



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

## 2011 OTAGO WINNERS

PETER AND HELEN GILDER AND LANDCORP  
 'WAITEPEKA FARM'

### SUPREME AWARD WINNERS

**ALSO WINNERS OF:**  
**LIC DAIRY FARM AWARD**  
**PGG WRIGHTSON LAND AND LIFE AWARD**

Peter and Helen's attitude to entering these awards provides a succinct insight into their approach to overseeing this predominantly low-lying 855ha Balclutha dairy and dry stock unit.

Explains Peter: "It's not Helen and I that entered, it's the farm and the people on it; Landcorp, the whole crew. Two of our senior guys are managers in their own right."

In praise of Waitepeka, Landcorp's southern-most farm, the judges summarised: "Staff development and input is highly valued which is a reflection of Peter and Helen's personal commitment to the farm. There is clear evidence of a vision and passion to work within the landscape and sustainably integrate social, environmental and farm production values."

Situated southeast of Balclutha on the Owaka Scenic Highway, Waitepeka comprises mostly flats and terraces, with about 260ha easy hill country. Most of the flats are lower flood plains of the Clutha River; the Puerua and Glenomaru Rivers run through the property. "When we came here 13 years ago there were a lot of swampy areas, and about 400ha of heavy peat flats," recalls Peter.

Today however, Waitepeka contains two productive dairy units on a milking platform of 558ha effective. This season 1050 cows were calved on 'Landsdown' and 730 on 'Dunns'. There are 10 full-time staff and six casual employees. A 270 ha run-off five kilometres away is leased, and from May this year a 450ha deer fenced property adjoining the run-off will also be leased. In addition to the dairy cows (the numbers calved this season include 450 heifers which went into the herds in spring) the Waitepeka operation also wintered last year 100 bull calves, 450 heifer calves and 300 breeding ewes with another 500 added in late winter, prior to lambing. The cows produce 1120kg ms/ha and the lambing is 150 percent.

Nutrient management is a real challenge with a large area of low lying wet delta land. In June soil samples are taken then a meeting is held with the Landcorp agronomist and Fertiliser Rep where a nutrient budget is completed. The policy of 120kg maximum nitrogen use per ha is closely followed. Accurate GPS fertiliser spreading is carried out. Two new 90 day storage ponds are being constructed so that effluent application can be avoided when soils are too wet.

Peter and Helen, who have three adult children - Jason, Karla and Regan – and five grandchildren, came to Waitepeka from a



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## PETER AND HELEN GILDER AND LANDCORP 'WAITEPEKA FARM'

### SUPREME AWARD WINNERS

Landcorp finishing block, Dawson Downs. Prior to beginning their second career as Landcorp managers, the couple were farming in their own right in West Otago; "the 80s were not very kind to us". They describe Landcorp as "terrific employers" and say they'd never consider going farming themselves again.

Waitepeka was originally a smaller property, being run mainly as a sheep breeding operation. The Gilders were asked to convert it into a finishing block but three years into this, in 2002, they were asked to oversee the creation of two dairy units on the property. In a hectic 12 months they kept the sheep operation productive by continuing to finish lambs whilst overseeing the dairy conversion, a project which involved the development of five houses, two cow sheds and a new water scheme. In addition lanes totalling 16km were created and 143kms of open ditches were dug and fenced.

Peter candidly admits to initially being unimpressed at having the property's shift into finishing changed again to a dairy conversion. "At the time I was frustrated we didn't get the chance to get it going properly as a finishing unit, but we stuck around and we are still here," he says with a grin.

Explains Helen, "development is right up Peter's alley, he loves doing that sort of thing, and he's good at it." Upon completion they were asked to stay on and keep running the place, despite having no dairying experience. Peter "hopped over the boundary fence" and completed a herd managers course at Telford Rural Polytechnic and now he happily admits "we definitely treat the place as our own". The addition of more land to the Waitepeka holding four years ago and again three years ago means the requirement for Peter to oversee development has been almost continuous.

