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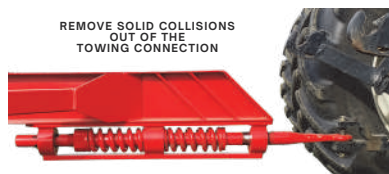
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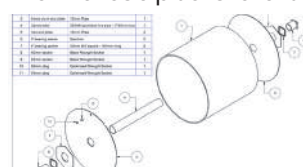


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Can we replace intuition with an algorithm?

The practice of farming that built what we often call the backbone of the New Zealand economy was founded on generations of hard-earned agricultural wisdom.

These farmers didn't have the luxury of apps or sensors — they farmed with an intuitive understanding of their animals, their climate, and their land.

There was no hiding behind technology.

A good farmer was a vet, an accountant, an agronomist, and a weather forecaster all in one.

In our famously erratic "four seasons in one day" climate, they needed a sixth sense.

New Zealand livestock aren't raised in barns or on grain; they're out in the elements, pasture-fed, in a system that still feels more authentic than most.

At the heart of that system has always been stockmanship: the ability to understand and work with animals in a calm, skilled, and empathetic way.

But farming is changing rapidly.

Today, you can check your herd's health stats from a smartphone, or even move stock with the press of a button from your living room.

Just like ChatGPT risks creating a generation that turns to automation over creative thinking, is there a risk that modern farming tech could replace the stockmanship passed down over generations?

Can we replace intuition with an algorithm?

There's no denying the benefits of agri-tech.

Wearable animal sensors, automated milking systems, GPS tracking, and drone

surveillance have all become part of the farming toolbox.

New Zealand is leading the way in adopting these technologies. With global food demand expected to increase by 70% by 2050 — and the world population forecast to hit 9.1 billion — technology will be essential.

In developing countries, food production may need to double.

Labour shortages are already an issue here at home. So yes, agri-tech has a critical role to play.

But it must be part of a balanced approach.

Technology should support — not replace — good stockmanship.

Machines can collect data, but they can't replace a farmer's instincts.

An experienced stockperson knows when a ewe is about to lamb or senses pain in a cow just by the angle of her ears.

Farming is as much art as science.

Take cow wearables, for example.

They can monitor heat, rumination, and mastitis risk and uptake has soared in the past five years.

But they still rely on farmers interpreting that data with judgment and care.

Like stockmanship, agri-tech can improve efficiency and profitability — but only when paired with human insight.

Research shows that poorly-handled heifers are more fearful of humans, and stressed animals produce less milk, suffer more injuries, and are harder to manage.

Calm, consistent handling — hallmarks of good stockmanship — boosts both animal welfare and farm performance.

Technology is a tool. Stockmanship is a

skill. We need both.

In the rush to innovate, we must not forget the irreplaceable value of hands-on experience, empathy, and understanding — the very qualities that built New Zealand farming in the first place.



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ACL's water crew keeping taps running

They're the team you never think about, until the water doesn't run.

Ashburton Contracting Limited's (ACL) water division works around the clock to make sure homes, businesses, and public spaces across Mid Canterbury have clean, reliable water and often without residents even noticing.

Founded in 1995, ACL has been serving the Ashburton community for three decades. Its water team, a tight-knit group of engineers and field staff, are on-call day and night, responding quickly to pipe failures, leaks, and wastewater issues.

Engineer Anubhav Joshi says the job is constant, but meaningful.

"It's like providing water for ourselves," Anubhav said.

"So the water that gets into the system, it has to be the best we can do."

Anubhav, often referred to as Joshi at ACL, oversees the planning and response when water-related issues are reported. Depending on the urgency, his team can swing into action within the hour. While he handles paperwork and logistics, it's his crew on the ground who do the heavy lifting, often late at night or on weekends.

Corbin Davis, who works out in the field, said communication was the key and unexpected complications are common once the digging starts.

"We're called out all times, midnight, 3am. You have to have all your gear on hand," said Corbin, noting the investment ACL has made in reliable equipment, including their custom-built service truck.

Despite the hard work and sometimes "unsexy" nature of the job, Corbin said the supportive culture at ACL always stands out.

"The management's good. You can go to anyone with any issue," he said.

For team member Dave Pio, the role has also opened new doors.

"There's plenty of training available (for) licenses, hands-on skills, and a good crew that makes every day enjoyable."

Safety is a non-negotiable and team

members manage their own traffic setups and look out for each other on-site, according to Anubhav.

"We've got to have each other's backs," he said.

"It's not just your responsibility for yourself, but also for your co-workers."

So next time you turn on the tap, spare a thought for the ACL water crew working quietly behind the scenes.

They're fixing the unseen problems and sometimes before you even knew there was one.

Fears of discharge consent chaos

ANISHA SATYA

The potential quashing of a discharge consent could create uncertainty and chaos for Mid Canterbury farmers.

MHV (Mayfield Hinds Valletta) Limited have found themselves in the crossfire of a case between the Environmental Law Initiative (ELI) and our regional council, Environment Canterbury (ECan).

High Court judge Cameron Mander is reviewing the case, which revolves around ECan's compliance with the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) and environmental policy.

In 2021, ECan granted MHV a discharge consent, allowing the irrigation scheme to release contaminants like nitrogen fertiliser onto land where it might end up in nearby rivers and streams.

But ELI, a charity organisation of environmental researchers and lawyers, believe the consent was unlawfully granted.

They applied for judicial review focussed around two key issues; the consent's non-compliance with the RMA and coastal policy, and a lack of public notification.

ELI lawyer Adam McDonald said ECan failed to correctly apply section 107 of the RMA - a point argued in their successful case against the Ashburton Lyndhurst Irrigation scheme (ALIL) last year.

Section 107 prevents the granting of discharge permits if they'd significantly contaminate waterways (make them look dirty or harmful to aquatic life) after dilution.



Judge Cameron Mander hears out the submissions made for and against MHV's consent.

PHOTO ANISHA SATYA

"The commissioner wrongly thought that [section] 107 could just be overcome by [MHV's] proposed staged nitrogen changes," McDonald said.

It's worth noting that section 107 was amended by the government last year, and now permits consents which impact water quality with conditions.

McDonald also said several coastal policies, like the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement and Regional Coastal Environment

Plan for the Canterbury Region, should have been included in the proposal.

MHV's lawyers said the commissioner had "confidence" that sustainability promises would be met, more so than in the ALIL case. "MHV's got an obligation in its consent to gather five years of data," lawyer Ben Williams said.

He also said MHV was subject to specific rules in the Canterbury Land and Water Regional Plan that ALIL had not been.

The cooperative has done a lot to support the community and their farmers in taking up sustainable practices, like helping found the Hekeao/Hinds Water Enhancement Trust (HHWET) who manage New Zealand's largest groundwater rehabilitation project.

"A quashed consent would create uncertainty for the farming and wider communities of Mid Canterbury," Williams said.

ELI's second point revolved around 'limited notification.'

If a consent negatively affects someone, they must be notified and able to submit statements ahead of the consent being granted.

ELI said the discharge affects water supplies linked to Carew School and the Hinds township, and a lack of data provided by MV warranted public notification.

"The fundamental rights of those who take their drinking water from nearby suppliers were just overlooked," McDonald said.

ECan lawyer Kate Dickson said the request was responded to "in substance" - not in one go, but through various meetings, emails and reports.

ELI's final sticking point was that ECan should have revoked their decision to grant MHV a consent immediately following the ALIL decision.

In 2024, the Ashburton Lyndhurst Irrigation scheme lost a similar High Court review and lost their resource consent as a result.

"The commissioner's flawed approach in the ALIL case and in this one are strikingly similar," McDonald said.

ECan lawyer Philip Maw said the council does not, and should not have the ability to cancel consents at will.

He also reminded Judge Mander that the ALIL case, which ELI based much of their argument on, was not solid ground - it was at the Court of Appeal and could be overturned.

Judge Mander will consider the submissions, and release his decision at a later date.

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The claws are out for cats

CLAIRE INKSON

Forget nine lives — one shot in North Canterbury could turn a feral feline into a \$1000 payday.

It's cash for cats, and the claws are out.

"There's \$1000 for the biggest cat, \$1000 for the most cats culled, and a draw where every cat gets you an entry for a prize," says event organiser Mat Bailey.

"We increased it this year, because the cat section gets people fired up."

Held annually in Rotherham over Matariki weekend, the hunting competition is more than just a trophy haul — it's a major fundraiser.

Proceeds go to Rotherham School and the community pool, and this year the event will also support the Canterbury West Coast Air Rescue Trust, a service that plays a crucial role in rural and hunting communities.

"It's not hard to find someone who has a life-changing story involving the Westpac Rescue Helicopter," Bailey said.

The event also supports Hunter-4Hope, a charity that last year donated 2200 kilograms of venison mince to the Hope Community Trust from the competition — enough to provide around 16,000 meals for people in need.

With 1518 entries in 2024 — including 450 junior hunters — last year's event was the biggest hunting competition in New Zealand.

A total of 747 animals were

weighed in the open section: 175 deer, 191 pigs, six chamois, four wallabies, and a jaw-dropping 371 cats. The junior section brought in 727 animals.

This year, the total prize pool is expected to reach around \$55,000.

One lucky ticket-holder — no hunting required — could walk away with a 2015 Ford Ranger Wildtrak.

"So many people don't realise you can enter from anywhere," Bailey said.

"It's just a raffle. You buy a ticket, you don't have to be there, you can enter from anywhere in the country."

Other prizes include a Fiordland fishing trip with Takapu Charters and a 110cc Honda motorbike for junior hunters.

But not everyone's lining up to celebrate.

The cat section continues to stir backlash from animal rights activists — especially Christchurch Animal Save (CAS), who have protested at past events and plan to return this year.

"A huge concern of ours is the impact hunting has on the developing brain of a child," says CAS spokesperson Sarah Jackson.

"There are growing bodies of evidence showing how damaging that can be."

CAS recently attracted criticism after a drone used by the group to film the opening of duck shooting season at Lake Ellesmere was shot down by a hunter.

"The pilot had his licence to fly the drone and was well within his

rights," Jackson said.

She also voiced concerns about the Predator Free 2050 strategy and the potential to add more species to the pest list — which could include feral cats.

"We want to advocate for non-lethal methods of managing introduced species," she said.

Bailey, however, says public perception around feral cats is shifting.

"People are realising feral cats are a big issue and have become de-sensitised," he says. "The eyes of the country are open. You see feral cats being killed on TV, and where once it would have been an issue, now no-one cares."

Far from being deterred by the protest, Bailey welcomes it.

"We are looking forward to the protesters coming — it's become a great attraction for the competition," he said.

"Plus, it's great entertainment for the kids."

