



**Ballance**  
**Farm Environment Awards®**  
 Promoting Sustainable Profitable Farming

## 2011 EAST COAST WINNERS

STEVE & JANE WYN-HARRIS  
 'MARLOW HILL'

### SUPREME AWARD WINNERS

#### ALSO WINNERS OF: BEEF + LAMB NZ LIVESTOCK AWARD AND PGG WRIGHTSON LAND & LIFE AWARD

Described by the award judges as “picture perfect”, the Wyn-Harris farming business comprises 358ha spread over two properties five kilometres apart in the Hatuma district, east of Takapau.

Steve and Jane purchased the 182ha home block 'Marlow' from Steve's parents in 1985 and there began Steve's journey to the point where, today, he happily admits his adopted 'maxim' fits: “A man should live life as though he will die tomorrow but farm as though he will live forever.”

The judges were clearly impressed with how Steve and Jane were juggling the balance between land stewardship, lifestyle and successful business operation. They wrote: “This is one of the most highly intensive and sustainable hill country sheep and beef units in the country. Intensively subdivided with reticulated water, shade and shelter in every paddock and a minimum of frills this property works to its maximum. It is intensively monitored with Steve using the information to preempt animal health issues, climate and market to maximise returns. Being a small property he has developed interests off-farm to provide additional income to support the family and to further invest in the property.”

The livestock portion of the business is grazed on the farm's easy rolling contour divided into 130 paddocks totalling 320ha. It includes the Marlow Coopworth stud established in the late 1960s by Steve's parents. Steeper country has been planted in trees – Steve estimates 50,000 of them on his watch – 29ha of forestry and 6ha of other species including trees for stock shade, shelter and fodder, for farm beautification and productive nut trees (walnut, chestnut, hazelnut and almond).

“All hills that could possibly slip have been fenced off and planted out in trees,” explains Steve. “This has also had the added benefit that runoff into the catchments is filtered and flow of water in heavy rain events is moderated.”

Runoff filtration and water flow distribution has also been improved with the fencing of wetlands and most waterways, which in turn is enhancing habitat for birds, insects and native eels and koura (fresh water crayfish). Recounts Steve: “Remnant cabbage tree areas were fenced when the cabbage tree decline appeared 12 years ago. Now we collect seed from these trees as well as local seed collected from other species such as kowhai, propagated on contract by Marie Taylor, to be planted back into these areas.”

Steve has planted all the trees on their property, an unswerving effort spread over nearly 30 years. Site preparation and



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## SUPREME AWARD WINNERS

consistent releasing are key factors in ensuring tree survival he says. By happy coincidence, he hasn't planted many in the past four years. "Because of the successive droughts, these would have been difficult years to get trees established," he says, "and anyway, I think I'm all planted out for a while!"

Recent poor springs and the summer droughts play havoc with the Marlow Hill stocking policy. "We are lucky. This area recovers well from drought, compared to other parts of Hawke's Bay." Steve says they've managed to keep their ewe flock steady most years; it is their cattle stocking rate that can be "all over the place". For example, 450 cattle were wintered one year and the next only 50. "My Friesian bulls are my flexibility, I know I don't make as much out of them as some people, but I have found having that flexibility option is really helpful."

The lack of free draining soil on the properties places limits on cattle policy "if you want to prevent soil damage, which of course we do". Cattle ratio is kept to a maximum of 40 per cent and it is predominantly yearling bulls that are wintered. In 2010 they wintered 194 R1 bulls, 57 R2 bulls, 1392 ewes, 522 hoggets, 148 stud ram hoggets, 22 rams and 16 works lambs.

The Marlow Coopworth stud consists of 240 ewes with genetics Steve believes represents traits positive for the area and for profitability. Up to 100 two-tooth rams are sold annually. Forty years of performance recording and current full Sheep Improvement Ltd recording of the stud, and the farm's production figures, allow Steve to irrefutably state "we are making good progress on genetics".

"We are happy. The lambs are going off the property the best I've ever seen them, and we are getting pretty well rewarded for them. I guess you could say our sheep are currently expressing their genetic potential to the maximum due to finally having

decent feed levels!"

