inflation, and high interest rates, coupled with the drought many farmers face, reminds him of the tough times of 1988.

Warren remembers those times well and has tips for farmers struggling in the current economic climate.

- Recognise what you can affect, like selling stock and reducing expenditure, and don't waste time, oxygen and energy on what you can't change, like the weather.
- Be light on your feet when taking on or holding extra stock.
- Learn to recognise the onset of a drought from a dry period and make multiple early plans. Watch the weather patterns and ask the wise old locals for their thoughts. There will be lots of opinions, but work with facts.
- Reduce expenditure hard and early.
- Be an autumn not a spring spender.
- Learn the rule of 72. Divide 72 by the interest rate you are paying, and the answer will be the number of years the debt will double.
- Over time, the average

sustainable cost of capital is about 7.5 per cent. To be safe, I always do a stress test on a budget at 8.5 per cent. Currently, I'm glad I did that, although three years ago, people told me I was conservative and should do it at six per cent.

- Don't be one of those people who borrow money to buy a depreciating asset to show how wealthy you are. Leave that to the urbanites in the city rat race.
- Look around the yard and home and see what underutilised assets you can sell to generate cash.
- Farming is cyclical. History has proven that when you are at the bottom of the cycle, it's hard to see the top, and when you're at the top, it's hard to see the bottom. Keep a photo of a drought and flood on your office wall to remind you what a difference Mother Nature can make.
- Find a retired farmer or businessman to talk to and help you make key decisions. Making quality decisions is very hard work and tiring, but it's a very easy job to get help with.
- Take a big-picture, long-term view. Write it down for the bank. Overload them with positive but realistic

information. Make sure the banks are informed of your position. Keep your file at the bottom of the bank's pile. If you give them quality information, they will support you. Deceive them and hold information back, and they will be harder to deal with.

- Debt is like booze: a great servant but a terrible master.
- Identify your cost of production and work from that. Maximum production is not necessarily maximum profit. Find the optimum marginal profit point on the production curve. Normally, about 85 per cent of maximum production. Understand fully the concept of marginal costing.
- Get off the farm and socialise with mates who aren't farmers. Often, the best antidote to a drought is to walk up and down Queen Street or Colombo Street for two days. Then you will be pleased to get back on the farm!
- There is huge support for farmers formally, like Rural Support, and informally, in the form of friend groups. When I'm in trouble and struggling my four-wheel drive club mates are quick to come and help me. But YOU must ask.... it's up to YOU to turn the key and get



Farmer and author Mark Warren.

PHOTO: SUPPLIED

that support running in your direction. Often, all it takes is just a Facebook post asking some urban friends to come and help for a day on the farm

in exchange for mutton (and at the current price, that can be cheap help!), but recognise that they often have issues with mortgages, too.



## Public consultation on the Fire and Emergency levy for 2026 – 2029

Fire and Emergency New Zealand has opened public consultation on our proposed levies for the period 1 July 2026 – 30 June 2029.

Fire and Emergency is funded almost entirely through levies on eligible insurance policies. When the Fire and Emergency New Zealand Act 2017 came into effect a transitional levy funded the new organisation until the new levy arrangements, under Part 3 of the Act, could be brought in. The new levy will take effect on 1 July 2026.

Before introducing the new levy arrangements, we are required to consult on the proposed levies and the activities we plan to undertake during the levy period.

To support consultation on the levy arrangements for the period 1 July 2026 – 30 June 2029, a discussion document on our website sets out:

- the activities we propose to undertake over the levy period and the estimated costs of delivering these activities,
- our proposed levy rates, and
- the assumptions we have made in estimating our costs and the steps involved calculating the proposed levy rates.

We welcome submissions from levy payers, insurance policy holders, their representatives and interested members of the public on our proposals to help inform the Government's decisions on the final levies for 2026 – 2029.

More information on this consultation and how to submit a response can be found on our website at [www.fireandemergency.nz/about-us/public-consultation](http://www.fireandemergency.nz/about-us/public-consultation)



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# FARMINGFASTFIVE

We ask a farmer five quick questions about agriculture and what farming means to them

## A chat with Monique Radford

### 1. What did your journey into farming look like?

I was born into farming, growing up around the Taranaki region.

My first love of cows started when I began doing calf club. Following this I fell into the A&P showing world helping out my great uncle who had the jersey stud, Truday.

This has been a huge part of my life and is a major reason why I have such an appreciation for the dairy cow.

I chose to go to University after high school to pursue a Bachelor of Agriculture Science at Massey University in the hopes of getting a role in the dairy genetics sector.

However, when the Grassroots Dairy Graduate Management Programme came up in third year, I decided it would be the perfect opportunity. I knew it would challenge my thinking and increase my skill level, which is what I was looking for straight out of university.

This landed me in my current role as a Herd Manager on Leighton and Michelle Pye's, dairy farm near Ashburton. I am employed by contract milkers Steven and Rosie Ketter.

### 2. Tell us a little bit about your farming operation.

The farm is 241 hectares effective area and we ran 876 peak cows in the last season. It is located near Mayfield, about 20 minutes south/inland of Ashburton.

The cows are milked through a 54-bale rotary with in-shed feeding and automatic drafting. Allflex collars are also used, especially for calving and mating management. We supplement with grain, PKE and silage when needed.

We winter the stock on fodder beet and kale with oat silage and straw on the nearby runoff.

### 3. What challenges have you faced in your farming business, and how have you tackled

### those challenges?

I'm very early into my career, so the challenges I've faced haven't been too many yet.

One of the biggest challenges for me so far was moving to the South Island, knowing no-one and only visiting the place once prior to shifting.

As well as this, was the challenge of building my confidence on farm.

However, both of these challenges have been relatively minor as I have had a supportive farm team.

In the future, I know I will be challenged in many ways, but I'm excited to build on the skills and knowledge I have gained.

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

One of my major highlights, that is farming/agriculture related, was being in the winning Jersey NZ team that travelled to Australia for International Dairy Week in 2019.

Of course, winning the Dairy Trainee of the Year 2024 for the Canterbury/North Otago region has been the biggest highlight in more recent times.

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

Align your values with your future employers, ensure that you are on the same page.

Back yourself and ask plenty of questions not just about what people do, but why they do it. Don't let work be an excuse, for not going out and doing things outside of work.

What you do outside of work is just as important as what you do at work.

Enjoy what you do and success will follow.

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Monique Radford.

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# Navigating the narrative

By Claire Inkson  
[claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz](mailto:claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz)

Palliser Ridge expansion manager Lisa Portas left Wellington's city lights behind in 2009 when she moved with her husband Kurt to the South Wairarapa's 1200-hectare sheep and beef property, and has embraced rural life.

"Falling for a farmer meant that there was no chance of him moving to the city," Portas says.

After the couple entered into an equity partnership with Kiwi farm owners Jim and Marilyn Law in 2013, the focus has been on building the farm operation and diversifying the business by developing a farm stay and producing luxury blankets made from Palliser Ridge wool.

The property has 1,200 Angus-cross cattle and 7,000 Romney sheep, which Portas said suited the farm's dry summers and wet winters.

"We've found Romney to fit the bill for this. They are a dual-purpose breed, they produce quality lambs, and the fibre from their first lamb shear is well suited for taking through to finished products."

The farm stay, Palliser Ridge Retreat, opened for bookings six years ago, is an off-grid, solar-powered one-bedroom cabin at the top of the farm with views out to

the Cook Strait and South Island.

"It's designed for a couple or a single person to relax in the KiwiTub, take in the Dark Sky Reserve that the Wairarapa is well-known for, and escape everyday life," Portas said.

"I look after the booking system, and we have two part-time team members who work in the diversification business, which includes turning over the cabin once or twice a week."

Knowing the importance of storytelling when marketing the farm, and interested in why, how and to whom farmers should tell their story, Portas chose the topic 'Farmer storytelling -- Navigating our Narrative' for her research report she completed for the Kellogg's Leadership Programme Course in 2019.

"It feels like a while ago now, but I think there was a lot of encouragement at the time, as there still is today, for farmers to tell their story – and to me, that felt like a really simple sentence, but the actions behind it weren't that straightforward."

"I want to get out there and share my story, but why am I doing it, and who am I telling it to? And how do I make sure they hear me?"

Portas said that farmers tell their stories for different reasons, and knowing how and where to tell your story depends on your end goal.



Lisa Portas.