While the cat section of the competition has attracted the most controversy, feral cats are reportedly impacting vulnerable native wildlife across the South Island.

Last year, one wild cat made it on to an island in the Clarence River and wiped out a large black-fronted tern colony over a single weekend.

They're also blamed for harming kea, native bats, and skinks, and spreading toxoplasmosis — a parasite that can infect sheep and humans.



North Canterbury Hunt organiser Mat Bailey is expecting another successful event with around \$55,000 worth of prizes up for grabs.

PHOTO ASHBURTON GUARDIAN

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6 YOUNGCOUNTRY

Putting the spotlight on Young Farmers

Young farmers are the future of New Zealand agriculture, so each issue we shine a spotlight on a Young Farmer. Today we talk to Linda McKnight.

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

I'm a proud member of the Fitzherbert Young Farmers Club, where I've been actively involved for the past seven years.

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?

The biggest highlight of my time in Young Farmers has been the opportunity to connect with a diverse group of likeminded individuals and build lifelong friendships.

I've thoroughly enjoyed taking part in a wide range of activities — from fundraising events and Christmas parties to beach cricket matches and farm tours.

The club offers tremendous value through its networking opportunities and the sense of community it fosters.

Being involved has allowed me to develop key skills in leadership, communication, and organisation, particularly through my experience on the club committee.

One standout experience has been organising our annual quiz night, which has taught me the logistics of event planning.

Serving as secretary has also improved my confidence, taught me how to take effective meeting minutes, and supported my personal growth.

Overall, the club has provided countless opportunities to learn new skills, take part in the FMG



Linda McKnight says agriculture is in her blood.

PHOTO SUPPLIED

Young Farmer of the Year contest, and enjoy shared experiences with others passionate about agriculture.

3 How did you become involved in agriculture?

Agriculture is in my blood. I grew up on my parents' dairy farm, and that upbringing fostered a deep passion for the land and the variety the agricultural sector has to offer.

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

so far.

I currently work as an Agriculture Training Advisor for Primary ITO, covering the southern Manawātū region.

I've been in the role for two-and-a-half years and love the balance it offers between time in the office and being out on the road.

It's incredibly rewarding to support trainees as they gain qualifications while working on the job.

My career has always been ingrained in agriculture — from working on a dairy farm, earning a

degree in AgriCommerce at Massey University, to working across various roles as a rural professional.

Each step has reinforced my commitment to the industry and deepened my understanding of its many aspects.

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

The future of farming will be increasingly shaped by technology,

with innovative solutions continuing to change how we operate on-farm.

While this presents exciting opportunities, I believe it's crucial that we continue to support farmers as they navigate ongoing regulatory challenges.

I'd like to see more recognition and support for the hard work that goes into farming — much of which happens behind the scenes.

Ensuring that farming remains viable and sustainable.

6 What are your future plans?

I plan to remain in the agricultural sector as a rural professional. In the longer term, I'd love to support my brother on the farm and eventually own a lifestyle block where I can have a few animals of my own.

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

My biggest inspirations in agriculture have been my dad and my brother.

My dad, now retired, owned and operated our family dairy farm, and he set a strong foundation with his work ethic, resilience, and practical knowledge of the land.

He demonstrated what it means to be committed to the job.

My brother continues that legacy, now running his own beef and cropping farm.

Watching him take on the challenges of modern farming with a forward-thinking mindset has been both motivating and encouraging.

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Soil - Our Most Precious Resource

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



With winter well on its way and the recent heavy rain experienced throughout Canterbury, soil erosion has been at the top of our minds. New Zealand has a high proportion of steep land prone to soil erosion, leading to negative impacts on agricultural productivity and ecosystem health. Erosion rates in New Zealand are very high by world standards, with about 200 megatonnes of soil lost to the ocean each year.

Climate change will increase the frequency and intensity of storms and heavy rain events. To plan for the future, why not look into regenerating your marginal, erosion-prone paddocks with native vegetation? Are there areas on your farm that are prone to sheet, slip or rill erosion? Are you interested in establishing riparian buffer strips to prevent bank erosion and improve water quality? Verity NZ are here to show how native regeneration carbon projects can benefit both your soil and your pocket.

Soil erosion in New Zealand and its control

Around 5% of New Zealand’s land was classified as highly erodible in 2022 with landslides being the most common type of erosion risk. A combination of steep terrain, high rainfall and tectonic activity have created a recipe for high levels of soil erosion in New Zealand. This natural susceptibility has been exacerbated by the historical large-scale native deforestation that transformed once-forested slopes into tussock, grassland and pasture. There is a growing movement to revegetate this type of land as this is one of the best methods to conserve soil.

In the past, exotics have often been utilised for erosion control. Pine species such as *Pinus contorta* were planted from the 1960s to early 1980s, and while useful as extra farm income from woodlots, these stands have led to negative environmental impacts such as issues with slash debris and the many wilding conifers we see today. Poplar and willow pole planting are a popular solution that can achieve quick soil stabilisation. Modern poplar and willow species have been developed with soil conservation in mind

and lack their original invasive characteristics. However, the use of exotics for erosion control, while efficient and well-studied, does not offer the range of benefits provided by native vegetation.

Native plants for soil conservation

Utilising native species for erosion control was often placed in the too-hard and too-expensive basket. In the past, native species were not seen as being able to rapidly colonise bare soil. Native plants are well adapted to the soil and climatic conditions of

layer for bare soil against heavy rainfall, and acting as a barrier or filter to sediment-laden surface runoff. Native species are useful for revegetating bare but generally stable surfaces or preventing potential erosion sites from becoming active. Native vegetation also plays an important role in increasing soil carbon. Soil carbon plays a vital role in nutrient cycling and the maintenance of soil structural stability, thus aiding root growth. Soils with higher carbon levels are generally more resilient to climatic extremes such as intense rainfall and drought.

exotic species but are slower growing and have shallower root systems (often not exceeding 2 meters). It is interesting to note that studies have found that root depth correlates to the stoniness and depth of soils on steep slopes, rather than tree age. Many native species are perfectly adapted for colonising bare, bony soil damaged by slips.

How can Verity NZ achieve this?

Erosion-prone areas are often in the steep and hard-to-reach places on your farm. Therefore, planting these areas is often very expensive or simply unsafe. Verity NZ can implement a range of nature-based solutions to enable the establishment of native vegetation without the need for direct planting.

The first step is fencing to remove grazing pressure, allowing natural regeneration to start up.

Stock exclusion is utilised but Verity’s model also encourages short, intermittent, well-managed grazing in these areas to assist with weed control and seed establishment.

In some cases, utilising nurse crops may be a great way to accelerate revegetation on your land. Species such as gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) where it is already present, or pioneering bracken fern (*Pteridium esculentum*) can provide a suitable habitat for other natives to emerge. They are also great at reducing soil erosion (while sequestering carbon).

While some native species like mānuka and kānuka re-establish quickly on eroded land, other native species can take a lot longer to establish. The establishment of pioneer species reduces erosion risk faster and brings you more carbon credit income sooner.

After project implementation, Verity NZ will continue to maintain and monitor the project area for the life of the project. We aim to implement projects with a 60-year lifespan to ensure intergenerational success.

Benefits of soil conservation with native plants

In addition to looking aesthetic, with gorgeous native plants forming riparian zones, forested slopes and the return of birdsong, your farm will be more resilient to

extreme climatic events. Your soils will become more stable, which means less damage to your farm after heavy rainfall. A study found that closed canopy tall woody vegetation reduced the incidence of landslides during large storms by 70-90%. The reduced sediment input into waterways will prevent this valuable resource from leaving your farm and help improve water quality in your catchment area, enhancing freshwater biodiversity.

On top of these benefits is the carbon income generated by your land. This includes the carbon from the aboveground biomass (trees and shrubs) and the belowground biomass (plant root systems). The significant increase in soil carbon from projects that focus on controlling and preventing erosion will also be accounted for. Co-benefits such as biodiversity gains from protecting rare and threatened species mean investors will pay a premium to invest in the credits generated from your project.

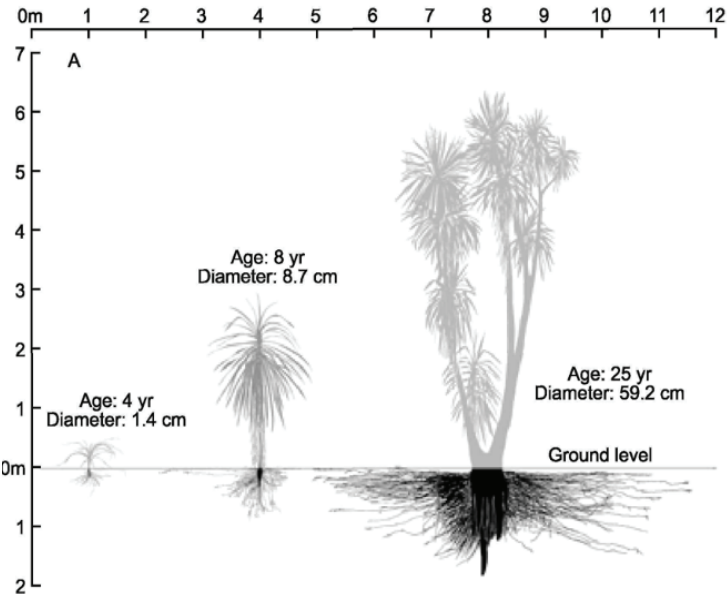
And all this at no up-front cost, Verity NZ are here to remove the barriers to native revegetation and would love to discuss what a project focused on native restoration and soil conservation could look like on your land.

Our project model

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. 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.

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 projects to reduce soil erosion, increase biodiversity, leave behind a positive legacy and steward the land for the future. Verity NZ is the genuine one-stop-shop, seed-to-credit company who will deliver for you.



The root system of the cabbage tree from age 4 to 25. Source: Alexander Czernin & Chris Phillips (2005) Below-ground morphology of *Cordyline australis* (New Zealand cabbage tree) and its suitability for river bank stabilisation, *New Zealand Journal of Botany*, 43:4, 851-864.

New Zealand and by encouraging natural succession patterns they can offer successful, long-term soil erosion control. Verity NZ can remove the implementation barriers associated with establishing native species, such as high up-front costs, enabling farmers to use natives for soil erosion control and a multitude of other benefits such as improved water quality, biodiversity and habitat connectivity.

Native plant root networks stabilise the soil, and a variety of species provide ground cover to improve microclimate and soil conditions, providing a protective

The depth of rooting systems varies among species. Here are a few examples of the root depth of common native plants:

- Kānuka root depth ranges between 1.5 to 2.2 m between 6 and 32 years old.
- Mānuka can have a root depth of 1.1 m at 4 years old.
- Lemonwood can have a root depth of 0.3m at 5 years old.
- Tōtara can have a lateral root of 2.2 m at 4 years old.
- Cabbage trees can have a 2 m deep taproot at 25 years old.