In the late 1980s Steve was part of a group, New Zealand Ovine Sire Reference (NZOSR), the first of its kind in the country to artificially inseminate sheep. Says Steve, "the group of about 20 breeders continues to use AI and ram circling to maintain strong genetic links, so that through referencing we can remove environment effects and accurately identify the top genetics within the group and then repeat the process. Now the Marlow stud is using gene markers to identify genes of interest and also all sires from the past four years have been 'SNP' chipped by Pfizer to produce molecular breeding values."

Any outside genetics introduced into the Marlow stud must be from a facial eczema-tolerant flock. Steve has selected for this trait successfully in the Marlow flock. Other traits he rates highly are growth in meat, survival and wool quality. In contrast to years gone by, he is not actively seeking more fertility; he does not think this is necessary anymore. "Three lambs are an opportunity, but also problematic."

The Marlow Hill operation has been developed to be a productive unit easily run by one person. All 130 paddocks have shade and shelter for livestock and reticulated water. The largest paddock is 4ha. The whole family helps out when required, but Steve does the day-to-day work.

Steve is pleased with the state of their farming business, particularly with the amount and scale of development that has been achieved. He says contrary to the traditional perception of being a sheep and beef farmer who spent his entire career developing the farm, he believes he has taken a leaf out of "the book of dairy farming". "You know, that front end loader development approach, get in and get it all done and get your payback quicker."



### JUDGES COMMENTS

- Steve is a top-class stockman achieving impressive production.
- Successful Coopworth stud achieving top class performance and financial results.
- Careful consideration of cattle policy on wetter and more sensitive soils.
- Sheep came when called – impressive! Steve displays a great eye for stock.

## SUPREME AWARD WINNERS



A Lincoln graduate with a B AgCom, Steve was an early convert to feed budgeting in the mid 1980s. He calls himself “an intensive feed budget planner” and likes the opportunity having so many paddocks gives him to ensure each paddock is grazed only for a short time, with a lengthy spell between grazing. Marlow Hill is a contributing property to the Farmax and Beef and Lamb Economic Service databases and was a Monitor Farm.

Steve and Jane place a high value on community contribution. Their list of involvements is lengthy, touching most aspects of local education and sport and many local and national agricultural bodies. Steve has been writing a well-read column in Farmers Weekly for the past 16 years. In 1998 he took on

anchoring the ‘Cockies Hour’ show on Central FM radio station twice a week.

Formerly a dental nurse, Jane attended a tennis-coaching seminar when their sons were younger, because there was no one else to help out in their area. She is now a fully qualified tennis coach and coaches up to 100 children a year either at the tennis courts in Waipukurau after school or at the schools themselves. She has also set up an interschool tennis competition that involves 100 children each week in the summer terms. In 2007 she was named ‘Coach of the Year’ at the Central Hawkes Bay Sports Awards.

Steve and Jane have three sons; Jason (19), Hugh (17) and Matt (14). While Jason has just taken up a place at the Waipaoa Cadet Training Farm, the other two are still at school. Steve and Jane don’t want to apply any pressure and believe it is too early to make any decisions about farm succession. However, in their typically considered fashion, they have been planning for all eventualities since they became parents.

They explain they’ve made a “concerted effort” to pay off and reduce debt. “We have done this steadily by ensuring good farm profits and careful control of our private spending. So now our strongest succession planning tool is our sound balance sheet.” The forestry block, when harvested, is also part of the equation. It will allow Steve and Jane to “extract capital without incurring debt for anyone”.

They are open to all possibilities, but Steve is quietly confident his family’s connection with this land – which began when his parents purchased when he was three – will continue, one way or another. “All of us have a strong sense of place and consider this our ‘turangawaewae’, the place where we stand,” he says with understandable contentment in a job well done.



## JUDGES COMMENTS

- A high profile, focused and passionate farmer open to new ideas and leading from the front for environmental sustainability.
- Steve shows a real pride in sharing the property and their farming achievements with others.
- A family business with all members openly encouraged and involved with the farm with well thought out, long-term strategies.
- “Picture perfect” with a stunning range of trees and shelter. One of the most highly developed and sustainable sheep and cattle farms in New Zealand.

JAMES HUNTER  
'RANGITOTO'

## BALLANCE AGRI-NUTRIENTS HABITAT IMPROVEMENT AWARD EAST COAST FARMING FOR THE FUTURE AWARD

Rangitoto is 660ha of coastal hill country near Porangahau, a property the award judges describe as “a high performing, well-run and planned unit”.