PHOTO: SUPPLIED

"Is it to pass on knowledge and history to the next generation? Is it to showcase your product and its benefits? Is it to extinguish myths about your industry? Is it to influence policy? There are so many reasons to tell a story in any industry, but I was really interested in understanding how certain end goals could be achieved through effective storytelling."

Portas said one of the most important reasons for farmers to tell their story is to generate connection.

Many urban dwellers have lost connection with agriculture. In the past, many had family living on farms and would spend at least part of their childhood

visiting rural relatives, but this has become much more rare as time has gone on.

"We quite often host buses full of retired groups, who step into the shearing shed, their eyes light up, and the stories start flowing of being a young rousie, or helping the shearing gang, or mucking out someone's woolshed for holiday money."

"As a contrast we host school groups from between 10 minutes and two hours away from our farm, and many of those younger individuals visiting have never set foot on a farm, and that connection that the older generations has isn't as strong."

Many people have assumptions about agriculture, and farmers can educate and enlighten by sharing what farm life looks like.

"I think of industries that I know little about, and I assume their day-to-day role, a bit of this and a bit of that, and then you meet someone who sheds light on what they do, and it broadens your knowledge and perspective."

"In farming, it's no different; a perspective of shifting stock, shearing sheep, running a dog, all are important, but our farmers do so much more than that, and any time we have the opportunity to share what that is, we should. The benefit is connection and understanding."

Portas said that people hearing

directly from farmers is more authentic, but acknowledges that time constraints can make it difficult for farmers to find the time to share their farming story, and encourages them to make the most of initiatives already in place.

"There are many great mouthpieces for our industry that can support farmers, like the Open Farms initiative, where farmers open their gates, supported by the Open Farms team with health and safety guidance, signage, ideas of how to engage an audience, a date, a time, it's all streamlined so that the on-farm team can set it up, and turn up on the day and deliver."

"I believe it's a fantastic example of hearing directly from the farmers, but they haven't had to come up with everything from scratch."

In cases where opening the farm gates to schools, catchment groups, or the general public isn't feasible, social media becomes a useful way to break down geographical barriers.

Portas warns that social media can open farmers up to a range of feedback, and those who choose that path need to be prepared to encounter differing opinions.

"The biggest piece of advice that I've taken on board here would be to remember that there is a wide range of viewpoints online. They won't all be in line with your own, and that's okay."

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## All Farm Engineering



# Getting stuck in at the Fitz

Young Farmers are the future of New Zealand agriculture, so each issue we shine a spotlight on a young farmers' club member.

Today we chat to *IZZI PANETTIERE*.

**1. What is the name of your club, and how long have you been a member?**

Fitzherbert Young Farmers Club. I've been a member for one year as of this month! I was nominated as the treasurer at the last November AGM and have been loving the role since.

**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 really love being able to get out and about with like-minded people of similar ages and similar experience, but with such broad backgrounds. I get to be involved in awesome events and help out in the community - get stuck in is our club motto which I really feel fits my lifestyle. Being part of Fitz has helped my confidence, as being in a big group of people can be daunting and it's also helped me further my career by opening new opportunities.

**3. How did you become involved in agriculture?**

I did a Bachelor of Science majoring in Animal Science at Massey University and decided to go dairy farming to get some practical knowledge of the theoretical knowledge I learned at uni. I came for the cow, but I have stayed for the people.

**4. What is your job now? Tell us about your role, and what your journey has been like so far.**

I am a herd manager at Thornton Park - Fonterra. We peak milk 630 spring cows but also calve our adjoining farm's 350 autumn cows for them, due to our facilities. Our shed is a fully automated freshly renovated 50-bale rotary. I started almost fresh out of uni with no experience in October 2022 and in July of 2023 I moved into a herd manager position. I have experience across both of our dairy farms but spend most of my time these days at Thornton Park.

**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?**

I think farming will have a lot more technology involved in the future. We are already seeing a lot of wearable technology coming into play, but I expect that to be the norm or the standard within the next 10 years as we progress as an industry. I would love to see a lot more of my generation and

the younger generations coming into the industry and I think the technology is going to be a really cool drawcard.

**6. What are your future plans?**

I am looking to move into a 2IC position for the 24/25 season and then into farm management. Personal goals of mine include home ownership by the end of

the following season to help build equity as well as spending more time riding my horses and being with my family.

**7. Who has been your biggest inspiration in agriculture, and why?**

It's probably very cheesy but my partner Jake Ferreira is definitely my biggest inspiration. He is the Longburn Farms Manager and has been with Fonterra for 6 seasons. He was the DIA Northland Farm Manager of the year in 2019. He is an inspiration due to the dedication and time he puts into his staff. We are all offered enormous amounts of information relating to the farms that a lot of farm assistants etc wouldn't be privy to. He continually pushes us to strive to be the best we can be and think outside of the box. The training all of the staff get is impeccable and extremely thorough. He fights to give us the best chance possible in the industry and is always there to lend a hand.



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# OPEN DAY

## SUNDAY MAY 26TH, 10AM

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# Seminar to help sector with mental wellness

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Wiggy Wiggins is bringing Agriconnect to Ashburton.

Craig 'Wiggy' Wiggins, with former Māori All Black Slade McFarland, hopes to arm rural professionals with tools to help their colleagues and clients with mental wellness in an Agriconnect seminar at the MSA in Ashburton on May 8.

"It's basically for all rural service industries," Wiggins says.

"Slade and myself will be showing what mental and physical health support is available within the Mid Canterbury area."

Wiggins said that rural professionals such as vets, agronomists, bank managers and contractors are on the "front line" and are often the first to notice if a farmer or co-worker is struggling.

The seminar also aims to educate those in the rural sector on what signs to look for when someone needs help.

"They are the ones who see the subtle signs that farmers aren't trucking too well, but they also have their own pressures with the economic downturn."

"A lot of those in the rural service industry will tell you they are doing a lot of counselling, and a lot of conversations are landing on their doorsteps, and they

may not know what to do or where to go with those conversations."

The event will utilise local resources such as counsellors, Rural Support Trust and doctors within the region.

The daytime Agriconnect event will be followed by an evening with Wiggins and Macfarland.

The focus will be on Macfarland's journey leaving a career as a professional sportsman and how to foster a good culture within a sports club or workplace.

Both events are open to the general public and are free to attend, but Wiggins hopes to attract corporate sponsorship to cover operating costs and hold future seminars.

"We need some of these big companies to get behind it."

"It's a really easy way for them to get mental health training into their businesses, and we can supply follow-up support afterwards."

"If we had a handful of companies donate \$500 each that would really help us out with food and logistics."

More information about the events can be found on the Whatever with Wiggy Facebook page.



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# RURAL RECHARGE

Take a smoko break for mental health

## Making connections and finding out who you are

As rural women, we have different things going on, different issues, and varying ways of relating to others. Loneliness and isolation can affect all rural people. Loneliness is when we lack meaningful connections with others, while isolation is knowing that we do have meaningful connections, but time, distance, location, or finances make that connection more difficult.

If you are a rural woman without children – or your children have left home – it can feel much harder to make connections without having the easy mutuality of children. You may have long distances to travel to do anything. You may be wondering who you really are – if your children have left home, it may feel like there is a void there where your children once were. Try to see this as an exciting time to rediscover yourself, perhaps look for other women in the same situation.

Try new hobbies – or take up old ones. Keep connections up with family, whether that be with your adult children, or your

wider family network. You may feel outnumbered in your area, as is often the case in farming communities. What interest and sports groups are in your area, or can you start something new yourself? All it takes is for someone to be willing to make the effort – could this be you? Can you find some value outside of your home, perhaps in your career, with animals or pets, or would you be willing to study?

If your children are small, it is more of a challenge to get out of the house. It will require a concentrated effort to build connections, but the benefits for you and your children are so worth it. Find out what groups are held in your area for preschoolers – these groups are as much for you as they are for your children. Everybody feels a little anxious when approaching new people – this is normal and human. You are unlikely to regret any effort made.

If your children are older and growing more independent, you may be experiencing an urge to find who you used to be. Spoiler:

you are who you always were once you peel back a single layer, but wiser and more complex. Friendships that were put on the backburner are now able to be re-explored, while hobbies, interests and sports are more possible to be rekindled. What used to give you joy? What are you doing when you experience glimmers of who you once were? If you had a single day to do what you love, dress how you choose, and be with who you love, what would that look like?

Whatever stage you are at, now is the time to hold yourself kindly and acknowledge that things can be hard sometimes, but there are so many chances here to build upon yourself. Slip into a place of being mindful of your struggles and respond to yourself with love and kindness, as you would do with a good friend. So many women struggle with these stages along with you. You will always be the one constant in your life, so why not respond to yourself with being mindful, and being kind.

