RURAL GUARDIAN

South Island wide

MAY 2025

TO EVERY FARM IN THE SOUTH ISLAND

The CORRIEDALE QUEEN

Pages 4-5

FROMTHEEDITOR

WITH Claire Inkson – OPINION

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Rural women need to be heard

Mother's Day is just around the corner — a time to celebrate motherhood and show appreciation. It's also a time to reflect.

For many women, motherhood is their greatest joy and toughest challenge.

But in the constant juggle of responsibilities, even our best efforts can leave us feeling like we're dropping a few plates.

Being a rural mum on a farm today differs from a generation ago.

Many of us were raised by mothers who were full-time homemakers, dividing their time between children, household duties, and community work.

Today's rural women are expected to do all of that — plus contribute financially, whether on the farm, off it, or both.

Rural schools, often a long drive away, are smaller and rely heavily on parents for fundraising, working bees, and classroom help.

There's an unspoken expectation that rural mothers will always be available — something urban schools don't demand to the same degree.

Balancing traditional roles with modern expectations is further complicated by geographical isolation and the weight of invisible emotional labour.

Isolation means fewer childcare options, limited access to mental health services, and fewer career paths.

Women who had professional careers before moving — or returning — to farms often put those careers on hold, only for them to disappear altogether under a pile of school lunches and dairy calves.

Those whose work is on-farm face different pressures: guilt over trying to farm with toddlers in tow or being forced to leave them at home unattended long before it is really safe to do so.

And when the farm gets busy, children can feel like an afterthought — not because they're unloved, but because their mothers are stretched impossibly thin.

Add to that the lack of peer support — no nearby coffee group, no gym class to decompress or vent — and it can be a lonely place.

The mental health struggles aren't always obvious.

Often, they're a slow accumulation: burnout, identity loss, the quiet ache of feeling unseen.

Rural mothers are project managers, emotional anchors, financial planners, and often unpaid contributors to farm businesses.

When times are tough on the farm, they are the sounding boards.

Their labour keeps both families and farms running — but it's rarely recognised in economic or political discussions.

We need better access to mental health care, flexible career pathways, and real childcare options.

And more than anything, we need a voice.

Yes, organisations are advocating for rural women.

But too many are siloed by sector or still rooted in cake stalls and knitting bees — more relatable to our mothers or grandmothers than us.

It's time to start truly listening to rural mothers.

It's time they were heard.

WANT TO WORK FROM HOME?

Love farming? A passion for agri-business? Looking for a flexible work-from-home job?

Rural Guardian needs you! We are growing, and we need keen salespeople throughout the South Island to be on the end of a phone, talking to businesses about how we can get their company in front of the 26,000 farms - and up to 100,00 readers - the Rural Guardian is delivered to each month.

See page 6 for more information.

Photo: Supplied.

Leaks. Fixes. Plumbing – ACL sorts it all

For over 30 years, Ashburton Contracting Limited (ACL) has found the leaks no one else could. And now, they're fixing them, too.

The trusted and respected local company, which has been serving the Ashburton community since 1995, is known for its full and pinpoint plumbing and repair services. From leak detection and drainage diagnostics, it's now launched a major expansion by becoming a full-service provider in plumbing and gas.

It's a bold move designed to meet a clear need. One call, one team, one streamlined fix.

"We saw clients needing a seamless transition from detection to repair without juggling multiple contractors," the company said.

"By bringing these new services in-house, we're simplifying the process, saving time, and ensuring the same high standards our clients already expect."

ACL will tell you that their expansion is about being proactive and building its reputation as the go-to company for plumbing, gas, and drainage work to keep homes and businesses running smoothly.

The expansion means ACL can now legally and expertly carry out on-site plumbing and gas repairs, handling everything from unblocking drains and fixing waste pipes to installing gas appliances and converting traditional hot water systems. All work is certified and safety focused.

Industry veteran Richard Begbie has also rejoined ACL to help lead the initiative, bringing experience and a deep understanding of the local market.

But while the focus is on general maintenance rather than new builds, the upgraded gear - like jetting equipment and inspection cameras - allows the team to quickly diagnose and resolve issues. So whether it's a hidden leak or a faulty water heater, ACL has got it all covered from start to finish.

India trade a ‘real opportunity’

Anisha Satya
REPORTER

Beef + Lamb New Zealand chairperson Kate Acland. PHOTO ANISHA SATYA

A Mid Canterbury-based agricultural spokesperson says New Zealand needs to keep its eye on the world’s fastest growing economy of India.

Mt Somers farmer and Beef +Lamb chairperson Kate Acland, knows the immense potential of strengthening ties with India.

“India’s set to become the world’s third largest economy in the next five years.

“They’ve got a growing middle class, and that provides a real opportunity for us there,” she said.

“Not just on the meat side, but pharmaceuticals, wool, leather pelts.

“There’s a real opportunity for [what] we call the 5th quarter of the animal.”

Consultation on how New Zealand should go about handling free trade talks with India have closed, but negotiations for the India-New Zealand FTA actually began 14 years ago.

Talks stalled in 2015 due to various challenges. Both countries have since sought to strengthen their economic partnership and the renewed negotiations are timely, given the current global trade landscape influenced by geopolitical tensions.

In the face of the United States’ volatile tariff situation, it was important New Zealand kept its trading options open, though we’ve always had good global market access, Acland said.

“Having more diversified market opportunities is a really good thing.

“We have a really wide range of high-value markets that we can send products to.”

Minister for Trade Todd McClay opened consultation back in March.

Prime Minister Christopher Luxon took 60 Kiwis, from business owners, Indian community leaders and politicians, to the country last month to build on the relationship.

A key goal for Luxon was to secure a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with India, something he pitched in his election campaign.

McClay said the Government wanted the views of the public to “better inform [them] in the early parts of this important negotiation”.

“Alongside trade agreement negotiations, New Zealand will continue to invest in stronger, deeper, more sustainable connections with India across all pillars of the relationship, including our political, defence and security, sporting, environmental, and people-to-people connections.”

New Zealand exports $718 million worth of goods to India, according to the ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT).

It listed forestry products as our biggest export to India last year at $126 million, $71 of that being logs.

Dairy made a decent cut, with $57 million, but didn’t pull numbers quite like iron and steel ($99 million) or horticulture ($89 million).

It was even beat out by wool exports, which was worth $77 million.

New Zealand also imports machinery and equipment ($174 million), textiles ($147 million) and pharmaceuticals, gems, vehicles and more from India currently.

But, solely in terms of New Zealand’s red meat sector, Acland knows that the Indian free trade talks mark a significant step forward because it presents an abundance of new opportunities for exporters.

Great-great-great grand-daugh

Claire Inkson
RURAL EDITOR

Pieta Sidey: "As my grandfather says, I'm very particular about my sheep."
PHOTO CLAIRE INKSON

At just 16 years old, Pieta Sidey is taking the corriedale sheep world by storm, carrying on a family legacy that stretches back six generations.

When James Little served as the first president of the Hawarden A&P Show in 1907, he likely never imagined his great-great-great-granddaughter would stand in the same show ring more than a century later – winning supreme champion with the very breed he helped develop.

"It was an incredibly emotional moment," Pieta said. "As my grandfather Doc put it, it's a moment I'll never forget."

Pieta walked away from the Hawarden show on March 15 with four trophies and four medals – the latest addition to an already impressive collection earned at A&P shows across the region over the past two years.

"It's pretty cool," she said. "I'm not really into sports, and I'd never won a medal for anything before I started showing sheep.

"So, it's awesome to win doing something I actually love."

In another proud moment, Pieta claimed her great-grandfather Harry Sidey's memorial trophy — and narrowly beat her own father, Andrew Sidey, who runs the family's corriedale and pole dorset stud near Masons Flat, Hawarden.

"One of my trophies was for most points in the corriedale section – I beat my dad by one point," Pieta said with a proud smile.

Her journey into sheep breeding began during the Covid lockdowns, when she bought four corriedale two-tooths from her father and founded her own stud, Mallochvale. She first stepped into the show ring in 2023.

"You've got to start somewhere," she said. "I didn't do too well that first year, but it takes time to make good sheep."

Pieta is a strong advocate for the corriedale breed, which was developed to offer the best of both worlds – meat and wool.

"Corriedales are a great breed because they do both jobs," she said. "They might not be as meaty as a pole dorset or a texel, but they produce quality wool and are meaty."

She's meticulous about ensuring her breeding line upholds that balance.

"Some sheep can have amazing wool but aren't so great body meatwise.

"You want both, and that can be difficult, because some sheep are better at one over the other."

Pieta said her sheep must have good feet and hold themselves well.

"If a sheep stands pathetically and doesn't look proud, they just don't look great."

Pieta also insists on clean, white faces and ears.

"No black dots."

"As my grandfather says, I'm very particular about my sheep."

Mallochvale Stud has now grown to include four rams and about 25 ewes. Word about her flock is

ter carries on with corriedales

Left – A proud moment for the Sidey family as Pieta takes top honours at the Hawarden A&P show. From left: Harry, Pieta, Andrew and Doc Sidey. PHOTO SUPPLIED

Right – Pieta Sidey with her award-winning ram Caesar. PHOTO SUPPLIED

Below – At just 16, Pieta Sidey is already gaining a reputation for the high standards of corriedale sheep she breeds. PHOTO CLAIRE INKSON

spreading – with interest even coming from as far as Peru – and she's determined to build on that.

She hopes to one day match the success of Glenovis, the stud once run by her grandfather Doc and now managed by her father.

"I want Mallochvale to stand on its own," she said. "I want to build my own reputation."

Pietas says her family is her support crew.

Her biggest role models are her grandparents and parents.

"They've taught me so much – and not just about sheep," she said.

Pieta says her mum is her sounding board.

"She is constantly in my corner supporting me and giving me business advice."

Pieta's grandfather Doc cares for the flock while she boards at Rangi Ruru Girls' School in Christchurch and helps with getting her sheep to shows.

She credits her paternal grandmother Jan with teaching her confidence and resilience.

"Granny Jan always said 'when it came to horses: don't take any crap – you're the one in charge'. She taught me those skills apply to people too. You're your own person."

Her maternal grandmother Jean lives in Christchurch, and when she can't attend shows in person, will video call Pieta so she can see her sheep and the placings they have received.

For other young people dreaming of starting their own stud, Pieta has straightforward advice:

"If you're going to be a dreamer, you'd better be a doer. Grand plans mean nothing if you don't act on them."

A high-flying salute for Anzac

Claire Inkson

A rough, grassy landing strip in the middle of a sheep farm might seem like an unusual setting for an Anzac Day ceremony, but this year's commemoration at Rangitata Island marked a special milestone: the 10th year the Brodie family had hosted the aviation-themed event.