In general, native species have higher tensile root strengths than

Positive move for 'late' starter

The Farmers Fast Five: Where we ask a farmer five quick questions about farming, and what agriculture means to them. Today we talk to Hurunui dairy farmer and founder of social media platform Females in Farming Anthea Rolfe.

1 What did your journey into farming look like?

I started farming "late", at the age of 24.

It was an unintentional career move but one that positively impacted the trajectory of my life.

I haven't looked back to city life since.

2 Tell us a little bit about your farming operation.

I am a dairy farmer, for the whole 17 seasons so far, either in an on-farm position or very closely related but you will usually find me on a dairy farm somewhere around Canterbury.

I am currently on a 1200 cow farm so there is plenty to be kept busy with.

I have also started a Facebook page "Females in Farming" which has progressed to selling women's clothing & posting educational & engaging posts about cows and dairy farming.

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

Starting later in life and coming from a non-farming, city background meant I had ALOT to learn — and fast.

I didn't grow up with practical, hands-on type knowledge, so I had to ask questions constantly,



Left – Anthea Rolfe didn't start her farming journey until she was 24, but she hasn't looked back since.

PHOTO SUPPLIED

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

Managing a dairy farm (albeit for a short period, but over the busiest time) was a highlight.

It really proved to myself that I had the skills to make it work, even the face of some big obstacles.

Starting my Facebook page and seeing it evolve is also a great highlight that is continuing to give me the satisfaction of being able to help others coming through the ranks in the industry or who may be looking at farming for a career option.

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

Question everything. Don't just accept that that is how it's done, always ask why. Questions like, "why do we think that" and "why not try it a different way".

Asking why is the fastest track to growth in my opinion and in farming we should never close ourselves off to learning because there is so much we don't know still.

watch closely and not be afraid to get it wrong (because sometimes, I did).

Being a woman in a male-dominated industry also came with its own set of assumptions and limitations — both from others and from myself.

Over time though, I stopped trying to prove I was "tough enough" and focused on working smarter not harder which made life a lot easier.

I overcame those challenges by asking "why" more than anything else.

Why does this happen? Why do we do it that way?

That mindset opened up so many learning opportunities and helped me grow not just as a farmer, but as a person.

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Shannon Fry: From tap shoes to



Claire Inkson

RURAL
EDITOR



Shannon Fry's working dogs are treated like family saying that she looks after them and they look after her. "All they want to do is please me, so of course I'm going to care for them."

PHOTOS CLAIRE INKSON

When Shannon Fry rolls up in her Ranger ute at Cleardale Station, dogs on the back and a pair of mud-splattered pink band boots, you'd never guess she once spent her days in a dance studio.

"I'm from Christchurch originally. I had a very city upbringing," she says.

"I was a competitive dancer from the age of two to 20 – so it was a big chunk of my younger life."

Despite growing up in suburbia in tap shoes instead of gumboots, Fry got a taste for rural life early, visiting her cousins' farm on Banks Peninsula as a child.

"I'd spend a lot of time there during holidays and weekends, moving sheep across the block and pulling wool off the board."

At just seven years old, Fry told her parents she wanted to become a farmer.

"I just loved being outdoors." That childhood dream stuck.

In 2021, she graduated with a Bachelor of Agricultural Science from Lincoln University. While studying, she gained practical experience on the sheep and beef property in Kaikōura her partner Billy Bartrum's family managed, mentored by his father, Kurt.

"I used to go up there while I was at uni to get hands-on experience. I knew a bit, but I was still pretty green, so I was thankful for the opportunity to gain some experience."

After university, Fry landed a job as a shepherd at Cleardale Station – a 1700-hectare stud sheep and angus beef farm in the Rakaia Gorge, owned by Ben Todhunter and Donna Field.

"Everyone at Cleardale has been so helpful and willing to teach. I've learned from everyone on the team."

After more than three years on the farm, Fry stepped into the role of genetics manager last October – a position that's ignited a passion.

"It's cool seeing the younger animals coming through and learning about the genetics behind what we're working on – and what they



were working on before I arrived.

"It's great seeing those key traits we're driving for coming through – whether it's temperament in the bulls, foot rot resistance, or lower micron wool in the sheep."

As a woman in a traditionally male-dominated industry, Fry says she hasn't encountered much resistance.

"When I left Lincoln, a few people warned me that some might be hesitant to hire a female – not because you couldn't do the job, but because you might not 'fit the system.' Sure, there's a strength difference, but I haven't had any issues."

"There are so many females in the industry now – it's good."

She says there was no bias in her hiring at Cleardale. "It wasn't about being male or female – it was about the best person for the job."

Animal welfare is a core value for Fry.

"Whether it's stock or dogs, looking after your animals is really important."

Her four working dogs are treated like family. She credits Kurt Bartrum for helping her get started with dog handling.

"Kurt was very generous. When I left Lincoln, he gifted me three dogs – two huntaways and a heading dog. I'd worked with them during holidays, learning their commands and how to use them."

continued next page



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gumboots



Above – Two of Shannon Fry's four working dogs Jack (left) and Pimm.

Top right – After more than three years as shepherd at Cleardale Station, Shannon Fry stepped into the role of genetics manager last October – a position that's ignited a passion.

Right – Pimm and Shannon Fry share a cuddle.



From P10
She brought those dogs with her to Cleardale.

"They were older and knew what they were doing, so I learned a lot from them – stockmanship, where to put myself to help the flow. Dogs aren't silly. They can read a situation."

Her dogs have coats, insulated kennels, foam beds, and are well fed on meat, biscuits and Mighty Mix frozen concentrate.

"They're not just a tool for my job – they're part of the family."

"I look after them, and they look after me."

"All they want to do is please me, so of course I'm going to care for them."

Fry finds training new dogs incredibly rewarding.

"I started with a really good

team, and now I'm training younger ones to come through. Spending time in the training pen and seeing it all pay off at work – it feels really good."

"I think the first time Pimm did something for me, I filmed it. I couldn't believe she was doing it."

Now several months into her new role, Fry is enjoying the challenge.

"I'm still learning as I go, and there's so much more to learn – but I just really want to get stuck into it."

Her advice for others starting out in agriculture?

"There are going to be hard days – but there are hard days in any job, in any industry. Some days feel tougher than the day before, but you just push through – and the next day is better."



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Have we not learned from our past?

JAMIE McFADDEN

While this story is about a willow whose origins have not been evidentially confirmed, the purpose of this story is to highlight what can happen when releasing any new organism (including GMOs) into our environment without due care and diligence.

The Conway River in North Canterbury used to be a braided riverbed with extensive gravel areas for nesting river birds and space for the river to meander across the braid plain.

But three years ago that all changed when a new type of large shrub willow took over the riverbed. The regional council aerial sprayed some areas last year but is fighting a losing battle.

It is believed this invasive willow came from erosion control plantings undertaken by public agencies.

It is not clear whether one of these newly planted willow species has spread, or two varieties have cross-pollinated and formed this new super weed. Either way, it is an environmental disaster of monumental scale.

The larger, well-known crack willow trees still line the margins of the rivers but seldom grow across the riverbed itself.

The difference between the crack willow and this new arrival is that this new willow takes over the entire riverbed. And more.

In the Leader River, six kilometres south of the Conway, the larger crack willows have existed



Left – The Conway River showing the shrub willow taking over the braid plain requiring costly aerial spraying. PHOTOS SUPPLIED

for decades along the riverbed margins.

The riverbed itself used to be clear of vegetation, but in the last 12 months, the invasive shrub willow has moved in. Another river about to be taken over.

The Leader River connects to one of Canterbury's largest braided rivers, the Waiau, and the invasive willow has recently moved in there too.

It can now be seen while crossing the State Highway 1 bridge.

A frightening aspect of this new invasive willow is that it appears to be spreading by seed.

It has jumped out of riverbeds and is spreading across farmland.

The speed of growth is phenomenal, and even in reasonably intensive grazing regimes it establishes freely.

Last weekend I found this invasive willow moving up side

streams, into hill country and native forest. In 30 years of fighting weeds and pests I have never seen anything like it.

As we watch this environmental disaster unfolding, the Government, at the behest of some corporate and scientist self-interests, is pushing new legislation through that seeks to reduce or, in some cases, remove safeguards around genetically modified organisms and genetic engineering.

And yet, this example I have presented here demonstrates how a lack of due diligence and care has led to an environmental disaster.

New Zealand/Aotearoa has a terrible history of species introductions that have gone horribly wrong.



Deer, rabbits, broom, stoats, gorse — and the list grows every year as new invaders make their way into the wild thanks to the actions of humans.

Have we not learnt from our past?

Not just the environmental damage but the economic cost, spending millions of dollars trying to fix our past mistakes.

The message from this is for the Government to immediately halt

the Gene Tech Bill and allow reasoned consideration of the perils of reducing and removing safeguards around the field testing and release of GMOs, and gene tech generally.

Anything less would be irresponsible and put our natural environment and economy at significant risk of major harm.

Jamie McFadden is an environmentalist and owner of Hurunui Natives

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WILLY LEFERINK

Marking our two-year anniversary with a planting project was an awesome way to celebrate.

Thirty-five people joined catchment group members last month to dig in more than 1000 natives next to the railway line in Tinwald.

These natives will protect the creek from urban run-off, stabilise banks and cool the water through riparian shade.

A grant from Ashburton District Council supported planting costs and volunteers came from the Tinwald and Lake Hood communities.

Turn-out was greater than expected given we postponed the original date due to rain and then ended up hitting Mother's Day.

Pupils from Longbeach School and members of the Rescue Warriors cycle team turned up, alongside district councillors Leen Braam, Richard Wilson and deputy mayor Liz McMillan. Leen is actually the architect of the planting plan and we are grateful to have him within the catchment group given his landscape and planting expertise.

Plants introduced include kowhai, lancewood, cabbage trees and carex secta.

As Leen said and we all agree. "I'd love to see the creek thrive and become a healthy and attractive part of Tinwald for future generations."

Carters Creek also contributes to water quality problems being experienced by Lake Hood as the creek flows into one of the canals.

Its high eColi and phosphorous



Left – Thirty-five people turned up to help plant the banks of Carters Creek on Melcombe St, Tinwald. PHOTO SUPPLIED

levels increase the risk of algae blooms in the lake.

The new riparian buffer in Tinwald will filter run-off contributed by the state highway and railway line, and shade from plants will cool the water protecting fish.

Riparian plantings also reduce bank erosion which can introduce sediment to a waterway smothering in-stream life.