However, they view the biggest part of their job being staff management and they are quietly proud of the fact that

Waitepeka has the honour of having the best staff retention rate of any Landcorp dairy property. Mindful of the tendency for staff to specialise within large scale dairy farms, Peter makes an effort to ensure the sharing around of a variety of other tasks like fencing, or planting out the doubled fenced ditches and 20km (so far) of riparian fenced areas.

"A lot of people in my position could be office bound. I'm not," says Peter emphatically. "We are very flexible," explains Helen, "we bend over backwards to allow staff to get involved in any sport or community activity off the farm." If a staff member has a commitment when they are rostered on for milking the Gilders see it as their problem to get someone to fill in. "I expect that not to be abused," says Peter, "and its not."

They appreciate how supportive Landcorp is as an employer, "particularly with any of the younger generation who show initiative". This aligns with Peter and Helen's approach both to staff and the numerous Telford students who regularly spend time learning farming skills under Peter's supervision. Younger students also connect with the farm; last year Helen organised the local Romahapa Primary School students to undertake Arbor Day planting and this is to be continued. The couple took cuttings from friends to plant in their first three years at Waitepeka, now they have their own nursery and an annual budget for plantings. "We've got this big dream that all the fenced off areas will one day be planted out." Waitepeka has seven areas of native bush & wetland in QEII & DOC covenants totalling 15.6ha.

Noted one of the award judges: "The Gilders have a vision and a passion for what they do and an understanding of the environment they work in that few others possess. They have certainly made their mark on Waitepeka, a legacy that will continue long after they have left the property."



### JUDGES COMMENTS

- The training of staff & Telford students reflects their enthusiasm & passion for the rural community.
- Demonstrating a commitment to biodiversity protection with their own nursery, enhancement plantings & waterway fencing.
- The entrant has a clear vision for the property (within Landcorp protocols) & has excellent staff relations & retention.
- Vigorous monitoring systems are in place for environmental protection, & farm production management systems exceed compliance standards.



## PHILL HUNT AND LIZZIE CARRUTHERS 'FORK FARM'

### OTAGO REGIONAL COUNCIL SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AWARD

The systems Phill and Lizzie have in place to ensure sustainability and resilience at their historic 474ha Wanaka sheep, beef and deer property are “impressive”, according to the award judges.



Shared commitment to their unique environment clearly defines this couple. Commented the judges: “Great full-time farm working team relationship with Lizzie in charge of the stock and Phill the tractor work and other aspects.”

Last year Phill and Lizzie were recipients of the Land & Life Award in the Otago BFEA. The difference when the judges came this season, says Phill wryly, was “we had some grass to show them”. The judges noted: “Two of the judges visited the property last year in a very dry year and felt that then, they did not appreciate the effort being made to make the farm as resilient as possible. A very impressive system and clearly the farmers are achieving their goals.”

Fork Farm sits in the Maungawera Valley northeast of Wanaka. Contour comprises half valley floor and a quarter each rolling hills and steep faces. The Hunt family have owned the property for 83 years. Phill took over the operation in 1989 and Lizzie joined him there in 1993. They lease Lizzie’s family farm in South Otago. Fork Farm is summer dry, so the leased property provides summer flexibility. The judges remarked, “the farm is a low cost operation with sound profits, regular budgeting and strategic planning.”



A major emphasis, noted the judges, was “reducing the impact of unreliable summers”. Measures taken included the selling of store lambs at weaning, cereal silage and grain for feed reserves, tall fescue and lucerne pastures, and pasja for growing out ewe lambs. “This links back to ensuring that stock health and welfare are paramount,” said the judges.

Wintered at Fork Farm last year were 2600 ewes, 370 deer and 50 cattle. This year there will also be around 800 hoggets, as the couple boost their flock numbers on the back of a summer in which they have also been able to build up feed reserves for the first time in three years.

Phill and Lizzie have an obvious commitment to good environmental practices with a wide range of considerations. They are trialling the use of a compost tea fertiliser. Cropping methods are mindful of soil conservation using minimum tillage. The farm’s main waterway is deer fenced. More deer fencing and enhancement planting is underway – of smaller waterways and more of the farm - to allow a wider spread of deer “so we can keep them off the valley floor in the winter and the dry hills in the summer”.