While previous years have seen the ceremony take place at the tail end of dry summers — when the strip resembled more of a dust bowl — this year was a stark contrast.

A wetter-than-usual season meant an overgrown field, according to farm and aerodrome owner Russell Brodie.

"It's definitely a grassroots event today," he said.

"Too much grass — I was still mowing the strip this morning."

The Brodie family's connection to Anzac Day is deeply personal.

Both of Russell's grandfathers served in World War One.

His paternal grandfather Ross Brodie earned his pilot's licence in 1917 and flew with the Royal Flying Corps.

"I'd like to think both of my grandfather would be proud," Brodie said.

"Both of their names were read out on the honour roll today."

Organised by the Geraldine RSA, the event drew around 200 attendees, with aircraft flying in from across the South Island to take part.

The ceremony was led by aviation historian and chaplain Reverend Richard Waugh, and featured readings from Geraldine High School students.

Retired Rear Admiral Jack Steer delivered the keynote address.

The service concluded with a moving rendition of The Last Post, a cannon salute, and the traditional laying of wreaths and poppies at the Rangitata Island war memorial.

Following the ceremony, guests gathered outside the aerodrome's museum for afternoon tea.

While hosting such an event takes considerable effort, for Brodie, it's more than worth it.

"I love history," he said.

"If we forget where we come from, then we aren't wise enough going into the future."

> **"If we forget where we come from, then we aren't wise enough going into the future**

Left – Lily, Russell Brodie's 1942 Tiger Moth, is parked by the ceremony after completing a flyover of Geraldine earlier that day.

Below – Farmer and Rangiatata Island Aerodrome owner Russell Brodie has strong connections to Anzac Day, with both grandfathers serving in the war.

PHOTOS CLAIRE INKSON

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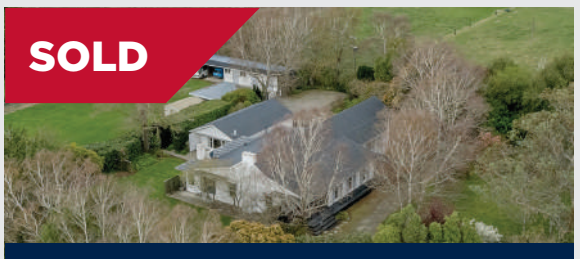

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With an increased level of interest, most noticeably in the dairy sector, I have buyers actively looking for new opportunities.

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High hopes for hemp in Mid Canty

Kate Paterson
REPORTER

Government officials and politicians visited some of Ashburton's industrial hemp [iHemp] growers and processors as they consider changing regulations that could boost the Mid Canterbury economy.

The visit provided an opportunity to see iHemp production in person and apply that knowledge to the upcoming regulatory review.

Hemp New Zealand business development manager Nigel Hosking said the regulation changes could mean positive economic growth for Mid Canterbury.

"We're definitely in the right place for infrastructure, growing, agronomy is here, we've got nice flat straight roads to bring things in for processing," Hosking said.

"It's all here, we've got dryers, we've got people that understand growing the crop, good quality genetics, and that gives us a good broad option to scale."

The current regulations on iHemp are a burden for the industry, blocking opportunities for growth he said.

"We're dealing with low THC [tetrahydrocannabinol] industrial hemp. We shouldn't be under the [Ministry of Health]. We should be under [Ministry for Primary Industries]," Hosking said.

Hemp is a type of cannabis crop which is a multipurpose resource that can be used for its health benefits, or used as a fibre in clothing and industrial materials.

Hemp has 0.3% or less THC present, so it does not contain enough THC to produce the 'high' effect that marijuana does. Hosking said it is still heavily regulated as a controlled drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act, creating barriers for the industry.

In 2018, regulation changes made it legal to sell hemp products for human consumption, but changes to the Agricultural Compounds and Veterinary Medicines Act mean hemp products are only legal to be sold for animal consumption if they contain no detectable THC.

Left – Nigel Hosking led MPs through the processing of iHemp at Hemp New Zealand's manufacturing plant in Ashburton.
PHOTOS ASHBURTON GUARDIAN

Left below – National MP for Northland Grant McCallum (middle) flew all the way to Canterbury to learn about iHemp growing and production.

"What triggers the misuse of drugs act in New Zealand is one molecule of THC, and that's where they said you can't feed anything that's got THC in it to animals," Hosking said.

"They said it's got to be zero, and no laboratory can test down to zero.

"There is a level of detection in laboratories, and we can't actually test down to 0.00, so that's where there is a challenge."

Before the regulation changes in 2018, hemp products were being used in New Zealand as animal feed or supplements.

"It is dense nutrition, it contains vitamins, minerals, amino acids, protein, and healthy fats," Hosking said.

"A lot of hemp seed oil and hemp seed meal was going out to the equine market in New Zealand.

"People were buying it for their own use for dogs, for goats that made homemade cheeses, people were feeding it to sheep, pigs, chickens, you name it.

"It was mainly for lifestyle blocks and people with horses that were just using them to get good condition, healthy animals."

With restraints on how it can be produced and sold within New Zealand, manufacturers are forced to export iHemp products overseas he said.

"Because we're not getting the pull from the market, we have to move that," Hosking said.

"A lot of that is being exported into the Australian market and going into some of those domestic uses over there.

"Which is a shame because we really want to capture the value in New Zealand.

"Maybe someone might pick up some products and put them into supplementary feeds, or dog nutrition, or equine product as an additive or ingredient as well, once we're allowed to sell legally for animal feeds in New Zealand."

Hosking said relieving some of the burdens from the industry could be a big economic boost for Mid Canterbury.

"The infrastructure for hemp seed production is Mid Canterbury, all the infrastructure is here, and we've got a lot of arable growers that understand it.

"The farm gate price needs to be good for those guys to grow that crop because without the growers, we don't have an industry.

"That's really important is going back and getting the farmers on the journey to ensure their part of it, and they get the gross margin returns that they need to grow that crop.

"They need to get away from the commodity market because we can't compete internationally with commodities.

"If we can get the grain yields up per hectare, we can pay the grower the right money per hectare what they require, and then our raw material, our grain price becomes more competitive for us to get it into more mainstream products and ingredients."

"That creates jobs, which is what we need, and export opportunities for the district as well."

15 years of groundbreaking ag

Claire Inkson

Precision Agriculture (PA) solutions provider Vantage is celebrating 15 years in business this year.

Since 2010, the company has been demystifying PA for New Zealand farmers and connecting farmers with the right systems for their farms to deliver the best results.

The idea for the business began when Jemma Mulvihill, inspired by her time studying in the United States, saw firsthand the benefits American farmers were reaping from PA technologies.

Upon returning to New Zealand, she and her father, Craige Mackenzie, began testing various PA systems on their family farm near Methven.

"Dad was doing his Nuffield Scholarship at the time, so we both had our eyes open to different things.

"We came home and implemented some of these systems on our farm to see if they made a difference."

Mulvihill found that the systems they trialled showed positive results.

"There were lots of gains made, mostly in terms of productivity and profitability."

This success led to the launch of Agri Optics in 2010, which was later rebranded to Vantage NZ in 2020.

Back in 2010, PA was in its infancy, and convincing farmers to give new technology a go was a challenge at first.

"People were very sceptical,

Kiwi farmers are more aware and open to precision agriculture than ever before. PHOTO SUPPLIED

but it helped with us using the technology on our farm, how we were using it, being able to show first-hand the financial gains it was making and the steps to get there."

Fast forward to 2025, and while farmers are more aware and open to PA than ever before, more understanding is still needed on the return on investment.

"That's our ongoing challenge, to showcase and educate the different ways across the country that our customers are using precision ag to make a real difference to their farms.

"It can seem really costly, but it doesn't have to be."

While the technology may seem complex, the concept itself is simple.

"It's all about putting the right thing in the right place at the right time," Mulvihill said.

Vantage offers a wide range of PA systems, including guidance and steering systems, various mapping services, data collection and analysis, and flow and application control systems for fertilisers, seed, and pesticides and much more.

They also provide tools to monitor soil health, such as soil moisture sensors and systems to measure soil variability.

Through variable-rate mapping, Vantage optimises input applications like seeding, fertilisation, and irrigation by adjusting to the specific conditions of each field.

"We do a large amount of Ravensdown's and Ballance's variable rate work across the country.

"We had those key partnerships in the early stages, and they continue."

As the technology landscape evolves rapidly, Vantage remains committed to evaluating the latest innovations and determining which are truly worth adopting.

"Everyone has the latest and greatest thing.

"What we take pride in is validating the new tools and techniques that are out there and how they can make a difference on farm."

Mulvihill said Vantage only offers PA that delivers value, a challenge in what Mulvihill describes as a "noisy" market.

"We need technology, we need development, but it also has to have a strong return on investment because farmers can't afford to make mistakes."

Looking ahead, Mulvihill sees sensing technologies and Artificial Intelligence (AI) as the next big frontier for PA.

"AI holds enormous potential in areas like imagery, data analysis, and integration.

"It's getting better all the time."

Mulvihill, who was just 22 when she founded the business, said she is most proud of the impact Vantage has had on the efficiency of New Zealand agriculture over the last 15 years and the relationships they have built along the way.

"Our team of people love finding solutions for New Zealand farmers."

About Precision Agriculture

Precision Agriculture (PA) is an approach to farming that uses advanced technology and data analysis to optimise farming practices.

By precisely applying resources — like water, fertilisers, pesticides, and labour — based on real-time data, PA improves productivity and reduces waste, driving greater efficiency and sustainability on the farm.

Verity™

Biodiversity for Profit

Written by Maria Captein, Field Technician for Verity NZ based in Methven.

Thinking of implementing a large-scale biodiversity project? Would you like to gain carbon credit income and have the up-front implementation costs covered? Our projects restore biodiversity on your farm and in your catchment, creating local jobs and supporting farm succession for those passionate about conservation and sustainability.

Did you know you can get carbon credits for natural regeneration of tussock grassland, matagouri scrub and soil carbon sequestration? Even uncommon regenerative agricultural practices (if less than 20% of people across your district are doing these practices) that improve soil carbon levels can gain carbon credit income.

Verity NZ partners with farmers to design, register, implement and monitor carbon credit and co-benefit projects across New Zealand. **We pay for all up-front costs** to get your project off the ground, including fencing, aerial seeding with native seeds, and pest control. We recover our costs once the project starts to generate credit income. We use our unique investor funding model and the Voluntary Carbon Market (VCM) to achieve this.

Your questions answered

These past few weeks we have been enjoying meeting and talking with many interested farmers at the recent Central Districts Field Days and the South Island Agricultural Field Days - thank you to all who stopped by our stall at these events.