Someone asked us on the day 'don't we need this kind of protection all the way down the waterway?' And they are right.

It's something we are trying to promote.

Bare banks without riparian protection expose a creek to problems. We will keep working with our neighbours and the community to get this message out there.

As well as a water quality focus, the catchment group is concerned

about drainage after a series of flooding events.

Stormwater contributions in Tinwald add to flows and culvert sizes are an issue.

We successfully lobbied Environment Canterbury last year for a flood investigation project which will start in 2027.

As the catchment grows and more subdivisions are built around Tinwald and Lake Hood, we need a serious look at whether the creek can handle the amount of water it carries as a drain.

The planting project was our attempt to show the community what protecting the creek could look like now and into the future.

It was brilliant to meet new people from Tinwald and Lake Hood who now know a lot more about the creek and are motivated to help us protect it.

A big thank you to Ashburton District Council for supplying the funds for the plants and to all that volunteered their time to help plant them on the right spot.

If you want to be part of Carters Creek Catchment Group, get in touch with myself (021 796-037) or our facilitator Janine Holland on jrholland@xtra.co.nz or 027 460-4940.

Willy Leferink is the Carters Creek Catchment Group chairperson



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Farmer's dusty, rusty mystery

CLAIRE INKSON

Westerfield farmer and Commonwealth Games gold medallist shooter John Snowden is on a mission to uncover a piece of automotive history.

While restoring his 1951 Austin Loadstar truck, a tantalising clue to its past emerged from beneath layers of old paint on the driver's door.

As he sanded it down, a faint inscription became visible: "Wes McDonald, Farmer, Edendale."

Intrigued, Snowden began digging into the truck's history.

"Edendale is just north of Invercargill," he said. "I found the name on an old electoral roll, but the trail ran cold after that."

Snowden bought the truck from a neighbouring farmer at a clearing sale in Lauriston in the late 1990s for a bargain, thinking it might come in handy on the farm.

"It was a tip truck, so I thought it would be useful for holding grain," he said.

But, like many old vehicles, the Austin had its fair share of issues.

On the drive home, it became clear the gearbox was in serious trouble.

The wooden deck was almost completely rotted, the engine had several hard-to-reach water leaks — and there were no brakes.

"I used it a couple of times, and then it just got shoved in the shed and forgotten," Snowden said.

Eventually, the truck was moved to a paddock to make room in the shed, and its fate seemed sealed.



John Snowden with the Austin Loadstar he restored almost entirely himself.
PHOTO CLAIRE INKSON

"It all goes downhill quickly after that."

Years later, after leasing out part of his farm and gaining some spare time, Snowden decided to revisit the

project.

He'd previously restored a Land Rover, doing all the mechanical work himself while sending the panel work to professionals.

But with the Austin, he had a different plan.

"I thought I'd just get it mechanically driveable again," he said. "But once I started, I decided to do the

whole thing myself — including the bodywork."

Then came lockdown.

"I was on my way to town to get welding wire when the lockdown



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Left – The name of a previous owner, a Wes McDonald, was hiding underneath layers of paint, revealed when Snowden was completing the panel work on the 1951 Austin Loadstar. PHOTO SUPPLIED

Above – The Austin K4 that was once part of the Ashburton County Council fleet is John Snowden's current project. PHOTO SUPPLIED

Above right – The Austin emblem on the bonnet of the Loadstar. PHOTO CLAIRE INKSON

panel work.

No panel beaters were willing to take on the job, so Snowden turned to the "university of YouTube" for guidance.

"I bought a small welder and just started."

He converted his old farm shed into a makeshift panel shop, battling constant dust to get a clean finish on the paintwork.

"There's always dust settling in the paint — you just have to sand it off."

"At one point, a spider dropped on to the bonnet while the paint was wet and wriggled around," he laughed.

Snowden chose to repaint the Austin in Porsche Burgundy Red, a nod to the maroon he found beneath

the layers of green and grey paint — likely the truck's original colour.

He also restored the deck, adding sides made from a mix of kwilla and recycled rimu, and fabricating the metalwork by hand.

The restoration took around six years.

Now, Snowden has a new project: an Austin K4 — the predecessor to the Loadstar, featuring a different cab.

"It's an ex-Ashburton County Council truck, originally navy blue," he said. "It's the truck I've always wanted to restore."

Once again, he's trying to uncover the vehicle's back story — but with dead registration plates, it's proving difficult.

"I found a record of it in the Ashburton council archives, but the chassis number was wrong. I'd love to know its history."

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ALISON STEWART

Finance and fresh faces at FAR

ANISHA SATYA

Money talks and a change of guard are the main attractions to this year's Foundation for Arable Research (FAR) conference.

The theme of farm profitability will be woven throughout the two-day event hosted at Lincoln University.

Local and international leaders in the arable sector will join the conference to inform farmers from Canterbury and beyond about maximising their revenue.

The headline guest will be Methven's own Hamish Marr, who acts as New Zealand's Special Agricultural Trade Envoy, showcasing Kiwi farms and their produce to markets across the world.

Australian grain farmer James Venning will share how he's used tech to help him boost productivity while farming across different soil types and conditions.

Farming youtuber Olly Blogs, real name Olly Harrison, will stream in from the United Kingdom to share his growth story, from 70 hectares to 600.

Also from the UK, Professor Nicola Randall from the University of England will join to chat about regenerative agriculture.

The diverse line-up aims to expose local farmers to new methods for money making which they might not have known about.

While the conference theme is Show me the Money, it'll also be a chance to introduce levy payers to the new face of FAR.

Dr Alison Stewart, who's held the chief executive role for seven years, will be replaced by Dr Scott Champion on July 1, the second day of the conference.

"The arable sector is so diverse," Stewart said.

She was "very pleased" to learn of Champion's appointment to the role and expects the growers will gain lots from his decades in the food and fibre sector.

Stewart is stepping away from full-time roles and into science advising and board of director work.

"I'm sure that ... I will still have some involvement in the arable sector."

She leaves the role on June 30, which aligns perfectly with the 2025 FAR Conference.

"I will be the CEO on the first

day, and Scott will be CEO on the second day."

That will give growers a chance to meet Champion, and bid farewell to Stewart after seven years in the driver's seat.

"He will bring lots of new attributes to the table."

"It'll be great for FAR, and great for the arable sector."

Champion's journey with New Zealand agribusiness began back in 2001.

He came over after science and lecturer roles in Australia, to be a researcher for the New Zealand Merino Company.

From that he joined Meat and Wool New Zealand, now Beef + Lamb, as a general manager and eventually became the chief executive there for seven-and-a-half

years.

"I've been consulting for the last nine years," Champion said, "so looking forward to being in a great organisation like FAR and being involved with farmers again."

Arable is new ground for him so he's ready to "pause and listen" to FAR's growers.

"That person-to-person connection is really important to me, and through the first few months, establishing those connections."

"I think it's a really interesting sector - really looking forward to it."

A dinner will be held after the event to conclude the event and farewell Stewart from full-time work with FAR.

The conference runs from June 30 to July 1. To register, visit www.far.org.nz

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Abuse survey a 'bit skew-whiff'

ANISHA SATYA

Fresh concern around the treatment of contract milkers has arisen after a recent survey.

Published by Sharefarming Consultants, the Contract Milking Experience Survey proposed a shocking 43% of respondents had experienced abusive behaviour from a farm owner, and 72.2% had "gone mentally or financially backwards" while contract milking.

The survey was taken over 10 days, from December 20 to 30 last year, and was shared on Instagram and Facebook.

Two-hundred-and-76 accounts responded to the survey, 201 who were current contract milkers, and 75 who'd either left the sector or moved into different roles.

Comments on Sharefarming Consultants' LinkedIn post called contract milking "fundamentally broken", and praised the report for pushing back the "dairy toxic positivity narrative and propaganda".

"The results of this survey were disappointing but in no way surprising," cofounder Louise Gibson wrote at the beginning of the report.

"We have for too long focused as an industry on attracting talent, but failed to care for the talent once it gets here.

"I implore the readers of this report to consider what the results of this survey mean for our sector ... we need to put solutions on the table," she said.

Federated Farmers' national sharefarmer chairperson Sam



JOSH DONDERTMAN

Ebbett said the results were "concerning", but was wary of its currency due to respondents having worked in the industry over a wide range of time.

"When you're capturing data from 10-plus years ago, when we weren't doing as much work as we are now, some of the numbers may be a bit skew-whiff."

He'd received a few "frustrated" calls following media pick-up of the survey.

"It was more people [being] a little frustrated that it was painting our industry in a negative light, when people don't see it the way that this Facebook poll describes it, I suppose.

"There was frustration that ... our group of the industry was getting a bad rattling when we've done so much work, and improved it so

much."

He accepts conditions for contract milkers weren't great a decade ago, but said industry bodies like the Feds and DairyNZ had "done a hell of a lot of work" since then.

The survey was taken with good intentions, he said, and more should be done to record the state of contract milking today.

Contract milkers experiencing abuse or manipulation could turn to their local Fed Farmers chairperson for help, he said.

"My phone's always turned on to Fed Farmers members, so if anyone has a concern they want to raise or for us to investigate a bit further, give me a call.

"That report has some pretty confronting numbers," said Mid Canterbury Rural Support Trust



SAM EBBETT

chairperson Josh Dondertman.

The trust was started in Mid Canterbury in the 90s as a disaster support service, and now connects farmers in need with financial, legal and wellbeing services.

Despite industry pushing the trust as a farmer support service, only 24.3% (67) respondents said they had used the Rural Support Trust.

Dondertman, who is also the national trust's deputy chairperson, said the trust was a "listening ear" to those in a tough spot.

"If it is a wellbeing piece, the Rural Support Trust is there; we'll happily answer the phone and work through any piece they need help with, whether that's wellbeing or employment.

"We're not bottom-of-the-cliff people, we'll absolutely be there for

NEED TO TALK?

If you are a contract milker looking for support, contact:

- The Rural Support Trust on 0800 787-254
- Rural Employment Support on 0800 694-121, or
- Federated Farmers at 0800 327-646.

that, but we want to be front-footing some of these conversations."

He said researching farm owners before signing a contract with them was a smart move.

"Make sure you ring some people about them, because they'll always do a reference check on you as the contract milker.

"From a financial perspective, make sure you do your numbers and review them on a regular basis."

Communication was key, he said, both with the farm owner about expectations, and with support people about self-protection strategies.

"There's also the RESH phone number which is funded by DairyNZ," he said, "the rural employee support hub.

"They can link you up potentially to an employment lawyer and other resources as well."

The full report can be found on the Sharefarming Consultants' LinkedIn.