When the rabbit calicivirus disease was introduced nearby in 1997, the rabbit numbers dropped, so they took the opportunity to rabbit-proof fence their boundaries - a move which has “definitely paid off”. Regular shooting and strategic 1080 placements also ensure “we are well and truly on top of the rabbits”.

Preserving the heritage of the property is also a priority for Phill and Lizzie. The 101-year-old homestead, and farm buildings - some “at least 150 years old” - are well maintained. Phill and Lizzie have two daughters, Hillary (11) and Fiona (6).



### JUDGES COMMENTS

- Impressive stock management in a dry climate with good genetic based stock & excellent soil health management.
- Improving water quality with riparian fencing & planting; new shelterbelts; goats on hills controlling weeds.
- Excellent rabbit control with all boundaries rabbit-fenced, regular night shooting. Effective working partnership on farm.
- Excellent balance between work & family. A commitment to preserve the historic buildings. They are also undertaking energy conservation options.

## SHANE AND LEONA TRIMBLE 'SUNNYDALE FARM'

### MASSEY UNIVERSITY DISCOVERY AWARD BALLANCE AGRI-NUTRIENTS HABITAT IMPROVEMENT AWARD

On the edge of Hampden township, across the road from the sea, the Trimbles have developed a productive 171ha deer unit that impressed the award judges.



The Trimbles purchased the rolling to steep contoured sheep farm in 2006; they have doubled the property's carrying capacity from 1000su to 2000su (and rising) and created a deer unit set up to allow Shane to work off-farm if required. Commented the judges: "An amazing transformation in five years from a property with few paddocks and sizeable areas of gorse to a well-designed, easy-to-manage deer farm with many new enhancement plantings."

For the first year after they bought Sunnydale, Shane worked on the place, putting into reality his development plan to convert to deer, while still running it as a commercial sheep unit. This was no task for the faint-hearted, requiring refencing, regrassing, a new water system, concentrated fertilising attention, installation of deer handling facilities and, with around 15 percent of the area dense gorse, the commencement of their gorse war.

But developing a deer unit was not new to the couple. Shane worked on Haldon Station, which has a large-scale deer operation, for 17 years and between 2000 and 2006 the couple spent weekends and holidays transforming Leona's family farm 'Wooding Downs' near Geraldine from a mixed cropping/sheep farm into a high producing deer unit, which they farmed in partnership with Leona's sisters.

With Sunnydale, Shane and Leona are farming in their own right for the first time. Aided by a list the couple generate together each Sunday evening, Leona oversees the property during the week if Shane is away working as a contractor to a firm involved with Department of Conservation projects, or driving a tractor direct drilling for a local contractor. Leona manages most things, but has the option of calling in a friend for casual work as needed.

Last year Sunnydale wintered 360 stags, 220 mixed age hinds, 210 weaners and 85 RI bulls. They are planning to lift their hind numbers by 140 this year. The decision to specialise in deer was not a difficult one says Shane, who admits he has "a definite love for deer farming": "And the bigger the mob the more I like it!" he says. The deer suit their purpose; "that's the beauty of them. If we were running sheep I wouldn't be able to work away like I do," Shane points out.

The couple met at Haldon Station when Leona took a job there supervising the correspondence school. Shane, a builder by trade, initially went to Haldon as a maintenance manager, but discovered his love for farming once he began living at the McKenzie Basin station. He eventually became second in charge at Haldon Station.

The judges noted Shane's skills commenting: "The level of excellence and innovation on this farm is exceptionally high. This is seen in the very high standard of fencing; the fantastic deer handling shed with its gate arrangements; the square holding area for deer at the end of the lane to facilitate easier handling of animals; electric outrigger wires along the deer



### JUDGES COMMENTS

- Impressive electronic deer & cattle handling facility designed by Shane for safe one-person operation.
- Farm layout supports the efficient movement of stock & incorporates areas for ponds & wetland construction.
- Significant progress made in a short time due to prudent management, hard work & experimentation with new pastures.
- Detailed planning & layout including strategic fencing, laneways, water reticulation and shelterbelts.



fence to reduce rubbing and digging along fence lines; allowing clover to seed at least once every four years to maintain the soil's seed bank; boom spraying young gorse plants in new pasture with optimum rates of glyphosate in an attempt to kill the gorse and leave no residual chemical in the soil; the hydraulic lift built into the house for Shane's father."