Verity NZ are proudly 'for profit'. We are a business who look to get the best returns for both you and for us as a partner in your project.

Two common themes arise when we talk to farmers about what Verity NZ does - "it seems too good to be true" and "how is it different from the ETS"?

It seems too good to be true - what are the risks?

Slower carbon sequestration. Natives do not sequester carbon as quickly as faster-growing exotics. Carbon credit returns are lower than with exotics but our projects bring about meaningful restoration to the land. People who partner with us are in it for the long-term, with projects often lasting 60 years or longer. Ideal project areas include marginal farmland that currently brings low returns through conventional farming methods, where carbon credit income can improve your returns and restore biodiversity at the same time.

The quicker we can get the larger native species to establish - the climax species like beech and tōtara - the greater the carbon credit revenue. We use techniques like aerial seeding with native seeds and native seedling planting to speed up the natural regeneration process. While all carbon is accounted for during the vegetation growth phases, larger woody trees will sequester more carbon and generate more revenue for you.

Adverse events. Landslides, wildfires and cyclone damage are legitimate risks for many farms around New Zealand. What happens to carbon credit income when a natural disaster takes out some of the newly regenerated bush on your land? Carbon credits are calculated based on the difference in carbon stored by the vegetation or soil over a two year period. This is based on monitoring such as soil sampling, vegetation sampling and remote sensing using LiDAR and satellites to assess growth. In the event of a natural disaster, you will get a negative carbon growth for that two year period. You will receive no carbon credit income until the carbon stored reaches and exceeds the original point before the loss. While there will be no revenue in carbon credits over that period, there is **no liability** on the landowner in the event of carbon loss. This is very different from the ETS, where landowners are liable for carbon loss.

Matagouri/grey scrub often grows taller than 5m, but it is currently excluded from carbon crediting under the ETS. With the Voluntary Carbon Market (VCM), native woody vegetation of any height can earn carbon credits. Verity NZ specialise in native restoration projects.

Legal Protection. The project gets registered as a Covenant on the legal title for the land. Verity NZ arranges for this to be done. This means that for the life of the project (typically 60 years), the owner of that land cannot reverse the practices in place such as stock exclusion and allowing the natives to regenerate. The Covenant will clearly state what you can and can't do with the land that is in the carbon project.

No double counting or switching schemes. Double counting is where you are claiming carbon credits on that piece of land for more than one scheme (e.g. under both the ETS and the VCM). You can only be in one scheme for the duration of the project. You also cannot change that parcel of land to another carbon accounting method during the project lifetime (e.g. switch it to the ETS).

What are the benefits?

Native regeneration restores the land to its original condition and promotes biodiversity on your farm and in your catchment. We work with you to understand your specific conservation and biodiversity restoration goals and tailor the project around this. You may be able to gain a premium for your credits if they support rare or threatened species and ecosystems.

All vegetation can be included (other than invasive weeds). This includes tussock, scrub, low trees and tall tree species. If it grows, it will sequester carbon and we can include it in our measurements for carbon crediting.

These projects create employment opportunities for your local community for pest control, seed collection and potentially tree planting. These co-benefits mean investors will pay a premium to invest in the credits generated from your project.

How is it different from the ETS?

Native regeneration doesn't necessarily mean stock exclusion. Verity NZ are a strong believer of using intermittent grazing to support native seed establishment, where appropriate. This is called the 'hoof and tooth method', whereby livestock - usually sheep or youngstock - are introduced to regenerating areas after aerial seeding to press seed into the ground and graze to allow more light to penetrate through the sward. Stock must be carefully managed to ensure they are removed before they begin to browse on young seedlings.

There are no tree height or canopy width restrictions, as long as the project area is a minimum of one hectare (contiguous). Shrubs, tussocks, grasses and soil carbon can be included for carbon crediting.

Supporting Farm Succession

A long-term passive carbon crediting project can be a good option for farmers thinking about setting their farm up for the next generation. Marginal land generating very low returns from conventional farming methods is a great candidate for natural regeneration (either regenerating on its own with existing native seed sources in the ground, or through assisted regeneration with aerial seeding of native seeds or in some cases planting with native seedlings). This involves a change of mindset - from farming livestock to farming carbon - and stewarding that marginal land towards native regeneration.

Ongoing pest control and some weed control will likely be needed to successfully farm your marginal land for carbon credits from native regeneration.

Verity NZ arranges for the registration, validation and verification, monitoring, trading and reporting requirements for your carbon project for the entire duration. We partner with you to provide ongoing support and technical expertise to achieve your conservation aims.

We work closely with catchment groups to bring like-minded farmers together and create multiple projects at catchment-scale, this enhances biodiversity corridors and adds ecological value to the entire catchment.

Give us a call!

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 and planting projects to increase biodiversity, leave behind a positive legacy and steward the land for the future. We can discuss your goals for native regeneration and conservation, how we assess your land for eligibility and our funding models. Verity NZ is the genuine one-stop-shop, seed-to-credit company who will deliver for you.

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 Eskview Young Farmer Emma Ractliffe

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

I've been a member of the Eskview Young Farmers Club since November 2024.

Prior to that I was a part of Massey Young Farmers Club for four years between 2018 and 2021, vice chairperson 2020 and chairperson 2021 – absolutely loved the keenness of the members, so that started and cemented my love for Young Farmers.

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?

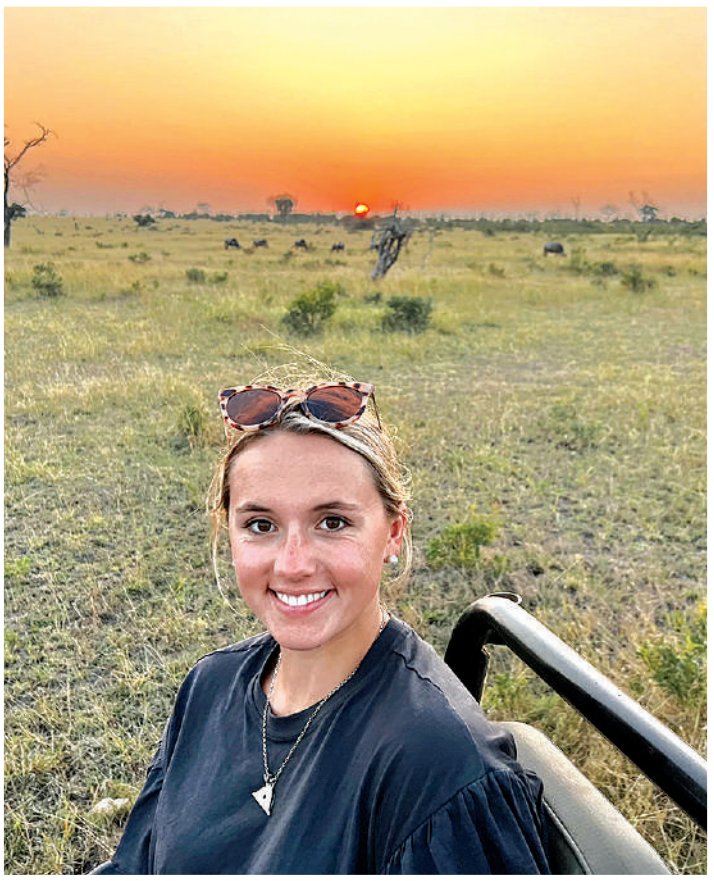
When I first joined Eskview, we had a modest total of five members signed up.

Since then, the club has massively grown to 32, and hopefully still growing!

I just really enjoy connecting people, getting like-minded people together, talking about things they enjoy, the industry and lifestyle we enjoy and holding events that everybody is keen to get behind. It's been great getting the club going again in a region that so many young people flock to.

3 How did you become involved in agriculture?

I grew up on a sheep and beef farm in Kimbolton, Manawatu, and absolutely adored the work, the rural lifestyle and spending time with good genuine country people.



Left – Eskview Young Farmer Emma Ractliffe. PHOTO SUPPLIED

I studied agricultural science at Massey following school, and became involved in the red meat industry after that.

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

I am currently the regulatory manager at Progressive Meats in Hastings. In the role, I am responsible for all things regulatory, or anything with legislation behind it, so food safety, market access and export compliance, health and safety, environment and sustainability, also things like building warrant of fitness, trade waste and resource consents.

I started off in a medium-sized lamb and bobby site in Invercargill, Blue Sky Meats, on the management intern programme there.

It was fantastic being able to learn all functions of a red meat processor, from the farm gate through to export markets and consumers, and to be able to see and develop understanding of the whole process start to finish.

I came into a compliance role there, and valued the opportunity to understand and develop skills in balancing compliance demands in a commercial environment.

An incredible opportunity then came up at Finegand in Balclutha, with Silver Fern Farms, which with its significant beef operation allowed me to apply the smaller site knowledge to one of the largest sites in the country by lamb equivalents.

I've been very fortunate to have incredible role models and teachers within the industry, and especially lucky to be surrounded and supported by strong female leaders.

5 What do you think the future of farming will look like, and what would like to see happening in New Zealand agriculture going forward?

The continuation of the farming industry I believe will depend strongly on innovation, taking the best of what we've learnt but re-imagining the way we do things.

I think farming will begin to look more heavily to precision tools and technology to drive efficiency, and I believe there will be an increased need to diversify and drive sustainable practices for our continued success.

6 What are your future plans?

I'd love to get back on the farm eventually, but I am loving what I'm doing at the moment.

There's an incredible vision for the next 30 years developing currently within our industry, all around adapting around current constraints in the procurement game, increasing efficiency within processing and continuing to develop our markets, all while meeting our regulatory and ethical requirements. I'm excited to be a part of it.

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

My grandfather is an enormous inspiration to me.

He was the one who shared his love of the land with me when I was young and really grew my passion for the lifestyle. He taught me that hard work will get you places and I owe a lot to him.

Winemakers go back to ancient

Claire Inkson

Natural wine once carried a slightly murky reputation, with bottles that appeared unfinished or laden with sediment — hard to appreciate for those unaccustomed to the style.

Now enjoying a surge in popularity with wine aficionados, it could be easy to dismiss these wines as a fleeting trend, served only at pretentious restaurants alongside minuscule portions of something often foraged.

But this couldn't be further from the truth.

Natural winemaking is far from new.

Rooted in a low-intervention philosophy that stretches back thousands of years, it's shaped by the landscape and environment in which it's produced.

In the heartland of the North Canterbury wine region, two winemakers are challenging perceptions of natural wine and bringing these adventurous, unpredictable wines to the everyday glass.