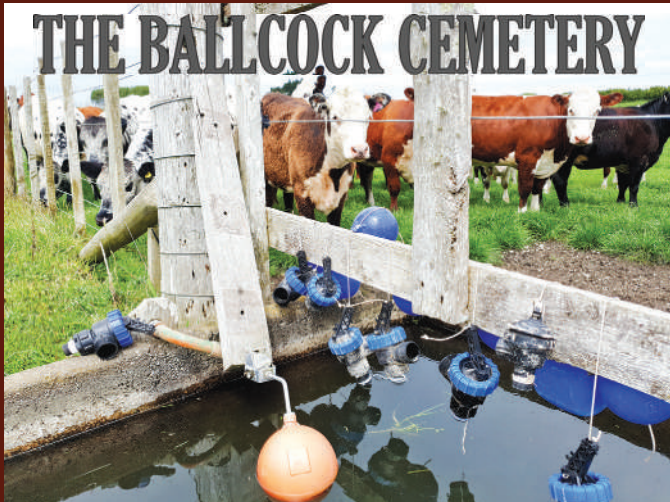
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From Haryana to Chertsey

CLAIRE INKSON

Mid Canterbury is a world away from the bustling Kurukshetra district in Haryana, India, where dairy farmer Kuljeet Singh grew up.

With a population nearing 1 million and summer temperatures soaring to 47°C, Kurukshetra is a stark contrast to the frosty winters and rolling pastures of Chertsey.

"In India, we were small-scale cropping farmers with just six hectares," Singh says. "We grew wheat and rice, so moving to New Zealand and working with cows was a complete change for me."

Singh initially arrived in New Zealand to study business management, but a friend introduced him to dairy farming, and he was hooked.

"I'm made for dairy farming."

"I have a connection with cows. I know when they're in pain or not feeling right."

Now in his second year managing Penbridge Farm — a 725-cow property owned by James and Lynley Procter — Singh lives on-site with his wife Lovepreet and their two children.

Over the past decade, he's worked his way up from farm assistant to manager and recently celebrated placing third in the 2024 New Zealand Dairy Industry Awards (NZDIA) Farm Manager category.

Singh has entered the NZDIA for the past three years and says the experience has been life changing.

"When I started dairy farming,



Kuljeet Singh with wife Lovepreet and son Navraj.

PHOTO CLAIRE INKSON

I had no connections — just a few friends.

"I had passion, but no idea how to progress. The awards helped me see a pathway forward," he said.

"Now I have contacts with accountants, bankers, and farm advisors, and I can see how to get from manager to farm ownership."

Animal welfare is at the core of

Singh's management plan.

"If you look after the cow, she'll give you her best," he said.

"We focus on body condition, energy intake, and reduce stress."

"For example, if a cow is too skinny, we dry her off or put her on once-a-day milking."

Productivity on the farm has improved dramatically.

"With help from CowManager technology, we've improved our in-calf rate by 10%."

"It's been very beneficial for mating, feeding, and overall cow health," he said.

"We also made big gains in pasture harvest after changing our fertiliser policy last year."

Staff wellbeing is a priority.

"Staff are key to our success — I think of them as assets."

"We use a six-two roster, and everyone gets a decent lunch break," Singh said.

"I believe in good training so staff can make confident, informed decisions."

Communication, however, remains one of Singh's biggest challenges.

"I knew a bit of English when I arrived in 2013, but I never used it to talk to people."

"I worked with a tutor in India to improve, and I feel more confident now, but I'm still learning."

Singh and his wife had an arranged marriage and then moved to New Zealand together. The isolation during Covid-19 was tough, especially when they couldn't return to India to visit sick family.

"My mother fell ill during Covid and I couldn't go back. That was a hard journey for me."

"Homesickness is a real challenge — not just for us, but for all immigrants."

Looking ahead, Singh is focused on future-proofing the farm for the next generation.

"We're very careful about what we put into our land and waterways. I want to farm in a way that's sustainable for the long term."

He also encourages young farmers to enter the Dairy Industry Awards.

"It's a great way to make connections and see a future path. And Primary ITO is another excellent way to upgrade your farming skills."



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It's all on agenda at Farmers Forum

CLAIRE INKSON

If it impacts dairy farmers, it'll be on the agenda at the 2025 DairyNZ Farmers Forum. "The thing I really like about this year's programme is its breadth," says DairyNZ chief science advisor Dr Bruce Thorrold.

"It covers a wide range of topics that are key to shaping the future of farming and the world as a whole—such as trade, technology, on-farm innovation, policy, climate change, globalisation, and nationalism."

Thorrold said the forum will offer a comprehensive view of the factors influencing farmers' lives, with a range of opinions and data-driven insights.

"If you come along to the Farmers Forum as a farmer, you're going to hear from people across the spectrum, covering all the things that make up the world in which farmers work."

"These are the topics that influence how farmers plan their future," he adds.

With the political landscape constantly shifting, recent tariff announcements, especially those by U.S President Trump, have created uncertainty in global markets.

"A huge amount of our prosperity in the dairy sector has been built on free trade agreements over the past 10 or 15 years," Thorrold said.

"Now, we're in an environment where some of that is getting challenged by nationalism and the reforming of global trade blocks."

"Since 95% of our milk is export-

EVENT LOCATIONS

Ashburton

Ashburton Event Centre,
Ashburton
Tuesday, 17 June 2025
9am-3.30pm

Invercargill

Ascot Park Hotel, Invercargill
Wednesday, 2 July 2025
9am-3.30pm

ed, we need to keep a close eye on what's going on globally," he emphasised.

"It's one thing to access markets, but the real question is whether we can produce at a price that's competitive, with an emissions footprint that meets consumer expectations, and that keeps us in the game."

Thorrold will be joining an impressive line-up of keynote speakers at the South Island events, sharing insights into DairyNZ's response to challenges and opportunities.

He will also offer an overview of key science and research that will help the sector achieve its long-term ambitions.

The event will be MCed by Sarah Perriam-Lampp.

DairyNZ Chief Executive Campbell Parker said that ensuring a positive future for the sector

requires collaboration.

"It's our job to ensure the sector has the right solutions in place for farmers, but we can't do it alone."

"We are privileged to have a stellar group of experts and farmers who are doing amazing and innovative work on farm share all that knowledge and keep pushing those boundaries at Farmers Forum 2025."

Parker said the world is changing fast, and so is the way we farm.

"Our focus at the Forum is on providing farmers with actionable insights into the global and national trends that will shape their businesses in the years to come."

"By collaborating with other leaders in the sector, we can ensure that New Zealand's dairy sector continues to thrive and lead on the world stage."

The 2025 DairyNZ Farmers Forum isn't just for farmers—it's open to rural professionals as well.

The event offers a unique opportunity to meet and discuss the future of the dairy industry with industry experts and farmers.

Registrations are open and free for levy-paying dairy farmers and their staff.

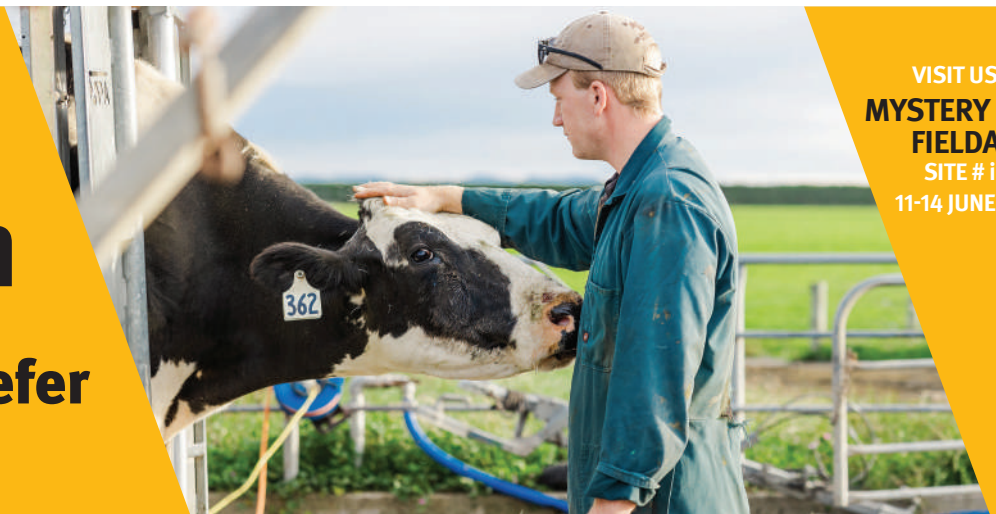
For more information, the full programme, and to register, visit the DairyNZ website.

Right – DairyNZ chief science advisor Dr Bruce Thorrold says the forum will offer a comprehensive view of the factors influencing farmers' lives, with a range of opinions and data-driven insights. PHOTO SUPPLIED



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CLAIRE INKSON

“If your people are happy, your cows will be too.”

That’s the philosophy of Culverden dairy farmer Stuart Neill and it’s one that’s clearly paying off for the Canterbury Ballance Farm Awards supreme winner.

Neill and wife Tracey farm in an equity partnership on Pukatea Dairy Farms, a 221-hectare (200 hectares effective) property located in Canterbury’s Amuri Basin.

There, they run a flexible, hybrid milking system — 10 milkings per week — that supports both their team and their herd.

“It sounds complicated,” Neill said, “but it’s simple.

“We milk twice a day on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. The other four days are once-a-day milkings.”

This schedule provides an appealing work-life balance.

“I’ve got three staff, and this set-up means they work five days and have two days off,” he said.

“They do one 4am-start every week.

“Compare that with some other farms where staff might work eight days straight before getting a break.”

Big difference

The goal is to build a business they’d want to work in themselves, and Neill has noticed a big difference in team morale and performance.

“Our people are happier and less stressed.

“They’re more focused, which



leads to fewer mistakes and that has reduced some of our machinery maintenance costs by half.”

The benefits extend beyond people.

The flexible milking schedule has only led to a 3-4% reduction in milk production — an intentional

trade-off.

“We want cows to use a bit less energy on milk production and a bit more on looking after themselves.

“They’re walking less, conserving energy, and maintaining better body condition.”

That shift has led to healthier

cows and a dramatic drop in empty rates (cows that fail to get pregnant).

While the regional average in Canterbury is around 20%, Pukatea’s empty rate has dropped from 18% to just 9%.

“More cows getting pregnant means more money.

“That’s 60-70 cows that are now productive, which weren’t before.”

Neill pushes back against the belief that flexible milking isn’t viable for all operations.

“It costs you nothing — no new gear, no capital investment.

“Just less work.”

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Animal welfare is also a core value- and that extends to pain relief. "Four or five years ago, local anaesthetic was the only pain relief for cows. "Now we use KetoMax — a ketamine-based product.