The judges found James was “committed to maximising the sustainable production on this difficult property” and was showing “vision and leadership sure to be followed by others”. They commented: “James has been very proactive in protecting waterways, creating inter-connected dams and filtration zones wherever possible and protecting all native scrub and tree vegetation.”

The judges also highlighted his approach to development describing it as “innovative work” and “unique to Hawke’s Bay hill country”. Draining, mole ploughing and fencing winter wet clay hill areas allows for better

management and improved pasture. “By removing that weakness we’ve 120ha as productive as some flats and can grow chicory and heavier crops to cover summer dry and droughts,” says James.

On 580 effective hectares James expects to winter 2100 ewes, 800 mated ewe hoggets, 1800 trading hoggets, 110 cows, 105 weaners and 100 R1 and R2 bulls.

There are 10 QEII bush and scrub covenants on Rangitoto, covering 41-ha, and a 6ha wetland/dam area awaits survey. These and more than 10,000 poplar and willow poles planted by James and his father and grandfather before him address hill stability and nutrient run-off issues. Aerial photos of the farm taken in

1953, 1972 and 1994 reinforced to James that he was “going in the right direction” when he began the QEII process in the late 1990s. “I could see that the scrub areas were disappearing,” he explains. “It was either fence it or lose it. It is not what it is, it’s what it will be, or what it would have been if we hadn’t done anything.”

He stresses that alone, these were “very ordinary” areas of scrub. But what is happening now within all these fenced areas – the bush growth and an explosion of native bird numbers, including the sighting of the rare bittern bird - is exciting, he says. “It is just amazing how keen native bush is to regenerate. According to reports there are only 700 of these bitterns left, and here we are the creators of a new home for them, in what used to be pasture.”

Commended by the judges for his vision and passion, James says, “I wanted to have a farm with the whole package: productive farmland alongside regenerated bush and wetlands, in summary, an attractive office!”

He is upbeat about what he views as an increasing environmental consciousness within New Zealand agriculture, a “quiet and positive change”. James uses his own life to illustrate his point: As a student he worked scrub cutting, after graduating from Lincoln he worked for the Rural Bank, lending Government incentive money to farmers to clear scrub and bush. Now, he is involved with his local landcare group and is a director on the board of the QEII Trust.

James came home to Rangitoto in 1989. He is the fifth generation of his family on this land. He lives there with his wife Jane.



### JUDGES COMMENTS

- Displays a real passion for birdlife and has created substantial wetland areas, some inhabited by endangered Bittern.
- James shows courage and vision to heavily invest in new ways to lift the productive potential of mudstone slopes.
- Highly innovative drainage of winter wet clay hills using nova flow
- Biodiversity protection, extensive planting, new thinking and profitable farming on challenging coastal farm – all rolled into one.

DAVID CLARK  
'OPOU STATION'

## BALLANCE AGRI-NUTRIENTS NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT AWARD HILL LABORATORIES HARVEST AWARD

All care is taken to minimise compaction of the predominantly heavy clay loam soils on David and Libby Clark's 280ha cropping property at Manutuke.



Aware of the limitations of the clay loam soil type of his land south west of Gisborne, David has an intrepid approach to options out side conventional cultivation practises.

The award judges commended this and noted his results, writing: "He has managed to greatly improve soil structure and increase earthworm numbers since adopting a controlled traffic strip till

system. David farms some of the most difficult to manage soils (heavy clay) on the flats, but to look at they have better structure and resilience than some of the best soil types (well drained silt loams) on the Gisborne flats. This is a remarkable example of what can be achieved when we look after the soil in a responsible way."

David took over farming his family's property in the mid 1980s. His great grandfather came to the place in 1882. It was a mixed dry stock and cropping operation until 1992 when David switched to cropping. He grows maize, a range of varieties for different contracts, all pre-sold as it is planted. Specific hybrids of milling maize for food industry consumption and other types for use in food manufacturing and stock feed.

Prior to exploring the strip tillage option David had been working at the other end of the spectrum, with load spreading

cultivation options. "The emphasis in the late 1980s and early 1990s was to spread the load to reduce compaction," he recalls. "We tried to minimise ground pressure with wide tyres and the like, we'd been doing it for 10 years but I didn't feel we were making much progress."