James Opie of Bryterlater Wines and David Collins of 15 Minute Bottles have partnered in a shared winery in Waipara.

Their labels are distinct and individual, and then there is their collaborative venture, Matter of Time Wines, which aims for a broader, more mainstream market.

"We want to make wines that a 65-year-old uncle can drink with his nephew — wines that break boundaries, wines with concentration but with fun and playful natures as well," Opie said.

Natural wines are often unfiltered and unrefined, and the grapes are grown biodynamically and organically. He did say though that it's difficult to source certified organic fruit due to its limited availability.

"We would love to only work with certified organic fruit in the future, but at this point, we need to be practical," Opie said.

Grapes for their three labels come from local Waipara growers, including Haydon Good, Sam Bedford, and Matt Barbour, and from the Luxton Vineyard near Oxford as well as some from Central Otago.

A region's unique terroir plays a major role in shaping the wine's character.

"Waipara is especially great for growing white varieties," Collins said. "It offers such a balance in the wine. The minerality from a diverse terroir — river gravel and hillside clay — isn't just one soil type."

Opie explains that the pair's relationship with growers often influences the wine concept before the harvest.

"You have to know what kind of wine you want to make in September or February, even though you're not picking until March.

"We closely monitor the process and only intervene when necessary."

Natural winemaking is a "slower way of doing things", Opie said.

"It requires patience in the vineyard and patience in the winery."

"But we don't have the same tools in our toolkit as we would if we were making conventional wine."

That adds another layer of challenge in wetter, cooler vintages.

"That's what we are dealing with at the moment.

"The fruit isn't getting ripe at the rate we would like it to, but the acid is also dropping, so we are trying to find a balance in our picking decision."

roots of natural fermentation

Far left – James Opie (left) and David Collins test the progress of a wine in their Waipara winery

Left – Townes the golden retriever is part of the furniture at the winery.

Right – The three labels produced in the winery: Bryterlater, Matter of Time and 15 Bottles.

Right below – Grapes are sourced from the Waipara Valley, Oxford and North Otago.

PHOTOS CLAIRE INKSON

Opie founded Bryterlater Wines in 2019 and offers a range of 11 natural wines, including pinot noir, sauvignon blanc, and riesling.

These include an orange wine made from a pinot blanc blend, fermented on skins in an amphora, giving it a sunset blush colour, and two naturally sparkling petillant naturel (pet-nat) wines.

Collins' 15 Minute Bottles label, founded in 2021, includes nine energetic varieties, such as a pinot noir pet-nat, skin-fermented riesling, and rosé.

Their collaborative project, Matter of Time Wines, follows the same low-intervention methods as their other labels but is priced lower, aiming for everyday drinking rather than just high-end wine enthusiasts.

The natural winemaking process is preservative-free, with only a tiny amount of sulphur added at bottling.

This demands a clean, sterile winemaking environment, as each winery's unique microbiology plays a key role.

Natural wines rely on wild or indigenous yeasts for fermentation, allowing the local environment to shape the wine's flavour and character.

"We have to ensure there are no outside influences in the winery, and even the winery itself is a big influence," Opie said. "But everything seems to be fermenting really well this year."

New IrrigationNZ chief executive Karen Williams says we need to be smarter when it comes to capturing and storing water. PHOTO SUPPLIED

‘No silver bullet in drying climate’

Claire Inkson

New IrrigationNZ chief executive Karen Williams says that Ashburton is a shining example of how access to water can lift a district’s economy.

“It’s a thriving community.

“I see what could be for other rural communities with the addition of water and associated infrastructure, and the industry and commerce that goes with that.”

Williams said it’s essential to look at the impact of water access in agriculture from a national perspective, saying, “A rising tide raises all ships.”

“We want good social outcomes and happy people who want to stay in New Zealand.

“We want New Zealand to be doing well, producing good food and fibre and having sustainable rural communities right across the country.”

Williams, who farms in Wairarapa with husband Mick, took over the position from Stephen McNally on February 24 after a role with FMG as national client propositions manager.

Williams served as Federated Farmer’s national vice president and board member between 2020 and 2022.

She also served as national arable industry group chairperson for the organisation for two years and has a background in resource management.

Williams said that although IrrigationNZ is based in Wellington to be close to the ears of the powers that be in parliament and related organisations, she is keen to hit the road and connect with irrigation scheme providers and farmers in the south.

“I’m keen to understand the South Island’s challenges; we are a national organisation.

“We need to be getting out and about in the provinces, working with established schemes, advocating for their continuation, and also having those conversations for new development sites.”

Water storage remains the biggest challenge and opportunity for the sector in New Zealand, as the climate continues to be drier on average.

Willimas recently attended a webinar with National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (Niwa) scientist Andrew Tait, where he reiterated that eastern parts of the South Island would be predominantly drier – although surprisingly not necessarily in summer.

“He did say summer wasn’t going to change much in terms of drought, but we are going to see changes in spring, autumn and winter.”

Williams said the realities of climate change mean we need to be smarter about capturing and storing water.

“We live in the land of milk and honey.

“New Zealand is really blessed compared to other countries.

“We do have plentiful water; we just don’t capture that much of it.”

Looking at what has worked across the Tasman with water storage could help New Zealand address project challenges on home soil, especially in Tasmania, which Williams describes as “a real success story”.

The outgoing chief executive of Tasmania Irrigation Limited, Andrew Kneebone, will be visiting New Zealand in June for the Primary Industry Summit in Christchurch, and Williams hopes to gain some insight from his experience in Tasmania.

“I’m hoping to unpack his expertise around how they developed so many water storage projects, what the magic formula was in that, and how all the parties worked together.

“We do have good domestic insights, too, but it’s good to learn from others as well.”

Williams said more government support is needed for new projects, especially with seed funding, as despite the tenacity of local individuals, projects often fall over before they can attract capital investment.

“We need the likes of what we are seeing with the Regional Infrastructure Fund to enable these projects to be assessed and considered with community input to determine the best option going forward.”

Water storage is just part of the solution to New Zealand’s water resilience.

Technology that improves water use efficiency will play a large part.

“If we don’t need to use as much water because we are using it in a more efficient way, that’s game-changing.

“There’s no silver bullet in a drying climate.

“It’s going to be lots of little things added together that will make a collective impact.”

IrrigationNZ is a voluntary-membership, not-for-profit organisation representing over 4500 members, including irrigation schemes, individual irrigators, and the irrigation service sector.

Will signs off

Above – Will Wright is retiring from the Mid Canterbury Catchment Collective Board. PHOTOS SUPPLIED
Left – Ashburton Forks Catchment Group facilitator Will Wright demonstrating various trapping methods, including the AT220 fully automatic self-resetting possum and rat trap.

JANINE HOLLAND

Will Wright had just got used to wearing two hats in the Mid Canterbury Catchment Collective (MCCC).

But a change of career means the local environmental advisor has had to retire from one; his role as a founding member of the three-year-old MCCC board.

The collective is the umbrella organisation providing support and resources to 10 catchment groups in the district.

Reflecting on his departure, Wright said it was an inaugural governance role that challenged and inspired him.

"It's been a really neat opportunity (to be on the board) and I've actually learnt a great deal, especially around interactions with people.

It's been a pleasure to be involved with MCCC and I've really enjoyed watching the catchment groups proliferate."

Heading back to farming, Wright remains facilitator for the Ashburton Forks Catchment Group.

He describes them as a passionate bunch who inspire, mentioning in particular the late Chris Allen, founding co-chairperson.

"Being able to work with farmers in a way that is ground up, farmer led and doing it for them and the right reasons to help them forge their own pathway is bloody rewarding. I just love it."

The Ashburton Forks catchment group is two years old.

By working together the 30 or so landowners have been able to eradicate pests, collect data to share amongst themselves about biodiversity and water quality within their patch, and come up with a future vision where they feel enabled to do more themselves to look after their environment.

Turning back to the bigger picture, Wright said local catchment group momentum is not without its challenges.

"I really genuinely hope that these groups carry on.

"The co-ordinated approach is so important. Groups will have to work out what way, shape or form works for them.

"Some may go back to being committees and others may decide they still need facilitators. The reality is people are going to have to put in a bit more skin in the game if they want catchment group work to continue."

He thanks the Mid Canterbury Catchement Collective (MCCC) for giving him his first governance opportunity and says learning from colleagues around the board table has been a highlight.

"I appreciate the time and mentorship experienced folk have given me over the years.

"It's been great to get to know everyone and work with them," Wright said.

After growing up on a Sheffield sheep and beef/arable farm, Wright says returning to his roots feels right.

Through MCCC and work, he's been circling agriculture since he left university.

"I've been talking to people about farming for a long time but not physically doing the doing."

Janine Holland is a facilitator for the Mid Canterbury Catchment Collective.

Catchment groups get a check-in

ANISHA SATYA

Aotearoa New Zealand Catchment Communities (ANZCC) chairperson Ben Ensor, PHOTO ANISHA SATYA

It's been rough waters for catchment groups across the country.

The recently-created Aotearoa New Zealand Catchment Communities (ANZCC) have been travelling the South Island to meet with local groups and update them on what's happening at a national level.

Chairperson Ben Ensor, a sheep and beef farmer from Cheviot, said the meetings he's had have gone well so far.

He'd met with a group in Alexanda for the Otago region, and met with Southland teams in Invercargill.

"And we'll be in the North Island [this] week."

The group represents 212 catchment teams nationwide, acting as their voice at a government and industry level.

It's just over a year old and was born out of a necessity to organise, Ensor said.

"There's been an amazing growth of catchment groups in this country, as you've seen in Mid Canterbury too."

"With that, there was no collective way for those groups to communicate, and it's very difficult for even the government or other stakeholders to talk to them."

He said a large number of new catchment groups have been kickstarted with government money - things like the Jobs for Nature fund come to mind - and a lot of those funding pools are coming to an end.

For the short period of time they've been operational for, Ensor said good progress has been made.

Mid Canterbury is home to ten catchment groups, with the newest of the lot being the Greenstreet crew who formed after their council battles that led their creek to run dry.

We have a regional body, the Mid Canterbury Catchment Collective [MCCC] who was created for similar reasons to the ANCC - to share knowledge and resources, and pitch for regional funding.

What are catchment groups?

Catchment groups are teams of people, often farmers and landowners, who work to improve the health of the land they're on - whether that's bettering river water quality, or increasing the diversity of plants and animals around them.

These groups replant waterways with native bush, test rivers for nitrates and put up pest fencing at their own expense.

"Catchment groups do two things," Ensor said; " they help farmers understand the effect they have on the environment, and give them tools to address that.

"And they do it in a way that's non-threatening and gets people on board."

Ensor said farmers have always worked to better the land in some way.