What small actions can you take?



Try new hobbies – or pick up old ones.

## Young Maori dairy farmers recognised

By Sharon Davis

Two South Island dairy assistant managers have reached the finals for the Ahuwhenua Award, which recognises excellence in Maori farming.

Shayden Gardiner and Hannah Speakman, both 21, made it to the finals for the 2024 Ahuwhenua Young Maori Farmer Award.

They are up against a previous finalist, 29-year-old Ben Purua, who manages a farm with 540 cows near Tirau in Waikato.

The winner will be announced at a gala event in Hamilton on May 17.

Gardiner works for Ma Taua Dairies, part of the Rylib Group, on a 354-hectare farm near Ashburton, milking 1120 cows at peak.

He was born in Whanganui and raised living a rural lifestyle, where his father and Koko instilled in him a passion for the whenua, passing down their knowledge as farmers and hunter-gatherers.

Gardiner decided that school just wasn't for him at an early age and set his heart on a career in farming to provide for his whanau.

He left school at 14 and got work wool pressing in the shearing sheds and doing seasonal work for his dad at the sheep and beef station where they lived.

Gardiner moved to the South Island in 2019 to build a new life closer to his partner's whanau and started out as a farm assistant at Ma Taua Dairies and was as "green as grass" when it came to dairy.

Two years later he'd worked his way up to assistant manager.

His dream is to become a farm owner within the next 15 years.

Gardiner is grateful that his manager,



Shayden Gardiner.

Murray Bowden, gave him that opportunity at 16-years-old and taught him everything he knows about dairy farming.

He hopes to inspire other young Maori that anything in life is possible through hard work and making sacrifices.

Speakman works as 2IC at Pine Hill Dairy, a 560-cow farm in Enfield, Oamaru in North Otago.

She grew up on a sheep and beef farm that her dad managed in Hawke's Bay where her passion for whenua and livestock began.

When the first Covid-19 lockdown hit in 2019 in her final year of high school, Speakman found herself back at home working with her dad – and decided to pursue a career in farming.

At 18, she moved to the South Island chasing the dream to follow her sister and brother-in-law in dairy - with no prior experience.



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I write this the day after getting home from a road trip, an over 1000km journey to Riversdale, deep in the heart of Southland, to help celebrate with Jamie Mackay 30 years of commercial radio broadcasting what we all know now as The Country.

Initially when I got the invitation last month I didn't think there was much chance of getting away from what has been a busy time on our farm.

We've been coping with a long, dry spell that has meant being tied to feeding out, and for the first time since our Family have been here at Mount Somers the usually reliable council stock water race has been dry, which has been a huge worry and very time consuming.

A few days out from the event I was feeling a bit more on top of the situation to the point I thought it was doable to make a quick trip away.

On the face of it, driving all that way to see The Country broadcast their birthday show live from the Emerson's tiny pub on a Riversdale farm for a few hours doesn't seem like it would be worth, especially because this would limit the amount of Jamie's beer I could enjoy!

Almost uncannily like when drought shouts are organised, the weather decided to get involved by delivering much needed rain to most of the South Island on the day. Rainfall amounts were widely discussed, Southlanders were sick of the sight of it while I was fizzing to hear from home that we could declare it a drought breaker. While the rain backed off for the function, the keen Southern wind was there to remind visitors from outside the region that a decent coat is always a good idea, despite a few locals showing up in their shorts still!

The first keg of Mackaiser had been emptied as the live show kicked off and a crowd of 200 odd people came together to enjoy a feed and drinks. It was great to see a great mix of old friends and new, and catching up with plenty of great conversations.



Jamie Mackay.

For me personally it's what made the trip worth all the effort, to finally meet friends I regularly converse with online via Twitter or the NZ Farming Instagram mailbox, where we're always sharing the ups and downs of life on the land, often conversations coming from whatever the topic de jour might be on The Country on any given day.

Much like the live version of the show beaming out from the Emerson's tiny pub, there was a great energy that will be remembered for a long time by all who attended.

Many there told fond reflective stories while congratulating Jamie on his long career as a sort of Judy Bailey 'Mother of the nation' type figurehead that is a key part of the fabric of Heartland New Zealand. It's a legacy that brings us all together.

We never know when our time, or that of the figureheads in our circle, may be up, so make sure you put in the effort to celebrate great people when the opportunity arises, I guarantee you'll get a lot out of it.



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# A concrete advantage

Well-built bunker silos are a long-lasting, environmentally friendly investment that can save farmers time and money.

Concrete Silution owner, Martin Sneek, is motivated to bring the advantages of the popular European silage storage to New Zealand.

As a long-term sharemilker in North Canterbury, Dutch-born Sneek has extensive experience making silage and knows what food wastage looks like.

With his brother, Theo, Sneek has developed a free-standing reinforced concrete panel with an interlocking joint that allow the panels to fit seamlessly together to form a tight seal.

The panels are perfect for feed bunkers but also have a multitude of other uses on farm, such as sheds, bulk storage or effluent storage - with uses off-farm as well, including retaining walls and flood protection.

Concrete Silution prides itself on providing quality pre-cast panels.

"We don't take any shortcuts and use a durable concrete composite that can withstand the acidity of silage and effluent," Sneek said.

Sneek believes Concrete Silution's feed bunkers give farmers the perfect feed storage solution - saving time, preserving feed quality, and reducing wastage.

Bunker silos take up less space than the traditional New Zealand silage bun. The smaller footprint means it reduces the amount of land taken out of production, reduces stacking costs, and is both quicker and easier to cover - uses less plastic to cover - allows the farmer to capture leachate which also improves the environmental impact.

Bunker silos allow for the perfect compaction and ensures a better-quality feed. The bunker silos reduce the amount of air in the feed and the likelihood of mould.

"Mould in feed can cause health issues, abortions - and even death - in stock," Sneek



said.

Stock health and fertility also improve with bunker silos.

Poor storage reduces the energy available in the feed, while the improved storage in bunker silos improves herd health and body condition as well as improved fertility and productivity for dairy cows through better quality feed.

"These are all small factors that you don't see, but they add up. The long-term efficiencies make the investment worthwhile," Sneek said.

Bunker storage reduces feed waste, saves on contracting bills, reduces the potential leaching, and is cleaner than a gravel pit, he said.

Concrete Silution had their concrete panels designed by an engineer to meet feed and effluent storage needs - and

the New Zealand building code.

With reinforced steel embedded in the concrete for longevity, the panels are free-standing and do not require back bracing.

"Making and storing quality silage is as easy as investing in prefabricated, internally-strengthened Concrete Silution LTD bunker walls, that are built to the New Zealand Building Code.

"Having quality feed on hand during drought conditions like we've had is like having money in the bank. It's one of the tools to drive efficiencies," Sneek said.

Save time and money with Concrete Silution's purpose-designed concrete panels. Visit [www.concretesilution.co.nz](http://www.concretesilution.co.nz) to find out more.



Martin Sneek, owner of Concrete Silution.

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# Drone use set to increase

The use of agricultural drones for precision spraying and other applications on-farm is increasing as drone technology develops.

Ag Smart UAV owner Vaughan Ward said drones had seen substantial advancement over the last two years with an increase in payloads and the ability to cover larger areas.

While earlier agricultural drones were more suited to hard-to-reach places or small areas, the latest drones can compete with the more traditional spraying options - such as ground sprayers or fixed-wing aircraft - for cost-effectiveness and with some definite advantages, he said.

Ward has recently invested in larger equipment - a bigger and more advanced craft - which allows him to take on larger spraying jobs and speciality crops at competitive rates.

Ag Smart UAV's new drone has a spray tank that can be swapped out within minutes to accommodate a spreader unit. The drone can then be used to apply granular fertiliser, slug bait, trace elements and seed, Ward said.

One of the advantages of drone application is that it eliminates damage from wheel tracks.

"A drone allows for the better use of the land at the same cost to the farmer. Even small wheel tracks add up - and that's a real advantage for a number of crops," he said.

Drones can also be used to survey crops, check on livestock, or for mapping.

"Mapping craft are able to collect multispectral crop data, highlighting areas of high or low growth, weed infestation, wet areas or crop damage and identify which areas need more fertiliser or chemicals."

Ward said this precision application allowed farmers to save money and minimise chemical use with a varied and targeted application.

"Mid Canterbury is flat and open with a lot of speciality crops. The province is almost designed for agricultural drones."