"It's incredible pain relief." Pukatea uses five times more pain relief than the average local farm, spending around \$6000 annually. "We don't give it to every cow — just those with sore feet, mastitis, or difficult calvings.

"But it changes their whole demeanour. "I don't understand why more farmers don't use it." Neill also supplements his cows with Vitalise, a pelletised mineral product he prefers over pow-

Far left – Happy people, happy cows: That's the philosophy of Culverden dairy farmers Stuart and Tracey Neill.

Left – Riparian planting has helped improved water quality drastically on Pukatea Dairy Farms. Through monthly testing with Amuri Irrigation, they've confirmed that water entering the farm with high nitrate levels leaves the property clean.

PHOTOS CLAIRE INKSON

der-based alternatives.

"Vitalise doesn't block the machines, it does what it says on the label, and the company is good to deal with."

His core philosophy is simple: "People and cows are connected. If you look after both, the whole system improves."

One unexpected benefit of the 10-in-seven milking schedule has been how much more social and relaxed the cows have become.

"They don't graze all day.

"The rest of the time, they're lying down, hanging out with their mates, drinking, wandering. They have a life. They're not machines."

Reduced stress improves cow health.

Elevated cortisol levels can lead to lost pregnancies, lower milk yields, and an increased risk of mastitis.

Neill is equally committed to improving water quality.

Surrounded by dairy farms and located in an area with historic tile drainage, the waterways on their property once had nitrate levels he describes as "glow-in-the-dark high".

With the help of Jamie McFadden

from Hurunui Natives and a lot of trial and error, Neill has seen major improvements through riparian planting and redirecting water into planted creeks and ponds.

Through monthly testing with Amuri Irrigation, they've confirmed that water entering the farm with high nitrate levels leaves the property clean.

"We're seeing nitrate levels go in high and come out at close to zero."

Neill spends between \$10,000 and \$20,000 annually on planting.

"It's peanuts when you look at the bigger picture of profitability and environmental responsibility.

"Part of our business plan is making sure we don't negatively affect our downstream neighbours."

Dirty dairying

On the controversial topic of "dirty dairying", Neill doesn't mince words.

"That campaign gained traction because it was mostly true.

"It's not that dairy farmers are bad people.

"But if you look at the nitrates in rivers, you have to admit we have some responsibility.

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Vitalise

Wearables: No silver bullet

CLAIRE INKSON

More dairy farmers than ever are using wearable technology to help manage their herds, but does it actually improve reproductive performance in cows?

New research led by Paul Edwards, a senior scientist at DairyNZ, takes a closer look and the answer is more complex than a simple yes or no.

Wearables on farms include more than just the well-known cow collars.

They also come as ear tags and sensor boluses (devices placed inside the cow).

These tools use accelerometers — motion sensors that track how the cow moves.

“Essentially they are all accelerometer-based devices that sit in or on the cow,” Edwards said. “The software basically classifies that accelerometer into different behaviours to detect differences.”

One key behaviour they’re designed to pick up is oestrus heat, the time when a cow is fertile and ready to mate.

This window occurs every 18 to 24 days and is marked by hormonal and behavioural changes.

Detecting it accurately is crucial for timing artificial breeding (AB), which many dairy farms rely on instead of natural mating with bulls.

“We have seen a big increase in the adoption of that technology,” Edwards said. “Because of the rate of adoption, there was a lot more



New research led by Paul Edwards (left), a senior scientist at DairyNZ, takes a closer look at whether wearable technology improves reproductive performance in dairy cows — and the answer is more complex than a simple yes or no. PHOTO SUPPLIED

conversations out there about the technology.”

Given the cost and complexity of implementing these systems, Edwards and his team wanted to see if wearables were delivering on one of their key promises — better reproduction results.

To find out, they analysed herd records from 141 farms using wearables and compared them to 1158

similar farms without them.

The comparison looked at data from two years before and two years after wearable adoption.

The findings showed that farms using wearables had slightly better reproductive performance overall — but they already had better results even before they adopted the technology.

In other words, the wearables

didn’t seem to be the main reason for the improvements.

“People hear the results of the study and think it’s a negative result because outcomes weren’t better, but I’m not sure it is,” Edwards said.

“It may not be a good news story, but it’s not a bad one either.”

One change was clear: Many wearable-using farms extended

their AB periods.

Some even switched completely to AB and stopped using bulls.

“If farmers have been able to genuinely automate their mating, that’s probably not a bad result,” Edwards said.

Still, he cautions against seeing wearables as a one-size-fits-all solution.

“Very rarely would a farmer ever take up wearable technology for one reason alone,” he said.

“There will be a range of benefits they will be hoping to get out of it, and reproduction is one of them.”

For some farms, changing management practices — like shifting to more flexible milking schedules — could achieve similar reproductive results without the added cost of new technology.

“There is multiple ways of achieving goals,” Edwards said.

“Don’t immediately jump to technology because that’s the popular thing right now.”


His advice?

Think carefully about what problem you’re trying to solve before investing.

“I wouldn’t be so bold as to recommend investment,” he said.

“But you really need to work out what your goal is, and what problem you are trying to solve. And they may not be a single goal, but multiple.”

In short, wearable tech can be a helpful tool for dairy farmers — but it works best when combined with good management, clear goals, and realistic expectations.




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Celebrating

MATARIKI

ANGELA CLIFFORD

We've been gifted a long weekend in the middle of winter, so it feels important as non-Māori to recognise and understand more about Matariki.

This might not be a lens through which we've seen this time of year previously (depending on our whakapapa or cultural background) but if we're open to including it, we propose we'll all be richer for it.

One of the themes this year is Matariki Hunga Nui, or honouring those who we've lost since the last rising of Matariki.

For me, this includes my father.

So we'll be cooking a meal of remembrance, setting the table with crockery, cutlery and glassware that I've been given from other family who've passed away.

It will be a feast, full of memories and laughter, good wine and great stories.

This year's other themes include Matariki Manako Nui, or looking forward to the promise of a new year, and Matariki Ahunga Nui, gathering to give thanks for what we have.

These also lend themselves to a family meal, full of reflection and thanks.

Our stores on The Food Farm are stocked after a successful growing season, and this feels like the best time of year for a feast.

Our understanding is that four of

the stars in the Matariki constellation are directly related to food; Waiti (freshwater food), Waita (food from the ocean), Tupuānuku (food from the earth) and Tupuarāngi (food from overhead, including trees and birds).

So we designed this recipe to reflect that, and will open the lid of the casserole pot to let the steam escape and 'feed the stars', before enjoying it as a family.

It includes a chicken (food from overhead/the birds), saltwater from the ocean, taewa & kūmara from the earth and cress from freshwater.

If you grow your own meat birds or have been eyeing up a rooster for the pot this is the time to use it.

Growing chickens for the table is no mean feat so it's a great reason to celebrate your hard work and give thanks for your success at this special time.

This is a perfect recipe for dual purpose chickens like plymouth rock or hampshire, because you cook it slowly, rather than roasting it.

If you are buying the chicken, get a responsibly raised bird, as reflecting the importance of our natural world, the earth or Papatūānuku, is important during this time of year.

If you can't joint a chicken yourself, use pieces on the bone.

The brining is an important step as it ensures the chicken remains juicy. Slow cookers vary so use your judgement.



Angela Clifford family will be cooking a meal of remembrance, setting the table with crockery, cutlery and glassware that she's been given from other family members who've passed away.

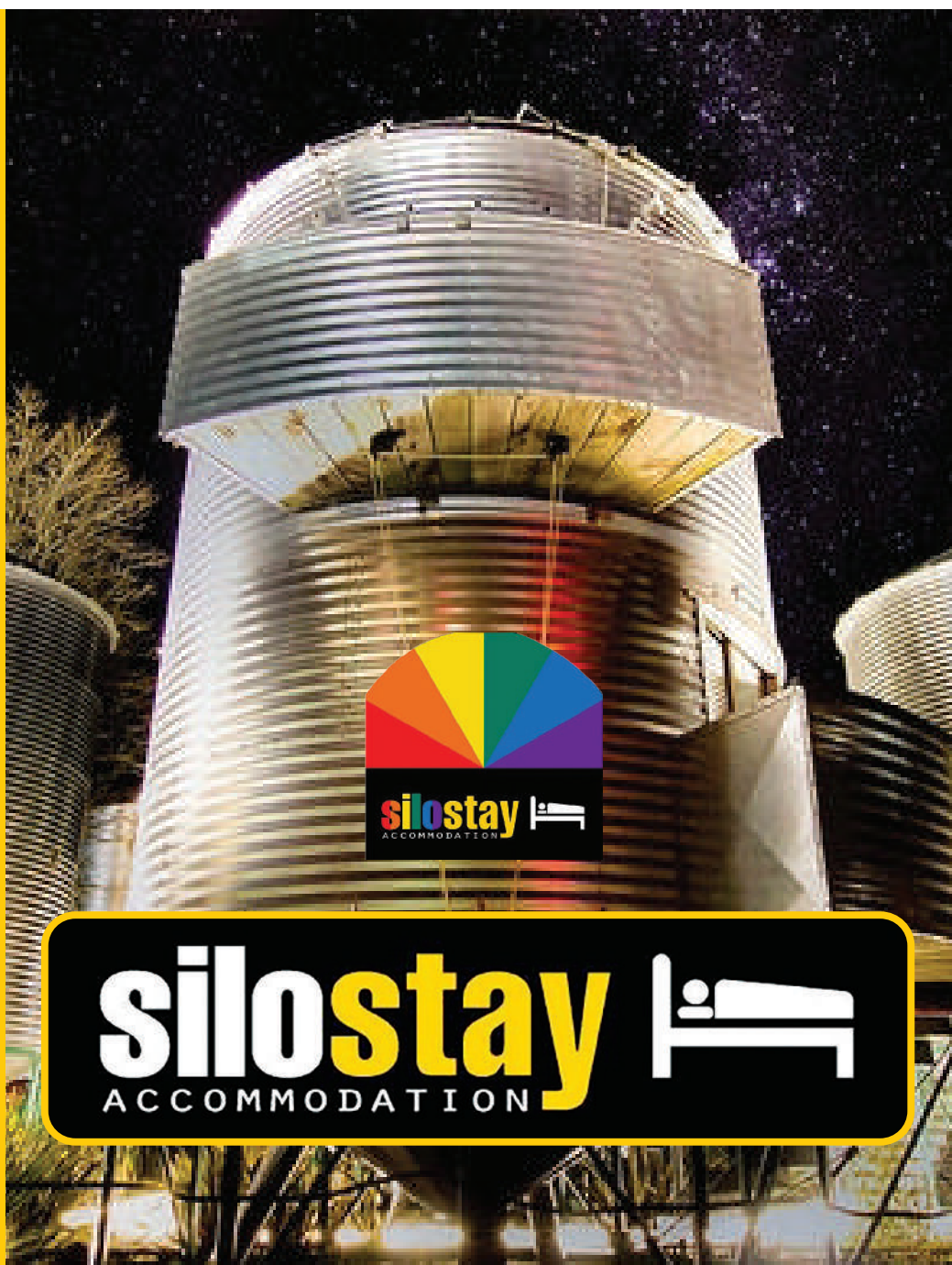
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ACCOMMODATION

THE FOOD FARM MATARIKI CHICKEN

Approx. 1.5kg chicken on the bone
To brine the chicken we filled a pot with seawater which has been cooled in the chiller. We then place the chicken in it, and leave it in the chiller for 24hrs before breaking down into joints.