But with an increase in regulations and monitoring bodies, catchment groups also help to break down what the rules mean when applied to the real world.

"It's a pity we sometimes don't have a good understanding between urban and rural, but generally, when you all get around those meeting tables, everyone wants the same thing.

"They might have different perceptions on how we get there,and how fast we should get there, but the direction's not hard to agree on.

"That's part of our challenge, is to help communicate that."

Using eDNA to get clear picture

MEGAN FITZGERALD

Members of the Whitcombe Landcare Group are developing a clearer picture of the biodiversity supported by the streams flowing into the Rakaia River.

The Whitcombe Landcare Group, located on the south of the Rakaia and Mathias rivers, has historical records going back 30-plus years that show the water quality, nitrates and phosphorus levels are very low and with discussion from experts, the next step is to understand the ecosystem services the streams in the catchment provide.

Understanding the ecosystem helps us understand the whole system – it is not just about nitrates or phosphorus, instead it is about the living creatures dependent on the bodies of water.

With relatively new technology becoming more accessible the Whitcombe Landcare Group, with the support of Mid-Canterbury Catchment Collective, has made an investment into eDNA (environmental DNA) testing to help establish a baseline of biodiversity supported by the major streams on the south side of the Rakaia and Mathias River.

eDNA measures tiny traces of DNA floating in a stream. The process involves filtering up to 1 litre of water through an ultra-fine filter, which is then preserved and sent to a laboratory for analysis.

The results show what DNA is present in the stream including fish, mammals, plants, clams, microbes etc.

The Whitcombe Landcare Group members take a break during a working bee. PHOTO SUPPLIED

Anything that uses the water constantly sheds DNA into it. The eDNA tool is sensitive enough to capture and preserve DNA suspended in water for two kilometers after it has been shed into the water.

It is a powerful tool to assess presence or absence of things that live in and around the stream.

For example, it could show that possums are using this stream, or that Canterbury galaxiids are present, maybe even lamprey or mudfish.

These rarer species stand to benefit hugely as establishing their presence through traditional means can be time consuming and costly.

If we suspect they are present by eDNA, more targeted investigation can be carried out and measures can be taken to support their habitat in that area.

With this knowledge, catchment members are able to make informed decisions about where resources can be used to protect the streams biodiversity and therefore the ecosystem it supports.

The Whitcombe Landcare Group also plans to use eDNA results to establish a baseline of biodiversity in the catchments waterways.

This will help track the impact of on-farm practices and activities by other key users of the area – such as hunters, fishers, Te Araroa walkers, and 4x4 drivers.

By monitoring these changes over time, the group can identify trends, support proactive environmental management, and seek assistance when needed.

If you are interested in testing streams on your property, get in touch with your closest catchment group or speak with Angela Cushnie, Mid Canterbury Catchment Collective Co-ordinator, on angelacushnie@outlook.com

Megan Fitzgerald is the Whitcombe Landcare Group facilitator.

Firefighter keeps it in the family

CLAIRE INKSON

Above – Also participating in the parade will be a rare 1964 Land Rover FT6.
Left – The centennial will include an open day, where locals can explore the station and trucks.
PHOTOS CLAIRE INKSON

"It would be ridiculous if Methven had a fire and could not cope with it for want of appliances and with hydrants at their doors," declared Mr G. Hillier at a meeting of the Ashburton Borough Council in May, 1925.

The following month, a meeting at the Mt Hutt Road Board led to a unanimous decision to establish the Methven Volunteer Fire Brigade, with firefighting equipment initially provided on loan from the Ashburton Brigade.

The site for the first station was donated by Mr J. McD. Anderson, the great-grandfather of Brent Anderson, the current chief of the Methven Volunteer Fire Brigade.

"It was little more than a shed back then," Anderson said.

The Anderson family has a strong connection to the brigade, whose station was rebuilt on its current site in 1988.

Anderson has been a member for over 35 years and chief since 2017, while his father David was chief from 1975 to 1996, and Anderson remembers times at the old station as a child.

"They had similar duty rosters to what we have now, and the kids were all dragged there on a Sunday to mow lawns while our fathers were on duty," Anderson said.

Despite the chores, there were perks.

"There were other kids there, and we got to climb over the trucks.

"It was every kid's dream."

While David was heavily involved in the 50th jubilee in 1975, the younger Anderson is now taking the torch from his father for the centennial milestone.

The celebrations will take place over King's Birthday weekend, beginning with a gathering for past and present members at the Methven station on May 31.

The next day, the brigade will hold a parade showcasing vintage appliances, including a 1969 Bedford truck acquired in 1970 through a local Lions Club fundraising initiative.

The truck served in Methven until it was decommissioned in 1991.

Also participating in the parade will be a rare 1964 Land Rover FT6, the brigade's old 1991 Iveco Cargo, and the station's current fleet.

The station will open its doors to the public on Saturday from 10am-3pm, with demonstrations to keep spectators entertained, before a night-time event that includes nibbles, a band, and a cash bar at the Mt Hutt Memorial Hall.

Information can be found on the brigade's Facebook page.

"We are just hoping for a really good day for the community and for people to look around the place and see what goes on."

Anderson has another challenge before the centennial though.

He will be competing for the seventh time in the Firefighter Sky Tower Challenge in Auckland on May 24, along with fellow brigade members Matt Duncan and Mark Brown.

"We are in full firefighting gear with our breathing apparatus on and go up around 1100 steps which is 51 floors. There are different grades, but effectively it's the quickest to the top."

Firefighters competing in the challenge will be carrying around 25 kilograms of equipment climbing an elevation of 328 metres.

"It's challenging. The fastest guy, I think, is 8 minutes."

It's all for a good cause, though.

The money raised will be donated to Leukemia & Blood Cancer New Zealand to support Kiwi patients and their families living with the disease.

Anderson is hoping to raise $1000 for the cause.

"People can go online to the Sky Tower Challenge and sponsor us either as individuals or as a brigade or just donate."

Anderson attributes the strength of the Methven Fire Brigade to its dedicated members, many of whom have served for over 25 years.

Even though volunteers are on-call 24/7, ready to drop everything and respond to a call-out, Anderson said there's a real commitment.

"There's not much turnover — people tend to stay," he says.

Though the work is often dangerous and demanding, with firefighters regularly facing catastrophic situations, Anderson believes it's all worth it.

"When the alarm goes off, it means someone needs help. I just want to be there for someone who's having a tough day."

With the success of the event last year, the Methven Lions Club will be holding its second farm machinery auction on May 9.
PHOTO SUPPLIED

THE DETAILS

Methven Lions Club Farm Machinery Auction

When: Friday, May 9, 11am until finish

Where: Methven Showgrounds

Entry: Free

Enter via the Methven Lions Facebook page, or request a form by emailing lionsmachineryauction@gmail.com

More than just machines ...

Claire Inkson

If it rolls, runs, or rattles into action, it's welcome at the Methven Lions Club Farm Machinery Auction, says club vice-president and event organiser Alastair Clemens.

"We'll take anything from an electric drill to a combine harvester — as long as it's in working order," he said.

Following the success of last year's inaugural event, which saw 140 entries, Clemens is expecting a similar turnout when the gates to the Methven A&P Showgrounds open at 11am on May 9.

But this isn't just a day for machinery enthusiasts. It's shaping up to be a whole community event, with Carrfields bringing their health van, a coffee cart on site, a refreshment tent, and the Lions firing up the barbecue.

Entry is free, and everyone is welcome.

"We're turning it into more of a fun day — it's about good deals, but also a great time for the community."

Machinery can be dropped off at the showgrounds at the beginning of auction week, allowing the Lions Club time to catalogue each item and build a schedule for the day.

Local stock agent John Farrell will return as auctioneer.

"He did a great job last year. We run it as professionally as we can," Clemens said.

The machinery auction has quickly become one of the club's key fundraisers, alongside their annual four-wheel-drive trek and golf tournament.

The club earns a small commission on each sale, with proceeds going back to the local community.

"It's a bit like a clearing sale," Clemens explains.

"The more machinery we get, the more we can give back."

Recent donations from the club have supported upgrades to the local pool, contributed to aged care services, and helped send local youth on the Spirit of Adventure.

They've even helped an elderly resident move house.

The Methven Lions Club's efforts haven't gone unnoticed, they were recently awarded the prestigious Stewart Trophy for Best Overall Club at a district convention.

"We do a lot, and we're one of the biggest clubs in New Zealand, second to just one," Clemens said.

Alastair Clemens

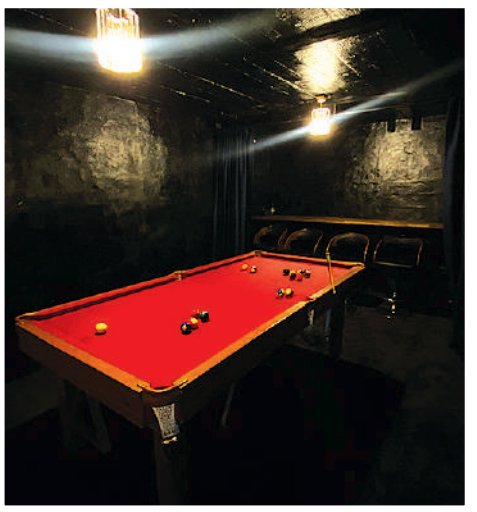
Lifestyle

RURAL GUARDIAN | MAY 2025

HOME-GROWN HUSTLE

Mysterious old girl filled with stories

CLAIRE INKSON



Above – The old vault is now a bar with a speak-easy vibe.

Left – The house was once the offices of the North Canterbury Catchment Board.

PHOTOS CLAIRE INKSON

It's just a hair's breadth over three months since we moved into our house in Kainga.

She's a home with a history — though so far she keeps some of her stories close to her chest.

Two stories high, with sash windows, a vault with thick concrete walls, and kauri panelling, she has many tales to tell — and each day, we discover a new one.

A pear tree, heavy with fruit, hidden behind overgrown bushes.

A forgotten well.

A lock in the wall that serves no purpose we can see.

At the base of a stone staircase in the garden, the date 1939 is carved — a clue that she's a grand old lady of at least 86 years. But we suspect she may be even older.

And so, I've begun trying to uncover a little of her story — and that starts with where she stands: in Kainga, on the edge of Stewarts Gully, near the old Waimakariri River bridge.

She began life as a residence, though her early years remain something of a mystery.

With all the hallmarks of a farmhouse, it's possible she was once the homestead of a long-ago farm — perhaps even that of the Stewart family, for whom Stewarts Gully is believed to be named.

Stewarts Gully, nestled on the banks of the Waimakariri, was once a popular fishing and holiday destination for Christchurch residents.