We also have the ability to apply chemicals at night, perfect for some insecticides, which gives the potential to limit the range of non-target insects, Ward said.

Ag Smart UAV is the local sales representative for DJI Agricultural Drones. The company can offer agricultural drone sales, along with training, tech support, drone maintenance, and assistance with licensing.

The biggest obstacle faced by farmers wanting their own agricultural drone is the time it takes for the licencing process. Ag Smart is able to discuss potential licencing arrangements on an individual basis.

Contact Ag Smart UAV to discuss how drones can help you farm smarter - or to arrange an on-farm demo.

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Campbell Contracting did a demonstration in the ring with their Volvo logging truck.

# A century of evolution

By Claire Inkson

[claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz](mailto:claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz)

Smoke and steam filled the air as around 800 vehicles participated in the Mid Canterbury Machinery Club (MCVMC) Wheat and Wheels Rally in Lauriston.

The April 6 and 7 event was held for the first time in six years, with profits going to the Canterbury West Coast Air Rescue Trust.

Event spokesperson John Hall said MCVMC was happy with the turnout and the number of vehicle entries.

"We had everything there: traction engines, army tanks, motorbikes, classic cars, and the latest trucks."

The rally showcased the evolution of machinery over the last century, with vehicle entries from across the country.

A military section included a 1951 Walker Bulldog Tank, a 1973 Scorpion Tank, and a World War Two Jeep.

Fire trucks were a popular addition to the extensive truck section, with a 1953 Dennis fire engine, a 1989 Dennis fire engine, and a 1978 Bedford fire truck.

Classic cars varied from a 1907 Cadillac to a 2003 Holden Commodore.

Farmall tractors were a feature, with over 70 on display as the event celebrated 100 years of Farmall production. Other tractor entries

included vintage and modern John Deere, Case, Massey Ferguson, Nuffield and Leyland.

May Brothers Contracting displayed their impressive John Deere X9 Combine Harvester, which has a 45-foot header front, one of the biggest in the world.

A raffle for a 1956 Ferguson FE35 tractor, bought and restored by the club in its traditional grey and gold colours, was drawn on the Sunday with Andrew Quigley of Quigleys contracting the lucky winner.

The event, which was on Anthony Hampton's property, featured various displays and parades in a main ring on both days.

"What really made it was the action; we had things going on all the time," Hampton says.

"With the layout, people could be at a trade site or food stall and see what was happening in the ring at the same time."

Campbell Contracting performed a demonstration with their Volvo logging truck, and other displays included chaff cutting, wooden mill and tin mill threshing, and vehicle parades by make and size.

Hampton, an avid collector of vintage tractors, says the event was well worth the effort.

"I've had a lot of pleasure from other rallies, and this is my way of giving something back."



The classic truck display included vehicles dating back to the 1920s, right through to the present day.

PHOTOS: CLAIRE INKSON





Chaff cutting was part of the demonstrations in the main ring.



A feature of the rally was the Farmall tractors, with the event celebrating 100 years of Farmall production.



Classic cars include a 1971 Holden statesman and a 1955 Cadillac Fleetwood.



The May Brothers Contracting John Deere X9 combine harvester with 45 foot header front was an impressive sight.



Fire trucks were a popular display.

Over 800 vehicles were on display at the rally from all over New Zealand.

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# Lifestyle

LIVE AN OPULENT

RURAL GUARDIAN | May 2024



## TAKING LIFE BY THE HORNS

### WHAT'S INSIDE

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# Taking life by the horns

By Claire Inkson

[claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz](mailto:claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz)

Teacher turned photographer Amanda King has made a career out of showcasing the beauty of New Zealand livestock.

King discovered photography after the intermediate school she was teaching at in the Wairarapa put her through a digital photography course. She began a side hustle doing family photography sessions alongside her teaching job. It wasn't until she moved with her husband Fraser to his family farm in Hororata that King found her passion.

"I was surrounded by lots of cattle, and I decided to take some photographs of cattle because I wanted a big print for my wall," King says.

"My friends really liked the print and asked me if I could do some for them."

Seeing an opportunity, King began a Facebook page to showcase her work, and what started as a hobby rapidly became a thriving business, By the Horns.

"It got a lot of interest on Facebook, so I wondered if I could sell these prints because people were asking me for them."

King created a basic website to sell her images, and the response was immediate.

"Next minute, I had this full-on business, and I wasn't prepared for that."



Amanda King describes the publishing of her coffee-table book a highlight of her career. PHOTOS: SUPPLIED

"I had little babies at the time, so it was quite hectic."

With the couple's two children, Greta (now ten) and Dudley (now eight) added to the mix, Fraser was hands-on in the business. He helped roll out prints when he came off the farm and assisted with the

administrative side of By the Horns.

"I had spreadsheets going, and it was all forcing me to learn a lot of things that I didn't know how to do," King said.

"Next thing I know, I had thousands and thousands of Facebook followers, and I had



Amanda King's prints grace walls throughout New Zealand and Australia, and as far away as Europe and the Middle East.

a new business, and I wasn't teaching anymore.

"It became my full-time career."

King diversified the business, adding tea towels, aprons and cushions with her prints on, as well as hats, bags and earrings to her online store.

King went on to win the Emerging Business category at the Rural Women New Zealand Business Awards, appeared on Seven Sharp and was approached by Penguin to publish a coffee table book of her images, which was released in 2022.



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“Having a book published was definitely a highlight because it’s something I never thought would happen in a million years.”

King’s customers are not limited to the rural sector or even New Zealand.

Her images hang on walls in Australia and as far away as Europe and the Middle East.

“It’s actually a real mixture, and that’s something I’ve been surprised about.

“The biggest sales area in New Zealand is Auckland. I sell a lot there.

“My prints go to outback stations in Australia and have also gone to lawyers’ offices in Sydney, so it’s a real mix.”

While King says most of

the feedback is positive, with followers praising her ability to capture the personalities of the livestock she photographs and understand the care and love livestock are shown during their lives on the farm, King has also dealt with negativity from some animal rights activists.

“I guess you could call them Facebook trolls.

“They would message me and say that my children are being brought up on blood money, saying it was cruel what we were doing, and send horrific images of slaughterhouses that weren’t even in New Zealand.”

King said these messages initially upset her, but she has learned not to take them to

heart.

“You just delete and block. I’ve learned you don’t even respond. You don’t feed them.”

“No matter what you do in this world, there will always be people who don’t agree with you or have different mindsets or opinions about things; that’s just life.”

King said that in the social media age, it’s easy for people to become “keyboard warriors” and post comments they would never be brave enough to say in real life.

“It’s just something I’ve learned to deal with.

“I love my business, and I’m not going to let them take that away from me,” King said.



By the Horns has diversified into bags, hats, cushions and aprons.



Photographing cattle has been a way for King to integrate into farm life.

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# Insta-famous in the dairy field

By Claire Inkson

[claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz](mailto:claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz)

When West Coast dairy farmer Chloe Payne started an Instagram page to share photos of cows in 2016, she never thought it would gain traction.

Eight years and 325,000 followers later, her Cows of New Zealand page is one of the most followed rural pages on the platform.

"I had always taken so many photos of cows," Payne says.

"I made an Instagram page hoping to find a couple of people who enjoyed seeing cows; I never thought it would become this big."

The page gained around 50,000 followers between 2016-2023, which Payne said she was happy with.

Since then, though, several images have gone viral, boosting her following by 270,000 followers in the past year.

"The reason I believe I have so many followers is because my photos really show the cows' personalities.

"This allows people to get to know the cows as individuals and want to follow their journey." "My cow Popcorn was the first cow to go viral in 2018."

"She still has people following her today who have known and loved her since she was a few days old."

Payne works as a dairy manager in Ikamatua, milking 600 mixed-breed cows, mainly Fleckvieh, on a 240-hectare milking platform.

Growing up on a dairy farm, Payne was passionate about cows from a young age.

She got her first job on a dairy farm when she left school at 18, and now, at 26, she remains as passionate about dairy as ever.

"I have 26 of my own cows on the dairy farm, all of which have names, and most of them enjoy cuddles. I

concentrate on mainly posting my own cows."

Payne said she has particular cows that are her favourites, such as Brown Sugar and Popcorn, that she will retire and keep.

Each cow has its own personality, with some, like Carrot Cake, enjoying bread, walks and will fall asleep in Payne's arms.

Payne said her following is a mix of rural and urban, from other dairy farmers to people who have never even touched a cow.