The advent of high accuracy Real Time Kinetic (RTK) GPS, allowing placement of wheels to within millimetres of where a vehicle had been last time one was in the paddock, prompted David's interest in strip tillage as a viable option for his place. He credits the Nuffield Scholarship work of Hugh Ritchie, which investigated minimising cultivation to avoid loss of topsoil in the wind, as helpful. "Having heavy soil we don't have that problem. We were looking for the same outcome, but for different reasons," David recalls.

Using machinery imported from the US, pulled by a tractor with a front wheelbase widened to fit the track of the rear wheels, and a Cat Challenger with narrow tracks and wide track spacing, the farm's full-time employee Matt Shann does all the driving. At harvest time, a jockey bin stays on the strip tillage 'tram lines' and is taken to the trucks waiting in loading areas. As well as ensuring optimum soil health, this approach allows savings in fuel, labour and machinery wear and tear. No spring cultivation is undertaken. "Most of the reason people cultivate is to undo all the damage caused by machinery from the previous crop."

Despite "getting a bit lonely" with being a front-runner of the method, David is optimistic about his chosen approach. "Once you take the pressure off the soil it seems to look after itself," he says.



### JUDGES COMMENTS

- A meticulous, model cropping farm on all counts – David is a NZ leader in minimum tillage and low impact farming.
- A simple but successful, profitable and low impact cropping system.
- David has a strong focus on maintaining and enhancing soil structure under permanent cropping.
- David displays an impressive understanding of soils and nutrients and has excellent awareness of appropriate land use for particular property and soil types.

## BRITTANY THOMPSON (VITICULTURIST) 'ELEPHANT HILL ESTATE AND WINERY'

### MASSEY UNIVERSITY DISCOVERY AWARD

At this 25ha property on the Te Awanga coastline the measures taken to ensure responsible use of natural resources are innovative and embraced at all levels of operation. To work there, says Brittany, "is an absolute dream".



The owners are clearly taking a long-term view of this business. Explains Brittany: "It's never been about cost it's about quality and sustainability."

The desire to establish Elephant Hill took root in 2001 when German couple Reydan and Roger Weiss visited New Zealand and fell in love with the beauty of the Hawke's Bay region. They envisaged a "state-of-the-art winery" but from the outset made

it a priority for this enterprise to be sustainable to its core.

"During development they wanted to have as little impact on the land as possible," explains Brittany, "and that continues." All staff appreciate their working environment and are acutely aware "what we do on a daily basis makes a difference" she says.

This was obvious to the award judges who noted many positive aspects and practises in the operation and while there was a strategic plan in place to ensure long-term profitability the current focus was on "operating profit rather than return on investment".

Situated just 4.5kms from Cape Kidnappers, Elephant Hill vineyard began the planting of the first grapes there in 2003. The establishment of the associated winery, cellar door sales operation and restaurant has followed. Their first commercial vintage was produced in 2007. The land is mostly flat, with two elevated terraces and a hillside block. The stony coastal soil is

"ideal" says Brittany. "It is free draining, the stones retain heat and we are able to grow a wide range of varieties over a long growing period."

Describing the winery as "excellent" the judges wrote they considered Elephant Hill "in the top 10 per cent of wineries in this area that are environmentally aware". They said water use was a real strength.

Using the New Zealand-designed Lyve Winery Waste Water Treatment System, one of just two in operation in this country, wastewater is recycled for some uses back into the winery and for irrigation in the vineyard. The problem of keeping algae at bay in the feature pool in the restaurant could not be solved with chemical use because of company policy. An innovative solution has been found by combining the use of a UV filter and an ultrasonic device in the water.

Brittany believes the "dry farming" method of grape growing is possible for 70 per cent of the vines and this conversion is underway. "Longer intervals between irrigation encourage the roots to go down and find water," she explains. "Over time you create this beautiful, balanced vine that does it all by itself, no irrigation required."

A Californian, Brittany has been working at Elephant Hill since 2008. She came to Hawke's Bay in 2007 on a six-month work contract with another vineyard. Like her bosses, she "fell in love with the area and the lifestyle". The company's managing director is Gunter Thies and winemaker is Steve Skinner.



### JUDGES COMMENTS

- Water management is a standout feature of this property including a state-of-the-art waste water recycling system.
- Focus on the most efficient use of water with the long term aim to be dry farming the vineyard.
- Elephant Hill is rated 100% sustainable by Sustainable Winegrowers of NZ.
- Indepth knowledge of soil types and diversity with different grape varieties carefully selected to match soil type.