The semi-rural village was home to a community hall and a scattering of tiny houses: beautiful examples of the classic Kiwi bach.

During World War Two, 800 soldiers from the First Battalion were stationed here to defend the vulnerable coastline from potential invasion.

As idyllic as the area was, it lived in the shadow of the river.

The Waimakariri's floods posed a significant threat, not just to Kainga but to Christchurch itself.

In 1922, the Waimakariri River Act was passed, and the Waimakariri River Trust was established to address the growing risks of flooding, erosion, and sedimentation, especially in the river's lower reaches near Christchurch and Kaiapoi.

Local farmers, whose lands were frequently threatened, played a central role in the trust.

Their livelihoods depended on keeping the river in check.

The trust continued its work until 1945 when it became part of the newly-formed North Canterbury Catchment Board (NCCB) under the Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Act.

This new body expanded on the trust's work, introducing scientific expertise, engineering, and a broader mandate to protect both the land and the environment.

Farmers remained at the table, ensuring practical farming needs were balanced with environmental goals.

Around 1950, our house was converted from a residence to become the engineering office for the NCCB.

An office extension and a large concrete vault were added to house engineering plans, and a long industrial shed was built for laboratory work and water testing.

By the 1970s, the house appears to have been returned to residential use.

In 1989, the NCCB was merged into the newly formed Canterbury Regional Council, now known as Environment Canterbury.

These days, Stewarts Gully is a sleepy settlement of mainly permanent residents looking to escape the busyness of the city, and our house in nearby Kainga stands once more as a home.

It is a project that will no doubt span decades.

We want to honour her age and craftsmanship, build upon what others have done before us, and preserve her for the future.

In time, I hope to uncover more of her story.

Balancing act

Claire Inkson

Balancing a career outside the farm gate while managing motherhood and the demands of farming life continues to be a challenge for many rural women.

For some, the distance to a city is too far to commute, and access to reliable childcare can be scarce.

Even for women not officially working on the farm, the unpredictable nature of farm life often means they're still called upon to help — whether in the yards or cooking for shearers.

This makes committing to off-farm employment a tricky proposition.

Yet, for many farming families, off-farm income has become essential.

Like many others, Amy Anderson, based in Waiau, found that the best solution was to create a work-from-home, self-employed business.

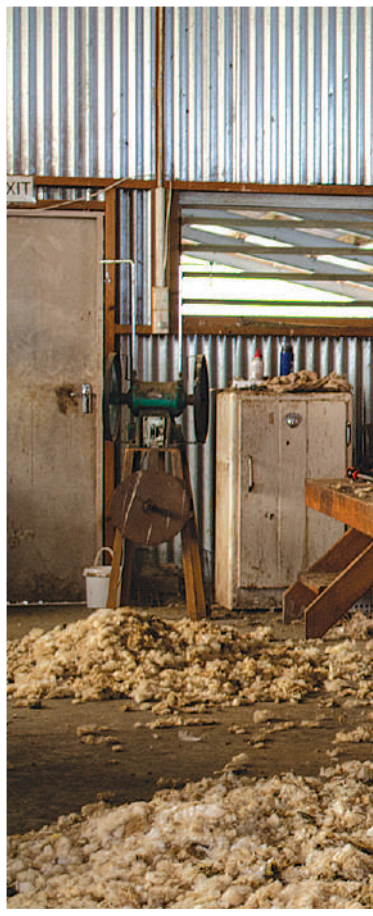
With a background in marketing and design and a passion for art, Anderson began carving out time to work around the demands of motherhood while raising young children on their property near Hawarden while husband Brian ran the farm.

"I always juggled things because I've always wanted to work," Anderson said.

She took on a variety of "side hustles", drawing from her diverse skill set to generate income when possible.

"I did freelance graphic design and social media management.

" I completed numerous painting commissions, and eventually, we built a studio on to our garage.



"I even taught adult and children's art classes, which were popular until the disruption caused by Covid.

"It was easy to slot in with the kids and farm life."

With their Hawarden farm supplying jersey service bulls to local dairy

can be tough for rural women

Far left – Amy Anderson found that the best way to balance motherhood and unpredictability of farm life with a career was to create a work-from-home self-employed business model. PHOTO CAIRE INKSON

Left – Amy Anderson with children Quinn, 13, Frank, 12, and Becca, 10. PHOTO SUPPLIED

farmers, Anderson was required to drop tools and focus on rearing calves for a portion of the year, making committing to any permanent roles difficult.

"I just had to do my own thing when it worked."

Three years ago, the Andersons moved from Hawarden to a more remote sheep and beef property just 15 minutes north of Waiau.

The property unexpectedly turned out to be close to a race car manufacturer, and Anderson took on a marketing role there.

"While I was excited about the position and learned a lot, I ultimately found it wasn't the right fit for me," she said.

"I found it a real struggle. "It was so far removed from what my personal life was about – we are farming and agricultural focused.

"It was like living two different lives."

Although her managers understood her need to balance work around her children, Anderson knew she needed the flexibility of working for herself again.

"I knew returning to self-employment would mean a financial step backward, but it offers me the flexibility I need.

"I can work through the night if I have to and be there for my kids during the day.

"It helps ease my guilt, whether it's for not being there for my kids or not fully committing to an employer."

Anderson went on to launch Brandnui, a marketing and design agency dedicated to helping small rural businesses.

"I love the variety of work and being able to draw on my rural background," she said. "It's rewarding to help small businesses refine their offerings and reach the right target audience."

With a degree in marketing and design, Anderson further enhanced her skill set by studying photography online.

She encourages other mothers looking to start home-based businesses to explore online courses and find ways to offer something unique.

"There are so many tools available to help you learn.

"You just have to back yourself, assess your competition, and find something others aren't offering."

However, Anderson said that working from home isn't for everyone.

"It can be lonely at times.

"A lot of people miss the social aspect of going to an office and interacting with colleagues."

Looking ahead, Anderson hopes that the roles of rural mothers will be redefined.

She believes that technological advancements and a shift in rural culture will allow women to fully utilise their skills and contribute to the family business from home.

"There's no reason why women can't run businesses and support the family from home," she said.

This Mother's Day, Anderson looks forward to a quiet, family-focused celebration with her three children — Becca, 10, Frank, 12, and Quinn, 13, who has just started his first year at boarding school in Christchurch.

"I just hope to get off the farm and do something new with the kids, enjoying the day together."

Fitting form for the farm

CLAIRE INKSON

New Zealand lingerie company Rose & Thorne is bringing the fitting room to the living room for rural women with their new virtual fitting service.

Finding the perfect fitting bra is challenging enough, but for rural women, that often means an inconvenient and time-consuming trip to the city.

The process takes time many rural women can't spare, especially when juggling farm and family commitments.

"Many women, particularly those living in rural areas, have gone years without finding a bra that truly fits.

"Our online tools, combined with live virtual fittings, are making high-quality, supportive lingerie more accessible than ever," says Rose & Thorne general manager Rich Carey.

Customers can book free, private Zoom meetings with trained female bra fitters by making an appointment on the Rose & Thorne website.

Women can show up in their favourite bra or fully clothed for the virtual meeting, which Carey describes as "normal and relaxed."

"Our bra fitters fit them visually and look at key components like where the shoulder straps are sitting on the shoulders, whether there is any digging in, and where the back straps are sitting.

"And from that, they can determine the size they need to get the best fit in our range."

Rose & Thorne is making bra fitting accessible for rural women. PHOTO SUPPLIED

Carey says most women don't get bra fitting often enough, and many suffer discomfort unnecessarily with ill-fitting bras.

Carey said women should be having fittings yearly, as our bodies change constantly due to age and circumstance.

"It's staggering the amount of feedback we get from customers who thought they were in the correct size, but it's not until they actually are that they realise what a good fitting bra feels like."

The company offers a complete size curve, including hard-to-find sizes like 24K, with the company aiming to keep its bras priced below $100.

For women who are busy on the farm, Carey recommends the Rose & Thorne Active bra for support and comfort without being a compression bra.

"We get a lot of feedback that it's the most comfortable bra in our range, and it's got the support elements you need, especially if you are working on a farm."

If a bra arrives in the mail and doesn't fit, unless it's on clearance, customers can send it back with no questions asked.

"We have a 30-day return policy.

"All we ask is customers keep the tags on, and if they aren't happy with them, they can send them back for a full refund of the purchase price."

Rose and Thorne, which Carey describes as a "long-term overnight success", was founded in 2011 after a Bendon restructure saw their head of design and chief executive form their own label.

Initially a wholesale brand, the company saw the opportunity for a web-based direct-to-consumer model when online shopping took off during Covid-19 restrictions.

"We started to see the opportunity and the reach we could get selling online," Carey explains.

Around this time the company began to grow its larger cup, premium support range, offering sizes 10-24 in a C-K cup - a niche where women were largely forgotten.

"We have found our place and our purpose.

"Our biggest strength is to offer those bras at a competitive price point."

Rose & Thorne sells 50,000 bras annually, with 31 % of their customers in the South Island in a New Zealand bra market valued at $254 million and growing at 3% annually.

Keeping with their online-only model, the company is shifting its focus to growing its market share in Australia.

"In contrast to our domestic environment, Australia is a $1.7 billion bra market and is growing at over 4% each year," he says.

"Australia is only making up a third of our revenue at the moment, but we know it should be two to three times what our New Zealand market is."

Carey said unlike many lingerie brands that rely on traditional retail partnerships, their digital-only model allows the company to offer a broader size range while creating the operational efficiency and inventories needed to service the trans-Tasman rural market.

How to do nothing

Kathryn Wright

It's harder than you think. We live in a world that celebrates busyness and productivity.

Messages we have received in society, in our families/upbringing, the media and at work/school implicitly or explicitly tell us that we must fill every moment with productivity and achievement.

Have you been in that place where you feel too exhausted to work, but too wired to rest, so you make yourself busy to avoid feeling guilt about standing still?

You could even be feeling the first icy grip of burnout.

Any attempt to rest or recuperate is met with thoughts around what needs to be done in the home or on the farm.

And let's be honest – there is no end to these tasks.

This sensation of needing to keep moving and keep on being productive accompanied by a nervous compulsion to complete task after task is a state where it is almost impossible to allow your nervous system to feel safe.

Your mind races through the tasks that must be completed, or it thinks of the consequences you may face if you fail to complete them.

Your ability to relax and embrace everyday chances to rest your mind, such as daydreaming, naps, reading, taking a walk, or a long conversation with someone who matters to you, can drastically affect how calm, content, and present you are able to be.

Doing these things will send a message to your nervous system that you are safe and that you can relax.