She sees social media as a way to educate the urban demographic about farming practices that are often misunderstood.

"Animal activists often spread misinformation that urban people are tricked into believing. So social media allows us to show how happy the cows are, and that they enjoy their life as a dairy cow."

Payne said she often gets negative comments from animal activists, and while she initially engaged with those people, she now ignores them.

"I have tried to educate them in the past, but they're often stubborn, so nowadays I ignore them and concentrate my energy on people who are kind and genuinely want to learn about the industry."

Payne hopes to start a YouTube channel in the future to further educate people about dairy farming, and has begun selling merchandise and hopes to further utilise her platform to generate income.

"I just want to continue showing everyone how sweet cows are and how dairy cows enjoy their lives.

"Even though I have a big following, it is just a hobby as I don't make much money from my Instagram.

"In the future, it would be awesome to make at least an income so I can use that money to retire all my pet cows," Payne said.



Chloe Payne with Popcorn.



Payne's most viral photo, Marshmallow and Bean.

PHOTOS: CHLOE PAYNE

## Chloe Payne's tips for other farmers wanting to showcase their farm on social media:

- Post consistently to gain followers
- Form a good relationship with your cows so they come close to you for photos
- Ignore all the negative comments
- Don't try to hide farming practices that could be frowned upon.

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## Do I need extra Magnesium? □ Part 2 □

Last week we saw that Magnesium supplements can be very effective for cramps, especially night cramps and to help restless legs. Magnesium is required by over 300 enzymes including those needed for muscle contraction, energy metabolism and many others.

As a Nutritional Medicine practitioner, Magnesium is one of my most frequently prescribed supplements. This is because Magnesium works on problems quickly with benefits obvious within days, especially with night cramp.

Magnesium is critical for cardiovascular function. Magnesium helps regulate electrical impulses and helps support normal heart rhythm especially for those with AF. I have seen those with mild arrhythmia return to normal using targeted Magnesium plus appropriate dietary changes. I also use Magnesium, alongside naturally fermented Co enzyme Q10, for those on statin drugs to help prevent or reverse the common side effects of low energy, muscle stiffness, pain and cramps.



Magnesium is also helpful when part of a nutrition programme for hypertension. Magnesium helps relax the smooth muscle that lines blood vessels thus reducing blood pressure. It does this because Magnesium is a natural calcium channel blocker.

When Magnesium levels are low, calcium overstimulates heart muscle cells (fibres) resulting in heart arrhythmias. Adding Magnesium helps to counteract this.

For hypertension I like to combine supplemental Magnesium with a good multi-antioxidant, multi-mineral, multi-vitamin complex.

This combined with a diet high in nitrates (especially beetroot) can produce real benefits.

I prefer chelated Magnesium di-glycinate combined with naturally extracted Magnesium from seawater. These, combined with rapidly absorbed Magnesium citrate means the supplement can work quickly for fast results. I suggest you avoid 1 a day supplements and look for those that you can vary the dosages depending on your needs.

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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# Nutrition for working dogs



Farmers should feed their dogs high quality food.

By Carolyn Jones  
VetSouth

With winter looming on the horizon, care of your working dogs over the colder months is important if you want them to be healthy, happy, and able to perform at their best next spring.

Over winter your working dogs' nutritional requirements will be different to what they need over the summer months.

Southland vet Hugh Hasselman from VetSouth, is interested in the health of working dogs. He says; "Dogs working hard on hill country, especially in poor weather, will often have much higher energy and nutrient requirements than their standard maintenance diet could possibly provide."

Feeding working dogs a high fat, high protein diet when they are working in cold or wet conditions helps them maintain physical performance, regenerate muscle tissue, maintain red blood cell levels, and protect against injury.

"The incidence of musculoskeletal (bones, muscles, tendons and ligaments) injuries is significantly higher in working dogs that are fed low protein diets," says Hugh. "Feeding a high quality, high protein diet has also been demonstrated to protect those dogs against significant falls in their red blood cell counts (anaemia), as can happen during periods of high workload."

To ensure your working dog is getting the best quality protein, Hugh recommends reading the ingredients labels on bags of dog food. Some may state that they are high in protein, but if it is a plant sourced protein, this will have a lower bioavailability (be less able to be digested and absorbed) than animal protein. This means a lower amount of protein is available for the dog to use.

Many farmers use homekill to feed their dogs, but Hugh says there are known risks associated with eating raw meat and bones, such as dental damage, intestinal obstructions, gut infections, and constipation. The transmission of *Taenia ovis* (sheep measles) is also an important risk if meat is not adequately frozen or cooked.

While the combination of meat and a standard biscuit diet may be quite adequate for many dogs doing light work, or during the off season, it is unlikely to provide the correct amounts of protein (amino acids), fat (fatty acids) and energy for dogs in a period of heavy work.

Dogs that are fatigued from working on a winter's day need to sleep and recover. However, rather than sleeping, they may need to spend a considerable amount of time chewing large portions of cold meat, bone and hard biscuits just

to consume enough to keep warm and replenish their significant energy and protein demands.

Hugh says; "A better strategy would be to supplement homekill dog tucker with a premium energy dense (smaller volume) dog food, rather than the cheaper, cereal-based biscuits."

Feeding a premium quality commercial dry dog food with ad-lib access to clean water best meets the "complete and balanced diet" requirements for your working dog's health and performance. Hugh says that in recent years, many farmers have converted to feeding the premium diets that are now available and are seeing the benefits for themselves.

The timing of feeding and exercise is also important. There is strong evidence that feeding dogs within two hours after their day's work promotes muscle recovery, with a more rapid and complete replenishment of glycogen stores and the optimal uptake of protein to build and repair muscle cells.

So, kennel and feed them before you go in for your own evening meal.

Although it is not ideal to feed dogs close to the time of working, for some dogs that don't eat well or struggle to maintain condition and stamina through periods of heavy exercise, a workable recommendation is to feed a small meal (one cup) of an energy dense diet at least two hours before work and then the balance of the ration within two hours of finishing work.

This protocol would also be recommended for Huntaway dogs that have had problems with bloating or have previously had a twisted stomach (GDV), so as to reduce the volume of food given per feed.

#### Top tips to maintain healthy dogs over winter

- Feed your dogs high quality food, even on days they have not worked, to maintain heat production, energy reserves and tissue repair.
- Ensure that drinking water is always provided and accessible during periods of work and when kenneled (bowls that are stable and not iced over).
- Check that their kennels are well positioned and insulated. Dogs that are too hot or cold will have to burn more energy to maintain normal body temperature, will be stressed and will have less effective sleep patterns.
- The provision of bedding can be difficult for a dog that destroys it, but dog coats at night are usually tolerated and can also be used through the winter season to reduce windchill when being transported on farm.
- Maintain standard control treatments for internal and external parasites for optimal health and food utilisation.



# Taking your agristory online

By Claire Inkson  
[claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz](mailto:claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz)

When telling your farming story, the most obvious platform is often social media. When choosing which social media platform best suits your farming business, marketing expert and chief executive officer of Grassroots Media, Chelsea, says it's all about the audience and knowing your purpose.

"Who are you trying to talk to, and why? If you can understand the why and the who, you can work out what platform to use. Every platform has someone different, and they are quite segmented audiences now."

YouTube is best when targeting men 45 years of age and over, while Facebook is best for a general audience. For targeting women in the 35-54 age bracket, Instagram is most effective, although that is changing, Miller said.

"We are seeing a lot of data that the younger male population is coming onto Instagram, especially farming-wise, and the reason for that is stories and reels."

"Instagram is the place to create engagement and showcase real farming."

Miller said videos are powerful tools, and Instagram reels are an effective way to create engagement and are easy to make.

"Instagram makes it easy with lots of templates and music

available. You just have to get your groove on and get into it."

The basics, like ensuring the lens on your phone is clean and the content is lined up correctly for the platform you are posting on, are essential as a starting point.

When it comes to selling a product, which is particularly relevant in the cases of farms selling produce online, Miller said it's about balancing content.

"People don't want just to be sold to; they want to know who you are and about your business."

When posting videos or photos, it's important to check imagery to make sure there is nothing that could have a negative impact on your farming business.

Miller recommends checking the foreground and background of all content before loading online.

Content doesn't have to be perfect, but it should be safe.

"Farming is becoming very regulated, and you don't know who is watching, and I think that scares a lot of people."

"But if, for example, you have someone riding along on a quad bike without a helmet in the background, someone is going to pick up on that."