## NICK & NICKY DAWSON (EQUITY MANAGERS) 'GREAT GLEN FARMS'

### LIC DAIRY FARM AWARD

The Dawsons farm 480 cows at Patoka, northwest of Napier, in what the award judges described as a top dairy operation across the 'triple bottom line' in this region.



Commented the judges: "This well balanced business across the social, financial and environmental areas provides the platform for many people to achieve their goals. They have a broad vision of who the farm is there to benefit, which extends beyond them personally to include staff and visitors to their environment."

The milking platform 'Glenelg' is 186ha of rolling contour. The 180ha run off 'Rivendell' is 15 minutes drive away and used for winter grazing, silage and young stock. The Dawsons came to Glenelg nine years ago as 50/50 sharemilkers from Taranaki, where they had progressed through the dairy industry steps from wages to sharemilker. Six years ago they took up the opportunity to go into an equity partnership with Stuart and Ann McPhail, forming Great Glen Farms, a partnership which went on to purchase Rivendell.

Nick is from Christchurch. He began his working career involved with sheep farm work and shearing. Nicky, from a King Country sheep and beef property, is a teacher. "Dairying was an industry that we didn't know much about, but we could see it was a way to get ahead and now we've grown to love it," says Nick. "The sharemilking system has been brilliant for us. Our future plans are to keep being profitable and to own the farm outright while watching our environment grow."

The couple have a deep appreciation for their industry and the land that allows them to lead the lifestyle they do. The opportunity for family involvement is important to them and their three children, Ben (12), Libby (10) and Felicity (7). The two full-time and one casual staff members are also encouraged to include their children. "We promote the enjoyment of farming to staff, family and friends."

Central to their approach is their belief that being environmentally sustainable and profitable is "co-dependant". Says Nick, "without an economic farm we would not have the capital to maintain our environment and without the environment we wouldn't have resources to work with, so they both go hand in hand."

The Patoka district is considered 'summer safe' but there has only been a dairying presence there for about 15 years; it is still predominantly a dry stock farming area. They believe this shapes the way they farm and sharpens their awareness of mitigating dairying's impact on the environment.

About 10 percent of the farm is regressed each year but cultivation is kept to a minimum and direct drilling is used to reduce the risk of wind erosion. All wetlands and waterways have been fenced for protection and to enhance bird life. The Dawsons are keen planters of native and exotic trees for "practical, aesthetic and financial reasons". Nick sums up, "our aim is to be a profitable and sustainable dairy farm while trying to be a role model to other dairy farmers in a district of predominantly sheep farmers."



### JUDGES COMMENTS

- Role models for other dairy farms with staff management and the importance of family and wider community involvement.
- Passion for planting and a love of trees, as well as an understanding of their role on farms.
- A keenness to see all difficult, wet and/or erodible areas set aside for plantings rather than stock.
- Using the sharemilking structure and their current equity agreement as a pathway to farm ownership.

## THE AWARDS

The Ballance Farm Environment Awards are designed to encourage farmers to support and adopt sustainable farming practices. The awards are now held in Northland, Waikato, Bay of Plenty, East Coast, Manawatu/Whanganui, Wellington, Canterbury, Southland and Otago.

This is their first year in the East Coast Region.

## THE AIM

The aim of the Ballance Farm Environment Awards is to recognise farmers who pursue good environmental practices. When farmers enter the awards, a team of assessors visit the farm and discuss the entire farming operation. The awards are designed to be a positive experience for everyone, an exchange of information and ideas, plus a chance for farmers to also get information and advice from the various assessing representatives.

## UPCOMING EVENT

A field day will be held at the 2011 Supreme Winner's property at a date yet to be confirmed.

**Name:** Steve and Jane Wyn-Harris  
'Marlow Hill'

**When:** To be announced.

**Time:** To be announced.

**Where:** 377 Hinerangi Road, Takapau



## THANK YOU

Thank you to preliminary and finals judging teams, judging coordinator Lloyd Fitness and members of the East Coast management committee, especially chairman Bruce Wills, for the many hours they have put into making this inaugural award process a success.

Entries are open for 2012 – contact the regional coordinator on [eastcoast@bfea.org.nz](mailto:eastcoast@bfea.org.nz) for more information.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:** [www.bfea.org.nz](http://www.bfea.org.nz)

● The East Coast Ballance Farm Environment Awards process is managed by the Farm Environment Award Trust (East Coast Region).

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