Finding and carrying out activities that put you in a "flow state" – that is when you are so immersed in a chosen activity that time slips away without you noticing – are extremely beneficial to your mental health and allow us to feel safe and rested.

To address this imbalance, you must turn your attention inwards and figure out what it is that your internal self is lacking – it could be more rest, sleep, silence or solitude.

It is unlikely that what you need will come from external sources.

Shift your focus to thinking about different tasks and whether they are a "rubber ball" or a "glass ball".

Which tasks absolutely cannot be dropped, or they may "smash", such as supporting your children or partner, or feeding your stock, and which ones could "bounce away" to another person, or be available for you to pick up later?

This may help you to accurately assess your priorities in a different way.

If you are at a point where you may need to take a break to preserve your mental health or prevent burnout, I realise that there are extra challenges if you are on farm.

The first step is likely to be communicating to your family, friends, neighbours that you are finding things a bit tough at the moment, and you might be surprised at how people show up – people often actually like to help when given the opportunity.

Nobody ever received a medal for never taking time off and running themselves into the ground.

Address your boundaries if you haven't already: if you have traditionally found it difficult to say no to requests from others, or to allow people to run roughshod over you, how could things be different for you without these extra challenges weighing you down?

Are you heavily scheduling your days out of a fear of lacking productivity?

Maybe it's time to think about how you really want to live your life, and what matters to you.

Kathryn Wright is a registered counsellor specialising in rural mental health.
http://www.kathrynwright.co.nz

Lemon loaf

This extra moist lemony loaf has a perfect balance of a little bit of sweetness, a whole lot of citrus tanginess and a delicious, melt-in-your mouth soft texture.
Store leftover loaf in an airtight container at room temperature for 4-5 days. Do not refrigerate as this can dry out the cake.

2C all-purpose flour
1t baking powder
1/2 t baking soda
1T lemon zest
110g butter, softened, ie room temperature
1 1/4 C sugar
3 eggs, room temperature
1/2 C lemon juice
1/2 C milk, room temperature

Lemon Glaze (optional)
1/2 C icing sugar, sifted
1/4 C lemon juice

Lemon icing
1C icing sugar
1T lemon juice
1T cream or milk

- Preheat oven to 175°C.
- Grease and flour (or use a non-stick spray) a standard loaf pan.
- Sift together the flour, baking powder and baking soda. Stir in the lemon zest. Set aside.
- In a large mixing bowl of a stand mixer beat the butter on a medium speed for 2-3 minutes.
- Gradually add the sugar and continue beating for another 2-3 minutes.
- Add eggs, one at a time. Make sure you scrape the bottom of the bowl
- Add lemon juice (NB the batter will curdle)
- Alternate the addition of the flour and milk, in two sequences (ie, add half the flour and then half the milk, and then add the remainder flour and then the last of the milk). Mix together on a low speed until combined well. Do not over mix.
- Bake in the pre-heated oven for 60-75 minutes until golden on top – and a cake tester comes out clean.
- Transfer loaf pan to a wire rack and allow to cool down for 10 minutes before removing the loaf to cool down completely on the wire rack.

Simple lemon glaze:
- Whisk together the icing sugar and lemon juice. With a cake tester (or skewer) poke some holes in the loaf top. Brush the glaze over the warm loaf.

Lemon Icing/Frosting:
- In a medium bowl whisk together the icing sugar, lemon juice, and cream/milk until smooth. Add in more powdered sugar or cream as needed for desired consistency.
- Remove the cooled loaf from the pan and drizzle or pour over the top and let set.

Garnish:
- Sprinkle some fresh lemon zest on to the icing for extra taste and visual effect.

Recipe courtesy NZ Eggs

Farming is tough on hand Joints

A farmer contacted me almost a year ago with significant pain from osteoarthritis. He had severe wrist, thumb and shoulder issues. This sort of discomfort is quite debilitating for farmers who use their hands constantly in a variety of often heavy farm tasks. The bottom thumb joint, the carpometacarpal joint (CMC) is highly susceptible to osteoarthritis which is worsened by heavy hand use.

Research studies have shown that farmers are particularly susceptible to osteoarthritis due to the physical demands of their work. The constant and repetitive use of hands in heavy tasks such as lifting, gripping, and manipulating tools contributes to the wear and tear on joints. Furthermore, outdoor conditions can exacerbate the pain and progression of osteoarthritis, impacting farmers' health and productivity.

Osteoarthritis is primarily caused by the death of chondrocytes, the cells responsible for maintaining healthy cartilage. When chondrocytes die, the cartilage deteriorates, leading to joint pain, stiffness, and decreased function. The processes that cause loss of chondrocytes are worsened by joint trauma of which farmers are greater risk.

I started my client on intensive nutritional therapy for 3 months. This involved adding chondroitin sulphate and glucosamine sulphate at 1600mg daily and a 100% water soluble curcumin (from turmeric) extract. Of these, the chondroitin sulphate is by far the most important as chondroitin is an actual constituent of cartilage.

After 3 month he reported significant reduction in pain. He still had some discomfort in his thumbs and one finger but could now close his hands without too much trouble. He now reports that he has no pain at all and is doing well on the lower maintenance doses. This again testifies to our wonderful healing processes once we add what our body really needs. Contact me if you need help.

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.

‘Kiwi dairy farming opens doors’

The Farmers Fast Five: where we ask a farmer five quick questions about farming, and what agriculture means to them. Today we talk to Ashburton dairy farmer Jaspreet Singh Brar.

1 What did your journey into farming look like?

I was born and raised in a farming family in India. I used to help my family look after eight to 10 cows, never thinking one day I would be responsible for a 1400-plus cow herd near Mid Canterbury’s Ashburton.

Coming from a farming family, the main income earner was cropping where we grew wheat and rice and milked the small herd – a self-contained business.

After finishing school at 19, I came to New Zealand in 2012 to study a business management course and worked at a liquor store and kiwifruit farms in my spare time.

Then I started in dairy farming as a farm assistant, working my way up to contract milker. At the same time, I was studying Primary ITO courses.

2 Tell us a little bit about your farming operation?

The property Ashfield Downs, one of a number of properties FarmRight manage for the New Zealand Superannuation Fund.

The fully irrigated milk platform is on 382 hectares with seven centre pivots and a fixed grid on corners.

At the peak of milking the 1415 cows go through an 80-bale rotary shed with in-shed feeding.

I have six fulltime staff and two calf rear in springtime.

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

Coming to New Zealand, communication was big challenge, but I worked hard on myself.

Doing study helped to improve my communication and in growing in farming.

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

At last year’s Dairy Industry Awards, I took out the Canterbury/North Otago prize for Dairy Farm Manager of the Year.

I enjoyed the challenge of chasing recognition and the networking the awards enable is invaluable.

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

I reckon Kiwi dairy farming opens doors, particularly for new immigrants with big dreams.

People like me, who came to this country with no English, with no money, can end up on their way to owning a multimillion-dollar business one day.

That is the great thing about farming.

Winning the Canterbury/North Otago Dairy Farm Manager of the Year at the 2024 Dairy Industry Awards has been a career highlight for Ashburton farmer Jaspreet Singh Brar. PHOTO SUPPLIED

Mastitis detection worth its salt

CLAIRE INKSON

A Kiwi start-up is revolutionising mastitis detection in dairy cows with impressive results.

Mastitis, an udder infection, is estimated to cost dairy farmers between $60,000 and $80,000 annually due to discarded milk, veterinary expenses, increased culling, reduced milk production, and penalties for poor milk quality.

Liam Kampshof, the founder of Bovonic, has found a solution. Growing up on a dairy farm in the Bay of Plenty, Kampshof initially left his rural roots to study biomedical engineering at Auckland University.

His journey then took him to London, where he worked on developing tools for detecting diseases such as cancer in humans.

When the Covid-19 lockdown hit, like many others, Kampshof found himself reflecting on his life and career.

With home soils calling, he returned to New Zealand to help on the family farm before planning to move to Australia with his partner.

"Before I came home, I didn't really know much about mastitis," Kampshof said.

While working on the family dairy farm, he quickly realised that current mastitis detection systems were outdated and inefficient.

"It just seemed archaic.

"I thought there has to be a better way," he said.

With his medical diagnostic background and a deep understanding of dairy farming, Kampshof set out to find a solution.

Bovonic founder Liam Kampshof at the South Island Agricultural Field Days in March. PHOTO CLAIRE INKSON

Inspired by robotic technology that detects mastitis using conductivity measures, he saw room for improvement.

He found the systems on the market to be too expensive, complex to install, and often inaccurate.

"I wanted to improve on that, so I started tinkering," he said.

The result of his efforts is QuadSense, a system that uses four patented milk sensors inserted into the four liners of milking cups.

These sensors connect to a control unit containing the brains of the system, along with replaceable batteries, a button for acknowledging alerts, and a 360-degree alert light.

"It's all based on the saltiness of the milk," Kampshof said.

Mastitis can cause salty milk due to inflammation and damage to milk-producing cells, leading to changes in milk composition, including increased sodium chloride (salt) content.

"That's a change you can measure – and that's what our sensors do: they measure the saltiness of the milk in all four quarters, and that's the real difference."

By measuring and comparing milk from each quarter of the udder, QuadSense can achieve greater accuracy than other in-line mastitis detectors.

Kampshof says that this is because a single sensor in the entire milk line is reading milk that has been diluted, meaning disparities in milk quality can be missed.

"Until now, no-one has made a sensor to go in each quarter of a conventional milk cluster.

"Ours is the first sensor that fits in each milking cup."

Mastitis is caused when microbes infect the teat canal, leading to inflammation.

While there are over 100 organisms that can cause mastitis, Staphylococcus aureus is the most problematic.

The infection is contagious and can spread between cows, often without any visible signs.

Because treating the bacteria with antibiotics is difficult, farmers may have to cull cows, leading to significant financial loss.

With QuadSense, farmers can detect mastitis early, preventing costly culling and minimising milk loss.

"Our system only costs around $12,000 to install.

"So, if they caught mastitis early and only had to cull two cows instead of 12, that's $24,000 saved, and it's paid for itself already."

Setting up the system is easy, with QuadSense designed so farmers can retrofit it.

"It's about a four-minute process per cup, and no-one has done it wrong yet," Kampshof said.

Dan Cragg: Vetting in the heartland

DAN CRAGG

VetSouth vet Dan Cragg has ridden the highs and lows with the farming community – including navigating Mycoplasma bovis. PHOTOS SUPPLIED

Can you share a bit about your background and what inspired you to become a veterinarian, especially in rural New Zealand?

I grew up in Auckland city and never stepped foot on a farm until I went to Massey University in Palmerston North.