If you're using chicken pieces, reduce the brining time to eight hours.

If you can't get seawater, use 30g salt per litre of water, dissolved and cooled.

The chicken and brine must be in a chiller or refrigerator at all times.

INGREDIENTS

Chicken (prepared as above)

Splash of oil

2 large onions, roughly chopped

1 head of garlic, peeled and smashed

1.4 litres passata

A few sprigs of thyme

2 litres of root vegetables chopped into even fork size chunks (we used taewa and kūmara)

Salt and pepper

2 large handfuls watercress from a clean source, rinsed and picked leaves

- Get a large frying pan hot on the stove, slosh in a splash of oil and brown the chicken pieces all over in batches. Remove to the slow cooker when browned. Continue until all the chicken is browned and in the pot.
- Throw the onion in the pan used to sear the chicken and cook until light brown. Remove to the pot with the chicken. Deglaze the pan with a splash of water and add to the pot.
- Place the garlic, passata, and thyme in the pot and start the slow cooker for about four hours.
- Then throw in the vegetables and season generously with salt and pepper and keep cooking until both the vegetables and meat are cooked, approximately another two hours.
- Check seasoning before serving. Stir in a handful of cress to wilt and serve in large bowls with plenty of napkins to clean up after picking the bones.

Angela Clifford is owner of The Food Farm in North Canterbury and chief executive of Eat New Zealand



Finding THE STARS

To find the Matariki star cluster in New Zealand, look to the eastern horizon just before dawn during mid-winter.

Matariki rises slightly north of where the sun comes up.

First, locate Tautoru (Orion's Belt), which points downward in winter — follow that line to the north-east.

Matariki appears as a small cluster of stars, often compared to a faint

sparkly cloud.

It's best seen on a clear, dark morning, away from city lights.

The first sighting marks the beginning of the Māori New Year and is a time for reflection and renewal.

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SUPPORTING LOCALS

CLAIRE INKSON

Mid Canterbury's strong sense of community was on full display at the 2025 Ruralco Golf Classic, with \$10,000 raised to support local farmers' mental health and wellbeing through the Mid Canterbury Rural Support Trust (MCRST).

Held in April at the Tinwald Golf Club, the event attracted over 100 players from across the region.

All proceeds from entries, raffles and on-course challenges from the event went directly to the MCRST.

Ruralco chief executive Tony Aitken said the result highlights the company's deep roots in the local farming community.

"We are here for Mid Canterbury farmers, that's who we are," Aitken said.

"It aligns with our local business because our purpose is around lowering farm input costs to make things easier for farmers.

"We get to address farmer wellbeing by enabling the Mid Canterbury Rural Support Trust to do their job."

The trust offers free, confidential support and wellbeing services to farmers and rural families facing personal or professional challenges.

Frances Beeston, MCRST coordinator, said the donation will go directly toward initiatives that strengthen community support networks.



Tony Aitken (middle) presents a \$10,000 cheque to Mid Canterbury Rural Support Trust coordinators Frances Beeston (left) and Duncan Barr. PHOTO CLAIRE INKSON

"The money will go towards initiatives such as counselling to support individuals, and we are also planning a rural professional's breakfast," she said.

The breakfast will give vets, stock agents and other professionals who are touch points for farmers' knowledge of the resources available if they are concerned about a customer or colleague.

"They are the people who have the eyes and ears on farmers.

"It's a holistic approach: Everybody is looking after everybody."

The event was supported by Ballance Agri-Nutrients and Nutrien Ag Solutions as platinum sponsors, with FMG backing the popular Vintage Putt Off.

Numerous local businesses donated raffle prizes to help boost fundraising efforts.

Aitken expressed his gratitude to all who made the event possible.

"We are incredibly grateful to

everyone who took part, whether by playing, sponsoring, or donating.

"This event was about more than just a round of golf – it was a show of solidarity and support for the people at the heart of our rural community.

"We are especially proud that the funds raised will stay local and directly assist Mid Canterbury farmers and their families."

The impact of the Rural Support

Trust (RST) extends beyond the Mid Canterbury region.

A recently released national Social Impact Report, commissioned by Fonterra and conducted by the Ākina Foundation, revealed the Rural Support network creates between \$4.60 and \$5.50 in social value for every \$1 invested.

Rural Support Trust national chairperson Michelle Ruddell said the findings validate the trust's mission.

"Our purpose is to empower primary producers, their families and our rural communities with the support, tools and networks necessary to foster social connection and build business and personal resilience."

The report found that 94% of people who engaged with RST felt less stress, and mental wellbeing improved by an average of 5.4 points on a 10-point scale.

"Our ongoing work in destigmatising mental health challenges and normalising asking for help is critical to building strengthened rural communities," Ruddell said.

"We want people to feel comfortable to reach out early before things feel out of control and we're here to support regardless of the situation."

Ruralco intends to continue its partnership with the Mid Canterbury Rural Support Trust and make the Ruralco Golf Classic an annual highlight on the rural calendar.

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Fast, focused FEELINGS FOR FARMERS

KATHRYN WRIGHT

When you pay attention on purpose to what is happening in the moment, you can learn how to surf the tidal wave of strong emotion rather than being swept away by it.

If you are rural, you have an advantage over townies - read on to find out how.

When you feel as though your feelings, thoughts and emotions are out of control, you might try a lot of different things.

Some not so good, like drinking, eating too much, drugs, sleeping too much, getting angry at people or isolating from others.

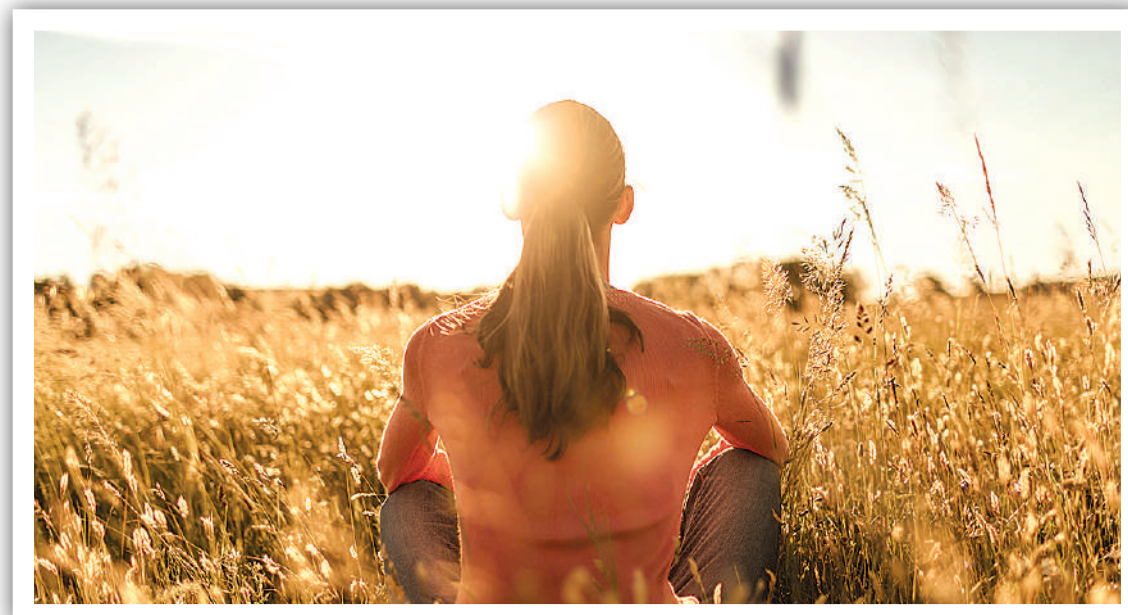
All of these things have something in common - they are all avoidance tactics that try to push hard stuff away.

Unfortunately, although they work in the short term, they don't work in the long run, as you've probably worked out.

The opposite action of this is to contact the present moment and allow your strong emotion to just be there, letting it come and go in its own time. Sounds hard?

Well, the other things haven't worked for you so far so why not try something different.

Allow the emotion: Make space for the emotion that has welled up inside you and name it to tame it - "I am furious" or "I feel like a



failure".

Notice where in your body you feel this - often it is a tightness in the jaw or a hard ball feeling in the chest.

Allow the sensation and imagine it flowing through you like a river - very strong emotions seldom last longer than about 90 seconds.

Using your five senses, bring your focus back to where you are right now.

If you are rural, you have an advantage because you have incredible sensory experiences literally

right on your doorstep.

Sight: look at the photo of the muddy tractor wheel closely.

Inspect the mud and the pattern of the tread like you have never seen anything like it before.

Pay attention to the swirly ice that forms on the windscreen.

Sound: When you are outside - maybe you're working or riding or taking the dogs for a walk. Listen to the bird song.

The neighbour on their tractor. Your dog's scuffling and running. Your boots hitting the gravel.

Touch: Pick up a stone or a handful of grass. Feel the different textures and temperatures. Study them like a curious scientist.

Smell: What is in the air? Maybe it's the smell of grass, dry feed, baleage or maybe you can smell your dogs or horse.

Taste: Do you still have tastes lingering in your mouth from breakfast? Maybe you can pop a mint and really concentrate on the texture or the flavour.

Staying present helps us to see situations for what they really are.

It brings us into this moment and focuses us on what is really happening, not what our minds tell us might happened or worrying about things that have happened in the past.

Your mind and body will be in the same place at the same time.

These worries usually stem from thoughts around things that have happened in the past that you play over and over, or possible future events that have not even happened yet.

The simple exercise of the 5 senses above, will help you to get out of your head and away from dwelling on unhelpful thoughts - essentially giving your mind, your consciousness a well-earned break from the over-thinking/ruminating process.

I've just given you a crash course on mindfulness.

You definitely don't need to sit cross legged and meditate or be a Buddhist monk to use mindfulness.

There is endless scientific research that using mindfulness can be life-changing for people who suffer anxiety and depression.

You've got nothing to lose by actually trying something that has helped millions of people before you.