When dealing with negative comments, Miller said the first step is to hide the comment to avoid engagement from other users. Then, if the user is open to it, take the conversation offline and discuss the



Chelesa Miller says knowing your audience and your purpose is the first step to putting your farming business on social media. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

issues with them privately.

"If they keep coming back, then I would block them," Miller said.

Content can be used to educate urban audiences, but Miller said it's important not to underestimate what they might know.

"Don't talk down to them; talk to them as an equal."

"Don't overcomplicate it, but don't oversimplify it either. Be positive, but direct."

Miller says a minimum of three

posts per week is ideal to keep the algorithms working in your favour.

"Obviously, you can do more than that, and with Instagram stories, you can do those every 24 hours if you want to keep yourself at the front, so people are more likely to see it."

Hashtags are a good way for people to find your content, but they should only be used on Instagram, not Facebook.

"People need to develop

hashtags for their topic but also have some general ones relating to their business. #NZfarming and #NZagriculture are good ones to use."

Miller said social media is not the only avenue for telling your farming stories, with other initiatives like Open Farms being an excellent tool for reaching urban dwellers.

"This is not a silo conversation. There are many cool tools available out there."

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# What is great about Mum

Mother's day is on May 12, so we asked the children of Omihi School in Hurunui what they loved most about their Mum.

"The thing I love about my Mum is that we read books together at night time." – **Maddy, age 6**

"The thing I love about my Mum is that she plays games with us. My favourite game is Catan"

– **Theo, age 6**

"The thing I love most about my Mum is we go horse-riding together down the hill"

– **Emma, age 6**

"The thing I love most about my Mum is that she blows balloons up for us."

– **Amelia, age 5**

"The thing I love most about my Mum is that she made me an aeroplane cake."

– **Eddie, age 5**

"The thing I love most about my Mum is that she takes us ten pin bowling."

– **Arly, age 6**

"The thing I love most about my Mum is that she plays with me. We play Lego farms with Lego animals."

– **Arty, age 6**

"The thing I love most about my Mum is that she makes yummy dinners for us. My favourite food is lasagne."

– **Jack, age 7**



Left to right, back: Arly, Theo, Arty, Jack. Front: Maddy, Eddie, Amelia.



Omihi School's Paemoana class.

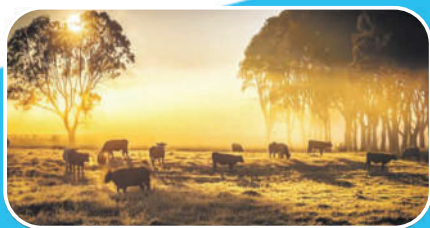
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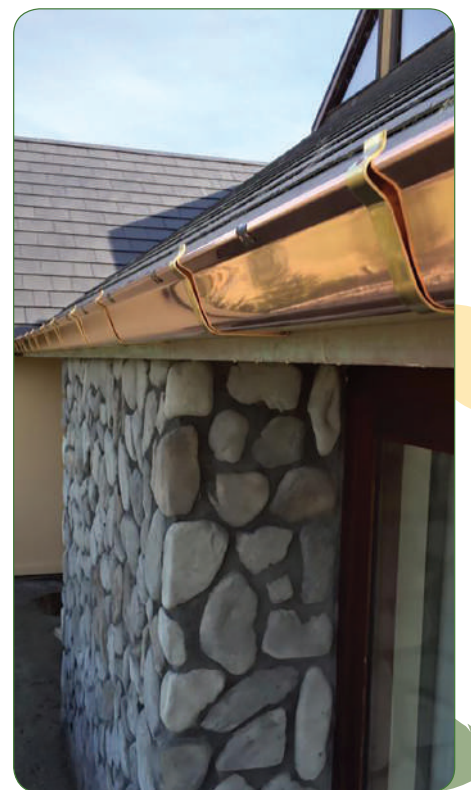
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# Catchment group covers lakes, walkway and more

By Kerry Harmer  
Chairperson of the Ashburton  
Lakes Catchment Group.

Started early in 2023, facilitated by Phil Everest, the catchment group encompasses the large catchment of the Ashburton Lakes, some 58,000ha over four extensive sheep and beef properties. The catchment group area includes 13 Lakes, the Te Araroa Walkway, numerous recreational hunting, fishing, water, tramping and snow opportunities and is enjoyed by many in our extended community.

Long considered an area of significance to the nation and local Iwi, our catchment has been under the spotlight recently due to concerns of deteriorating lake quality, something we have also been concerned about and are acting upon.

Since September 2023 we have been measuring water quality, where the water enters our properties, at a midpoint on our properties and as the water departs our properties. These nitrate tests range from less than 0.002ppm to 1.05ppm, which is extremely low. Some are less than 10 per cent of the nitrate levels in the drinking water of

our town water supply. In 60 per cent of areas measured the water quality does not change, or improves as it travels through the properties. This was not the result that many, including ourselves, expected. In 40 per cent of the areas, water quality deteriorates slightly as it travels through the properties. In all cases this relates to the addition of spring water to the streams as it travels through the properties. We are researching this to identify the source of the nitrate (animals, nitrogen fixation, organic matter breakdown or from parent rock material) and the age of this water. We hope

that with this information we will be able to find ways to reduce nitrate levels coming from the springs.

While we run extensive low stocking rate systems, we are investigating ways to reduce our environmental impact further. Many of our streams have already been fenced and we have installed large stock water systems to continue providing water for stock.

Next spring, with assistance from local Fish and Game and Forest and Bird members, we plan to plant almost six kilometres of Gentlemen Smith Stream above the Maori Lakes.

Although our winter feeding systems are less intensive than elsewhere, we are undertaking a monitoring program to determine the actual losses from crops. We already sow catch crops with our winter brassicas to help mitigate possible nitrate loss.

These are exciting times in the basin as we complete our research and work to develop practices that will improve our environmental footprint in the basin we all love and care for so much.

We are greatly appreciative of the Mid Canterbury Catchment Collective for their continued help and support.

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# Working with the land pays off for Southland family

By Claire Inkson

[claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz](mailto:claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz)

A third-generation farming family has been named the Regional Supreme Award winner at the Southland Ballance Farm Environment Awards.

The Miller family of Roselyn Downs in Glencoe was announced as winners at an awards ceremony in Invercargill on April 11.

The family runs a sheep and beef operation on the 1034-hectare property, led by brothers Jason and Quentin Miller and Jason's son Andrew. A nearby dairy farm, Claymore Dairies, was added to the operation in 2019 when Andrew and his wife Rachel joined the business.

Andrew Miller says the family is 'rapt' to pick up the award.

"It just helps to reassure us we've been doing the right thing, and it's nice to get some recognition that all the hard work and investment in the farm has been worth it," Miller said.

Roselyn Downs runs an average of 4,000 ewes, hosts a stud sheep-breeding programme and provides dairy support for the dairy farm.

At Claymore, the team strives

toward a five-year target of achieving 500kg of milk solids per cow. The judges complimented the Millers on the overall health of the cows and how the family has increased in-calf rate gains over a short period of time.

The family has utilised independent consultants to help them achieve their goals, and, since 2020, they've tripled business revenue and doubled their asset base.

The judges were impressed with the data-driven approach to farming and noted that, through careful consideration of environmental mitigations, the Millers have created a thriving ecosystem that supports native species and reduces erosion.

"The majority of the enhancements that we have been doing are on the sheep farm, but obviously, the dairy farm has got a huge amount of potential that we are excited to unlock as well."

The Millers have increased the property's biodiversity by planting native trees, enhancing wetlands, and fencing off waterways.

"We are working with the land to get the best benefit out of it and for the environment."



The Miller Family - Andrew & Rachel Miller, Chris Henderson (contract milker) and Eleanor & Quinton Miller.

PHOTO: SUPPLIED

The Millers will go through to the Ballance Farm Environment Awards national showcase in Hamilton in June, to be considered for the Gordon Stephenson Trophy.

Recipients of the Trophy will become 2024's National Ambassadors for Sustainable Farming and Growing.