I slowly developed more of a passion towards the large animal side of the vet industry while there, before getting my first job at VetSouth in Winton.

Once you leave a place like Auckland, you see the light and never look back. Rural NZ has so much more to offer than the rat race of bigger cities; it's a better quality of life when raising a family and it's an adult's playground if you are into the outdoors – especially hunting!

What has been the most rewarding part of working as a vet in rural areas compared to an urban practice?

I am a people person.

I enjoy building long-term relationships with the clients I deal with.

Compared with small animal vet work where you see many different faces each day and often won't see those clients again for another year, in large animal vet work you regularly see and talk to the same clients.

You become a key advisor in their business and often become good friends too. Smaller rural towns also have a great sense of community amongst them, and this fits really well with my guiding compass.

What are some of the unique challenges you face when working with farmers and rural communities?

Farmers are the backbone of our rural communities – and Balclutha (where I now work) is largely a rural service town.

A farmer's profitability is so largely dependent on things that are out of their control, namely commodity prices and the weather.

This flows on to the whole community's prosperity and the vet industry is not immune to this effect.

It can be challenging to predict the demand of services required from farmers when it can be so variable.

An example is this last spring when is was very wet, which caused a huge amount of lameness amongst dairy herds.

I could've easily had two extra vets or vet technicians out looking after lame cows every day for months to help farmers get on top of their issues.

What are some of the most memorable or difficult cases you've worked on in your career?

There really is a lot of memorable and difficult cases that I have worked through with farmers.

We ride the highs and lows with our clients and we're in the thick of

it alongside them during the tough times.

Some big cases that stick out are: working through a depopulation of a dairy farm that was diagnosed with Mycoplasma bovis, diagnosing the first farms that were affected by HT swede toxicity in Southland in the spring of 2014, working through the $3.90 dairy payout of 2015 with all farmers in full survival mode, and triaging and treating multiple down cows during a large acidosis outbreak.

There are many more!

What do you wish farmers knew or understood better when it comes to animal welfare and veterinary care?

Feeding animals well can eliminate 90% of animal health issues.

It sounds simple, but often I come across farms that are trying to push production too far and are over-stocked.

Whereas a reduction in stock numbers will likely provide a similar production, but with significantly better animal welfare outcomes and fewer costs.

Also, prevention is so much better than reaction – vaccinating to prevent disease, teat sealing to prevent mastitis, etc.

How do you manage the stress and anxiety of the job?

Being a dairy vet can be a very challenging job at times.

Like most farmers, your phone is constantly on, so it can be hard to switch off from work.

It's well known that there are huge burnout and mental health issues within the veterinary industry.

For me, I need to have regular breaks planned in advance.

At the time of writing this, I am starting a week off chasing roaring red stags – my happy place!

It's also important having a great team surrounding me that I know I can rely on to talk to.

Unloading from the day and sharing the problems often helps take some of the pressure off me.

What are you most proud of in your veterinary career, whether it's an accomplishment, a particular case, or your overall impact in the rural community?

I was a key part of setting up a VetSouth clinic in Balclutha, and I've been building it up right from the beginning.

This has been a really big project, with many ups and downs along the way. Lately I have proudly reflected on the amazing team and culture we have now, and the high standard of personalised service that we're providing.

I am also proud of my involvement in the community in general, I have been a volunteer firefighter for a long time and I'm involved in many other rural community groups.

Looking ahead, what do you see as the biggest challenges facing rural veterinary practices in New Zealand, and how do you think the industry can adapt to these?

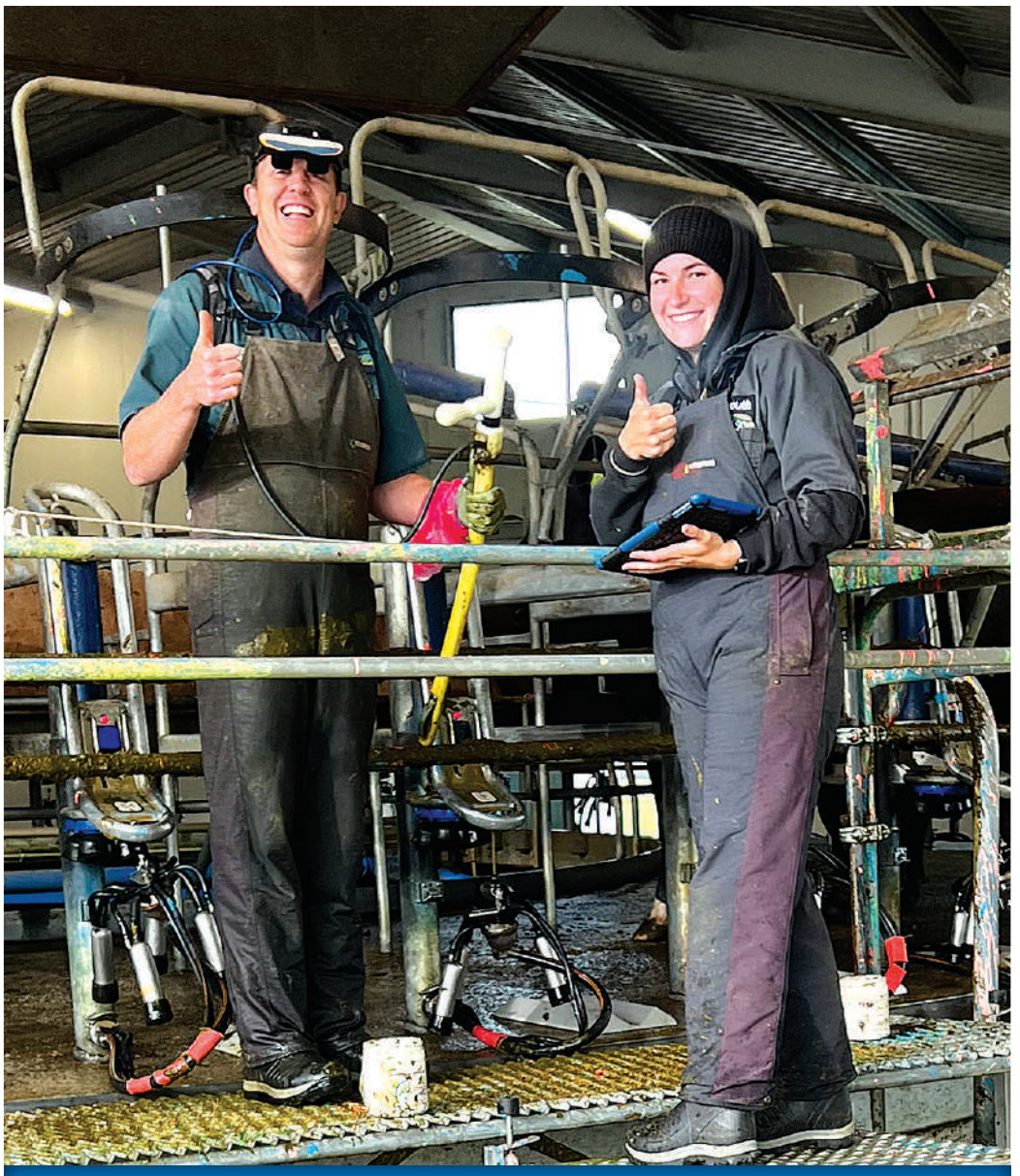
Rather than challenges, I see a lot of opportunities for the industry.

The invention and implementation of cow wearable technology is one of these, and it's rapidly changing the way that we interact with our farmers.

It gives us a much deeper insight into what has been happening on the farm, from an individual sick cow all the way through to the herd level.

There's a big opportunity for vets to get alongside this technology and learn to interpret the vast amounts of data so that we can get the best possible outcomes.

Dan Cragg is a senior dairy vet and large animal clinical lead at VetSouth Balclutha



VetSouth Balclutha vet Dan Cragg and vet tech Samantha Whyte are all smiles while pregnancy scanning on a dairy farm this summer.

Cream of the crop in dairy awards

ANISHA SATYA

Left – Richard Grabham and Nikita Baker won the Canterbury/North Otago regional Share Farmers of the Year award. PHOTOS ANISHA SATYA
Below – Mayfield's Kate Schuurmans was runner-up for the region's Trainee of the Year.

Two Ashburton locals took the top spot at this year's regional dairy industry awards.

The Canterbury and North Otago New Zealand Dairy Industry Awards saw farmers and businesses from across the regions come Ashburton's way to celebrate the best of dairying.

Lismore-based couple Richard Grabham and Nikita Baker won the regional Share Farm of the Year award, which they said was a "complete shock."

"Didn't expect that at all, really," Grabham said.

"We entered it just on a whim," added Baker, "thinking it was good to put ourselves out there."

Grabham and Baker also won the DairyNZ People and Culture award, the LIC Animal Wellbeing, Recording and Productivity Award, the Trelleborg Sustainable Pasture Award.

"The LIC recording [award] was my section, the pasture [award] was Richard's section, and the people and culture [award] was for both of us.

"We're a really good team."

Dunsandel's Josh and Becs Dondertman were the category's runners up.

The pair won the Federated Farmers Leadership award and ASB Business Performance award, no surprise given their community involvement and Josh's role as the national Rural Support Trust deputy chairperson.

Waimate-based contract milkers Martynas and Nukilanic Sinkus came in third, taking out the FarmRight Environmental Sustainability award and Ecolab Total Farm Hygiene & Innovation award.

It wasn't Grabham and Baker's first rodeo with the awards.

"I entered the Trainee of the Year four or five years ago, and Richard entered for manager, so we knew what it was about," Baker said.

She said they owed their awards to their staff and the farm owner, Baker's dad, for being open to new systems and methods.

"We've got a farm owner who likes to experiment, and we're willing to try things with that."

"We're not normal, that's for sure," farm owner Geoff Baker quipped.

He said it was good to see the pair recognised with the award and said they'd "worked hard for it" over the last three years.

Grabham said he was "absolutely stoked" and wasn't expecting to take anything home on the night.

"Hopefully we can bring it back down to Canterbury," he said.

But until the national awards dinner this month, it's straight home to the shed for Grabham and Baker.

"We're calving, so back to work as normal."

The other big winners were Darfield's George Dodson, the regional Dairy Manager of the Year, and Duntroon's Caleb Smith, Trainee of the Year.

Mayfield's Kate Schuurmans was runner up for Trainee of the year, and Ashburton's Thomas Coates came in third.

Kuljeet Singh, who manages James and Lynley Proctor's 725-cow Ashburton farm, was third place for Farm Manager of the Year.

Other local winners were Elain Williams (Ashburton), Jack Taggart (Ashburton) and Levi Hart (Ashburton).

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