Kathryn Wright is a registered counsellor(MNZAC)
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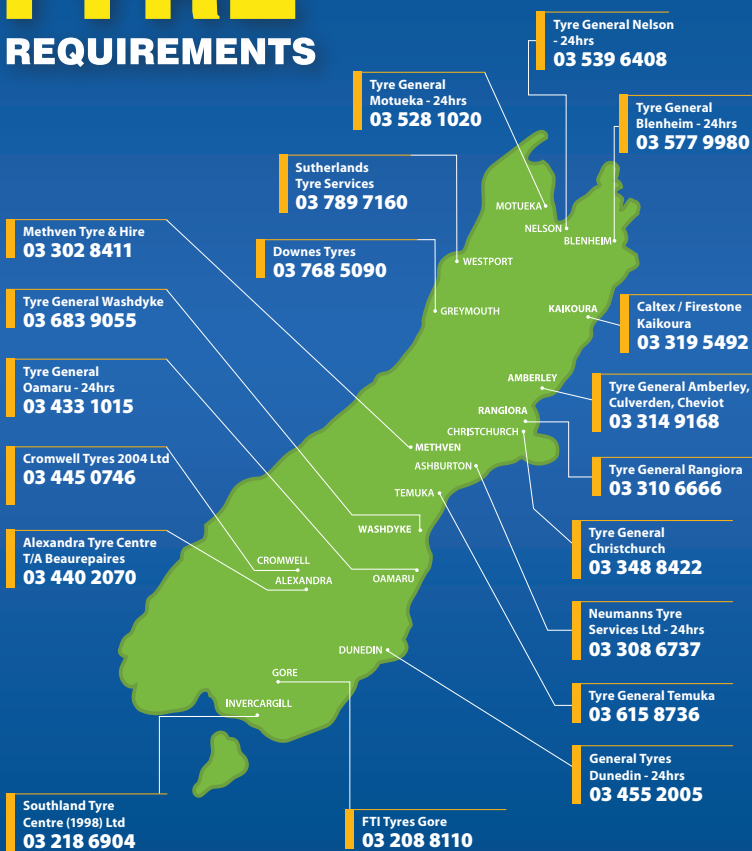
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CLAIRE INKSON

“We can do anything, so we may as well do what makes us happy,” says Ashburton dairy farmer Frances Beeston.

It’s a mantra she lives by in every area of her life — and her life is a full one.

Beeston grew up on dairy farms across New Zealand, developing a passion for the industry from a young age.

Now a mother of two, she’s worked her way through a range of roles in the sector — from contract milker to equity partner — and today helps oversee several family-run farming businesses.

Beyond her farming responsibilities, Beeston is deeply involved in community and industry advocacy.

She serves on the board of Rural Women New Zealand, chairs the Education Policy Advocacy Action Group, and is a member of the LIC Shareholder Reference Group.

Her true passion, however, lies in supporting rural mental health and wellbeing.

Beeston began volunteering with the Rural Support Trust before the outbreak of Mycoplasma bovis and now serves as the wellness co-ordinator for the Mid Canterbury branch.

“I started volunteering for Rural Support before the Mycoplasma bovis outbreak,” Beeston said.

“I realised then that I wanted to help farmers support farmers.

“Whether it’s floods or M. bovis, when a farmer drives up your driveway to check on you and see how much damage is done, farmers can relate so much better if it’s a farmer rather than a random stranger that has no idea about farming.”

Beeston’s dedication to rural communities was recently recognised when she was named a finalist for the 2025 Dairy Woman of the Year — a journey that pushed her beyond her comfort zone.

Despite being deeply involved in her community, Beeston has always preferred to keep a low profile.

But after recently completing the Agri-Women’s Development Trust Escalator Programme, she realised the importance of visibility when it comes to making a difference.

“I like to stay under the radar, but I realised now since doing the Escalator Programme I can advocate more for health resources and other things if I have a voice,” she said.

She now hopes her recognition as a finalist will help strengthen her ability to advocate for the rural sector.

“I realised that if I want to make a change at an industry or government level, I need to have a profile.”

Beeston credits her upbringing for her community spirit and drive to give back.

“Mum and Dad were always involved in community groups, on the PTA or making big conferences within the dairy industry happen.

“Growing up, that was our normal, and I was taught that for any community to thrive, you have to put time and energy into it.”

Among her many roles, motherhood remains her top priority — a role she cherishes, even with its challenges.

“It’s a juggle, because I’m a single mum with two toddlers, but I have a wonderful village which is my support network.

“Our village makes us stronger because we all have each other’s

back and we all have different strengths, and we make it work.”

Her relationship ended when her son Declan, now five, was a newborn, leaving Beeston to raise him on her own.

Wanting him to have the sibling bond she grew up with, she chose to expand her family via sperm donor and welcomed daughter Adaline four years ago.

“I grew up with siblings, and I wanted them to have each other and grow up together.

“I wouldn’t have her without a donor donating, and he would have done that out of the goodness of his heart to help someone who is struggling to have a family or with fertility issues.

“I’m so grateful to have her.”

Beeston was so grateful, she decided to “pay it forward” and help her close friends have a baby by being a surrogate.

“I had been friends with them for years, and watched them have fertility battles, so I carried for them as a surrogate.

“I wouldn’t have Adaline without someone being a donor, and they wouldn’t have had their daughter without me carrying her.”

Though the surrogacy process was rigorous, Beeston has no regrets.

She remains close with the family and continues to play a special role in their daughter’s life — even passing down Adaline’s clothes.

“The baby, Elsie, is the apple of her parents’ eye.

“I love her like I love my niece and nephews,” she said.



Above — Beyond her farming responsibilities, Frances Beeston is deeply involved in the community and industry advocacy.

Left (P28) — Ashburton dairy farmer Frances Beeston is a mother of two, who has worked her way through a range of roles in the sector — from contract milker to equity partner — and today helps oversee several family-run farming businesses.

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A Matariki FEAST

Peter Gordan's baked meatballs with twice-cooked kawakawa kumara and peas

Baked meatballs

- 1kg Quality Mark beef mince or lamb
- 2 onions peeled
- 1 heaped T fresh herbs: Think chopped rosemary, sage, or oregano
- ½ C tomato sauce
- 3T vegetable oil
- 10 garlic cloves peeled and sliced
- 2 thumb-sized fresh ginger peeled and chopped/grated
- ¼ t chilli flakes
- 200g button mushrooms sliced
- 1 large carrot, peeled and coarsely grated
- 2 x 400g canned chopped tomatoes
- 1 400g can chickpeas, drained
- 3T soy sauce
- ¼ C white flour
- 1t kosher salt
- 150g tasty Cheddar cheese grated

For the meatballs:

- 1 Grate one onion coarsely, squeeze out the juice and put in a large bowl – save the onion juice
- 2 Add the mince, herbs and tomato sauce
- 3 Roll the mixture into meatballs – they can be whatever size you want but I like mine the size of a table tennis ball
- 4 Place on a tray, cover, and put in the fridge to firm up while you make the sauce
- 5 Slice the remaining onion and fry in 1 ta-

blespoon of oil with the garlic, ginger and chilli flakes till golden, stirring often and making sure it doesn't burn

- 6 Add the mushrooms, carrot, tomatoes, chickpeas and soy sauce and bring to a boil then reduce to a rapid simmer
- 7 Cook for 20 minutes, stirring frequently, and taste for seasoning
- 8 We cooked our sauce in a pan that was able to fit in the oven – if this isn't possible then once it's ready tip into a deep sided baking dish
- 9 Mix the flour with 1 teaspoon salt and toss the meatballs in it to lightly coat, shake off any extra
- 10 Place a fry-pan on medium high heat and add the remaining oil
- 11 Cook the meatballs in two batches - add enough to sit easily in the pan, brown all over then place on the tomato stew while you cook the rest
- 12 Scatter the cheese over the meatballs
- 13 Bake till bubbling and golden, 20-30 minutes

For the kumara and peas:

- 1 Line a roasting dish with baking-paper
- 2 Steam the kumara in a double boiler until well cooked – poke with a knife to test – there should be no resistance
- 3 When cool enough to handle, place on your board and flatten slightly using the palm of your hand or the back of a spatula then place in the roasting dish
- 4 Melt the butter over low heat with the kawakawa in a small pan then spoon over the kumara and sprinkle on the sesame seeds
- 5 Roast 15 minutes in the top of the oven then transfer to a platter
- 6 Boil the peas in lightly salted water 2 minutes and then drain
- 7 Toss the peas with the olive oil, mint and spring onion and scatter around the kumara on the platter

Courtesy of Beef and Lamb NZ

Relief from joint pain (Part 1)

Joint pain from osteoarthritis can be anything from annoying to debilitating. Earlier this year, someone contacted me about osteoarthritis in his knees and elbows. He needed knee braces to get around and the pain prevented him from doing many activities that he enjoyed. He had resorted to cortisone injections for relief and was booked for another.

I started him on a double dose of my joint supplement. This gave him 1600mg of chondroitin sulphate, 1600mg of glucosamine sulphate and 400mg of the latest 100% water soluble curcumin (from turmeric) extract. While glucosamine and curcumin are important, it is the chondroitin that generates the greatest impact on arthritis joints.

Chondroitin sulphate helps to reduce inflammation in the affected joints. It promotes the repair and maintenance of cartilage thereby improving joint function and mobility.

Research indicates that chondroitin sulphate plays a crucial role in supporting



chondrocytes, the cells responsible for cartilage repair and maintenance. Studies have shown that chondroitin enhances the synthesis of extracellular

matrix components, which are essential for the structural integrity of cartilage. Furthermore, chondroitin sulphate aids in reducing the activity of enzymes that destroy cartilage tissue, thereby preserving joint function.

The real test of any supplement is whether it works.

I often ask clients to give me a pain rating out of 10. We then compare against this when we conduct our first review, typically after 6 weeks.

At the first review, my client noticed improvements. He was able to get around without the knee braces and he had cancelled the steroid injection. I spoke to him the other day and he said he was much more comfortable and now back playing competitive sport. Feel free to request a copy of my Osteoarthritis programme.

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



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- Chondroitin and glucosamine are building blocks of cartilage.
- Supplementation with correct levels can support healthy cartilage function and cartilage repair processes.
- New BioSolve® bioavailable curcumin helps joint function while gentle on the stomach.
- Research indicates that chondroitin is highly effective at 800mg daily.

John Arts comments:

"My latest Bettaflex formula includes BioSolve® bioavailable curcumin for faster results. The normal dose is 2 capsules daily but I recommend an initial higher dose for 1-3 bottles to saturate joint tissue."

John Arts, Founder, Abundant Health

Cautions: Do not take with anti-coagulant/platelet medication. If in doubt please consult your healthcare professional. Not suitable during pregnancy or lactation.



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