**The Millers also won the following awards:**

- Ballance Agri-Nutrients Soil Management Award

- Hill Labs Agri-Science Award
- Rabobank Agri-Business Management Award
- NZFET Innovation Award
- Environment Southland Water Quality and Biodiversity Award
- Other Southland Ballance Farm Environment Award winners include:
  - Mike and Kirsty Bodle — Braintra Farms, Hokonui
  - DairyNZ Sustainability and Stewardship Award
  - NZFET Biodiversity Award

- NZFET Climate Recognition Award
- Tracey and Steve Henderson — Legendaries, Awarua
- Bayleys People in Primary Sector Award
- James and Tanya Goodwin — Kelvin Grove, Waimumu
- Norwood Farming Efficiency Award
- Philip and Katherine McCallum — Rockley Farm, Belfour
- Beef + Lamb New Zealand Livestock Farm Award

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# Farmers seek clarity on freshwater plans

By Sharon Davis

The government's plan to overhaul the farm freshwater planning system has been welcomed as a positive step - but farmers want to ensure any new plans are practical and cost-effective and they want an end to uncertainty while the plans are reviewed.

Federated Farmers freshwater spokesperson Colin Hurst said many farmers had been left in limbo, wondering if they should get a freshwater farm plan under the current rules or wait for changes.

"The Government needs to address this uncertainty by extending timelines in regions that already have freshwater farm plan requirements in place.

"Councils have already started implementing freshwater farm plan rules, but it makes no sense to force farmers to comply when we know the rules are about to change," he said.

Plans were already underway in Southland, the West Coast, Otago, Waikato and Manawatu-Whanganui.

For Canterbury farmers the wait for clarity is slightly less frustrating.

Mid Canterbury Federated Farmers president David Acland said Canterbury was one of the last regions to fall under the new freshwater plans, which were not due to kick in locally until 2025.

"There's an indication from Government about where they see that going."

Acland was hopeful that a clear direction would be in place by 2025 and that the process would be slowed down enough to avoid farmers wasting money on systems that will change.

Hurst said the current system was impractical and frustrating for farmers with "one-size-fits-all rules" driven out of Wellington.

He said the review was "a really positive step forward for both farmers and the environment, but the devil is always going to be in the detail".

There was a lot of unnecessary cost, complexity, and duplication - and a lot of opportunities to make improvements, Hurst said.

"It's absolutely critical that the Government get this right. Farmers don't want to see another expensive box-ticking exercise that will tie us up in endless red tape and arbitrary paperwork for



Councils have already started implementing freshwater farm plan rules.

very little environmental gain."

Hurst said farm plans should allow farmers and rural communities to tailor their environmental improvement actions to match their specific local needs, which would lead to more community buy-in and better outcomes.

"It's good to see the Government

are talking about taking a risk-based approach, where the level of plan you need to put in place is determined by your specific catchment and farming activity.

"It's also really encouraging that they're looking at how existing sector or council farm plans could be recognised or integrated because over 10,000 farmers

already have a plan in place."

Associate Environment Minister Andrew Hoggard said the Government wanted to create an enduring system and was exploring ways to make any changes to farm plans fair to all farmers.

"As part of this, we may look into whether current requirements to complete a freshwater farm plan could be paused while improvements are developed", he said.

Agriculture Minister Todd McClay said decisions would be considered alongside the Government's overall approach to freshwater management, including stock exclusion and winter grazing.

Officials were looking at ways to integrate existing farm environment plans or industry assurance programmes into the system, he said.

"Certification and auditing requirements will also be considered, along with any support farmers need to develop robust freshwater farm plans.

"This might include giving catchment groups more of a leadership role in developing and implementing improved freshwater outcomes," he said.



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# Trifecta for Reefton pair

By Claire Inkson  
[Claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz](mailto:Claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz)

Michael and Cheryl Shearer have won the 2024 West Coast/ Top of the South Share Farmer of the Year at the region's Dairy Industry Awards in Shantytown.

The award dinner, on March 23, saw Michael Shearer add to his trophy cabinet. He had previously won Taranaki Farm Manager of the Year in 2014 and West Coast/ Top of the South Dairy Trainee of the Year in 2012.

"It's nice to have all three now with manager, trainee and share milker.

"It's nice to have the trifecta and finally finish that off."

The Shearers are 50/50 share milkers on Russell Andrews' 225-hectare property in Reefton, milking 500 cows.

Shearer said his previous experience entering the awards had helped him progress in his career and prepared him for the 2024 competition.

"Knowing how the process works, with the manager and share milker competition being reasonably similar in terms of the judging process, definitely helped.

"I knew what they were looking for, how to collect the data, and how to represent it.

"That was a big part."

Shearer said he is naturally competitive and enjoys the

competition and comradery of the awards and the networking opportunities.

"The number of contacts I have made through the awards is massive, and it's great rubbing shoulders with motivated people."

"It's great for having a fresh look at your business, what you do and why you do it, so it helps keep your business sharp as well."

The Shearers have faced challenges in their farming careers, including the 2019 Tasman forest fires, during which they had to evacuate their cows for two weeks, but the couple has maintained a positive mindset.

"I actually enjoy the hard times as they drive you to better your business and find different options and ways of doing things," says Shearer.

The Shearers won \$8,000 in prizes and four merit awards at the regional finals and now look forward to the national finals in Queenstown in May.

"One thing I did this year was to ask previous winners for advice on what to put in different categories and how to present it, so I'll be doing more of that."

"There won't be too many changes to the presentation. I'm just working on adding a few critical bits here and there and maybe changing a few of the presentation methods.

"You've only got a short amount of time to explain your whole



West Coast/Top of the South Dairy Industry Awards winner Alexandra Davidson, Michael & Cheryl Shearer and Trinity Jackson. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

business, and it's all about how you can get your point across in the most efficient way."

The other big winners at the region's awards were Trinity Jackson, the 2024 West Coast/Top of the South Dairy Manager of the Year, and Alexandra Davidson, the 2024 West Coast/Top of the South Dairy Trainee of the Year.

Jackson is the farm manager for Pāmu Farms of New Zealand on the 441-hectare, 800-cow Moana property. She won \$7,000 in prizes and three merit awards.

Davidson is farm assistant on the Birchlea Trust 300-hectare, 725-cow farm at St Arnaud and took home \$6,500 in prizes and one merit award.

## Other 2024 West Coast/ Top of the South Dairy Industry Merit Awards winners:

### Share Farmer Merit Awards:

- DairyNZ – People and Culture Award : Warric & Rachel Johnson
- Ecolab Total Farm Hygiene Award : Warric & Rachel Johnson
- Federated Farmers Leadership Award : Michael and Cheryl Shearer
- Honda Farm Safety, Health and Biosecurity Award : Warric & Rachel Johnson
- LIC – Animal Wellbeing, Recording and Productivity Award : Michael and Cheryl Shearer
- Meridian Environmental Sustainability Award : Michael

- and Cheryl Shearer
- Ravensdown Sustainable Pasture Award : Luke Chisnall & Charlotte Harding
- Cuffs Chartered Accountants & Business Advisors Business Performance Award: Michael and Cheryl Shearer
- Westland Milk Products Emerging Talent Award: Mark and Ester Tubman

### Dairy Manager Merit

- DeLaval Livestock Management Award : Kieran Hamilton
- Fonterra Dairy Management Award: Trinity Jackson
- Drummond & Etheridge Environmental Sustainability Award: Trinity Jackson
- Silver Fern Farms Pasture & Feed Management Award : Kieran Hamilton
- Parry Field Lawyers People & Leadership Award: Trinity Jackson

- Cow Manager Personal Planning & Financial Management Award: Kieran Hamilton

### Dairy Trainee Merit Awards:

- DairyNZ Practical Skills Award: Sapphire Jordan
- WCTOS Dairy Industry Awards - Committee Emerging Talent Award: Hannah Payne
- Pāmu Farms of New Zealand Farming Knowledge Award: Sapphire Jordan
- Greenfield Motors Communication & Industry Involvement Award: Alexandra Davidson

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# Probiotics enhance calf growth and milk production

Research indicates that accelerating growth in young calves results in improved tissue development in the mammary gland, paving the way for increased heifer milk production. Probiotic Revolution encourages farmers to maximise early milk intake by using their potent probiotic, Calf Xtreme, to foster better calf growth.

In an ad-lib feeding trial, calves supplemented with a probiotic voluntarily consumed an additional litre of milk daily. Stratford farmer Daniel Simons, who ad-lib fed his Ayrshire calves for up to 5 weeks, trialled Calf Xtreme on 30 of them. These calves were weaned earlier based on liveweight but continued to show superior liveweight growth post weaning, being 30 kg heavier than the control group a year later. Simons now feeds his calves 6-7 litres once a day from 2 weeks of age. "They are doing just as well because the Calf Xtreme is stimulating hay and meal consumption and setting up the rumen for better growth."

Since its introduction to the New Zealand market in

2017, Probiotic Revolution has promoted high milk rates, typically with once-a-day feeding. Increasing milk volume for calves doesn't necessarily reduce their consumption of meal, hay and grass. With higher milk intakes, Calf Xtreme floods into the rumen, stimulating hard feed consumption, resulting in accelerating calf growth, and enabling earlier weaning. This insight has been shared by Probiotic Revolution with farmers using Calf Xtreme. Consequently, a majority of the 100,000 calves raised last year with Calf Xtreme were fed higher milk volumes, leading to calves being weaned 11 days earlier on average.

Otorohanga farmer Malcolm Reynolds first trialled Calf Xtreme with 3 to 4-week-old autumn-born calves fed 6 litres once a day. Within 4 days the grazing behaviour of these calves changed significantly compared to the control group. "They were up grazing grass and picking at meal within ½ an hour of getting their milk, whereas the other group was still lying down. It was a no-brainer to put the whole lot on Calf Xtreme."



Mid July born calves were 155kg Mid December.


Due to the positive results from milk flooding into the rumen, many farmers have switched to once-a-day feeding earlier. Stratford farmer John Weir previously fed his Friesian calves 2 litres of milk twice daily for 6 weeks. With Calf Xtreme, milk intake increased to 7-8 litres by day 10. These calves were weaned two weeks earlier, with post-weaning growth rates significantly improved. Heifer milk production

rose from 74% to 86%. For a herd producing 440kg MS/cow, this represents a 48kg increase in heifer milk production, a huge gain for adjusting the calf rearing system.

Even with twice-a-day feeding, benefits have been demonstrated when milk rates have been increased. At Zwiers farm in Tirau, Friesian calves have traditionally been fed 3 litres of milk twice daily since

2020, along with Calf Xtreme, resulting in the best heifers they'd ever raised. Heifer milk production, compared to that of mixed-age cows, had risen from 70% to 80%. Chris Collier from Probiotic Revolution advised splitting the daily 6-litre milk feed into 4 litres and 2 litres, adding Calf Xtreme to the 4-litre portion. The results were immediate, with Ashley Zwiers, who looks after the calves, being surprised by the sudden rise in meal consumption when the opposite result was expected. Within a week, the night feed was increased to 4 litres. The calves easily handled the increased milk volume and are growing better than ever.

Chris Collier's goal is to assist farmers in boosting growth rates of young calves, aiming for heifer milk production to reach 90% of mixed-age cow production. He emphasizes the importance of setting up the rumen for better digestion of hard feed before and after weaning, to calve heifers at heavier liveweights, resulting in significant increased heifer milk production.




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# Winners look to the future

By Claire Inkson  
 Claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz

Awarua farmers Cameron Smith and Nicole Hanning-Smith have been announced as the 2024 Dairy Industry Awards Southland/Otago Share Farmers of the Year.

The winners were announced at an awards dinner in Invercargill on March 27.

Andrew Hazlett was named the 2024 Southland/Otago Dairy Manager of the Year, and Shannon Butler was named the 2024 Southland/Otago Dairy Trainee of the Year.

Cameron Smith said the awards process has helped provide an in-depth understanding of their farming business.

"It helps you understand exactly where you are, and then you can take that advice and start planning and making decisions on where you want to go, not just next season but in five to fifteen years."

The couple are contract milkers for Steve and Tracy Henderson on their 215-hectare, 580-cow Awarua property. They won \$7900 in prizes and three merit awards.

Smith said the couple credits the Hendersons with helping them progress in their dairy farming careers.

"In the next ten or fifteen years, we want to lease a farm and have our own operation."

"We have had many good



Southland Otago Dairy Industry Award winners Shannon Butler, Nicole Hanning-Smith, Cameron Smith and Andrew Hazlett. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

mentors in the industry.

"Steve and Tracy are unreal people; they've helped us develop a lot, and we want to be able to give back and help someone else one day."

Smith said that with the winners' field day, held on April 10, out of the way, the couple will concentrate on preparing for the national finals by going over the judges' feedback.

"The awesome thing about the Dairy Industry Awards is that everyone is open to giving information and helping everyone succeed."

Smith said the awards had allowed him to connect with others

of the Year, is a farm assistant on Allan and Kaye Wilson's 200-hectare Invercargill property. She milks 600 cows and won \$6,950 in prizes and one merit award.

**2024 Southland/Otago Merit Awards:**

**Share Farmer Merit Awards:**

- DairyNZ – People and Culture Award : Hayden & Alienor Diack
- Ecolab Total Farm Hygiene Award : Hayden & Alienor Diack
- Federated Farmers Leadership Award : Oliver & Lauren Badcock
- Honda Farm Safety, Health and Biosecurity Award: Oliver & Lauren Badcock
- LIC – Animal Wellbeing, Recording and Productivity

Andrew Hazlett, who was named 2024 Southland/Otago Dairy Manager of the Year, won \$6,950 in prizes plus one merit award and is the farm manager on Paul and Rachel Diprose's 208-hectare, 570-cow Thornbury property.

Shannon Butler, who was named 2024 Southland Otago Dairy Trainee

- Award: Jerome Montes
- Meridian Environmental Sustainability Award: Cameron Smith & Nicole Hanning-Smith
- Ravensdown Sustainable Pasture Award: Cameron Smith & Nicole Hanning-Smith
- ASB Business Performance Award: Cameron Smith & Nicole Hanning-Smith
- McIntyre Dick Emerging Talent Award: George Mushchamp
- Dairy Manager Merit Awards:**
- DeLaval Livestock Management Award: Andrew Hazlett
- Fonterra Dairy Management Award: Regan Smith
- Landpro Environmental Sustainability Award: Jeremy Tyler
- Dairy Holdings Pasture & Feed Management Award: Dilpreet Singh
- AWS People & Leadership Award: Regan Smith
- CowManager Personal Planning & Financial Management Award: Dilpreet Singh
- Regional Ford Emerging Talent Award: Baljit Singh
- Dairy Trainee Merit Awards:**
- DairyNZ Practical Skills Award: Corey Hirst
- NZDIA Southland/Otago Emerging Talent Award: Erin Harland Christie
- FarmRight Farming Knowledge Award: Shannon Butler
- VetSouth Communication & Industry Involvement Award: Sharna Durry



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# South Island dairy farmer makes awards final

By Claire Inkson  
[Claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz](mailto:Claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz)

A South Island farmer has been named one of the four finalists in the prestigious Dairy Women's Network (DWN) Fonterra Dairy Woman of the Year Awards.

Myfanwy Alexander, originally from Wales, says being nominated for the award gave her a boost.

"The nomination is special in itself because that's people you know within the dairy industry giving you a big vote of confidence. And then to make the finals was amazing."

Alexander came to New Zealand 18 years ago to intern on a dairy farm. Despite having no background in farming, she had wanted to pursue a career in agriculture since she was eleven.

Despite facing a marriage break-up and having two children to raise alone, Alexander was determined to forge a dairy farming career.

"I was at the bottom of the world, away from my family and

support networks.

"I owe so much to this community; they have been amazing."

"I could have given up and thought things were too much against me, but I was lucky enough and worked hard enough to get a job where I could keep farming."

She has spent the last ten years contract milking in the Waitaki Valley on a 280-hectare, 920-cow farm.

Alexander has thrown herself into the dairy industry as a DWN regional leader in North Otago, president of North Otago Federated Farmers, and member of the South Island Dairy Event governance group.

She has recently started a farming podcast called Ag in Conversation.

Alexander said the DWN helps create a sense of community within the industry.

"They bring women together from all the different roles on a dairy farm and within the dairy industry, making them feel like they are part of a bigger team.

"Dairy farming can be quite isolating when you're feeding calves and running the farm. It can get lonely sometimes.

"So for me to be a finalist in Dairy Women of The Year Awards is like being part of this club that is DWN."

Alexander said that although she has sacrificed a lot to get where she is, she hopes her journey inspires other women to keep going through difficult times.

"You can't be what you can't see.

"It's a chance to show others that when you are at those difficult points in your life, you can make those tough choices, and if you work hard, you can reach your goals."

Amber Carpenter (Paparimu), Katrina Roberts (Waikato), and Michelle Ruddell (Whangarei) are other award finalists.

The Fonterra Dairy Woman of the Year award will be announced on Thursday, 2 May, at the Gala dinner of the DWN 2024 Conference "Enhance, Elevate, Evolve" in New Plymouth.



Myfanwy Alexander – to make the finals was amazing.

PHOTO: SUPPLIED

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