Sunnydale is in what Shane describes as "a reasonably drought prone area" so they farm accordingly. Each year they expect to buy in up to 130 big bales of silage but this year they purchased just 40 bales of lucerne "because we were able to make the rest of what we needed ourselves".

About 90 percent of the farm has been regrassed so far. Mindful of minimising soil loss through wind erosion, they use direct drilling to establish crops and new pastures. However, this is not possible on the gorse blocks that, for the best results, require three years of cultivation, root raking and ongoing vigilance to deal with seedling establishment. "We are still learning how to deal with the gorse," says Shane. "One thing we do know is there is no cheap way!" Ever positive though, he points out that without the gorse present, the farm would not have been in their purchase price range.

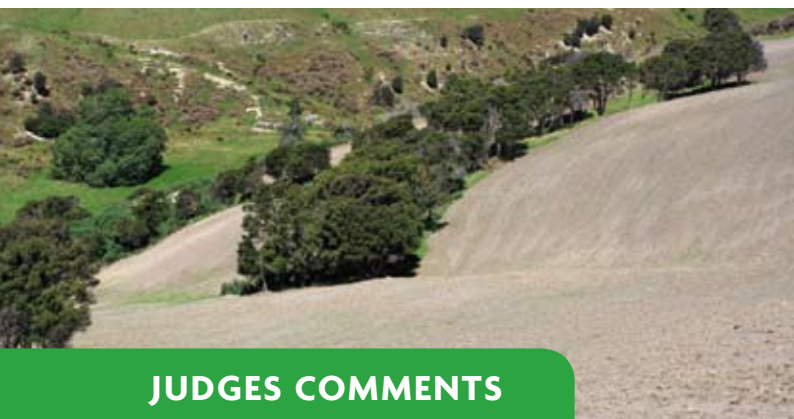
They have fenced off a 20ha block on the farm, 70 percent of which is regenerating native bush in a gully. "When the kowhai

are flowering, you can see hundreds of bell birds in the area. In springtime, the morning chorus here is unbelievable". The farm shares a boundary with a forestry block and has its own almost mature 10ha woodlot, which will be replanted once harvested.

The farm looks down to the sea; the prevailing wind is nor' east. They can also get damaging wind from the southwest. The previous owner planted some shelter and the Trimbles are continuing this. Noted the judges: "Many new shelterbelts have been established in a variety of tree species in conjunction with laneways and subdivision fencing to provide shelter and enhance the biodiversity." Ponds, with associated riparian area plantings are also being established.

Shane and Leona have four children – Shannon (21), James (19), who now live away from home, Angus (12) who is currently boarding at Waihi School and Kate (10). Shane is a volunteer for the local fire brigade. Leona is BOT chairperson for Hampden School and president of Hampden Rural Women.

The family enjoy their chosen home area. "Sunnydale Farm hit the market just as we went looking," they recount. "The location ticked all the boxes for a young family, and sea fishing recreational farmer." They particularly appreciate their neighbours Philip and Anne Nicolson, "who welcomed us in like family". Shane says Phil's local knowledge "that he's happy to pass on" is invaluable. "It's really good to have someone who has been here all of their life, to pick their brains."



## JUDGES COMMENTS

- A rapid transformation in five years to well designed easy to manage deer farm.
- Native bush fenced off enhancing rich native bird life & allowing local native plants to regenerate.
- New shelterbelts in conjunction with lanes & subdivision providing shelter & enhancing biodiversity.
- A programme of pond construction, fencing & planting on problem spring seepage sites.



## DAVE AND HAYLEY VAUGHAN AND LANDCORP 'HINDON FARM'

### HILL LABORATORIES HARVEST AWARD BEEF + LAMB NEW ZEALAND LIVESTOCK AWARD BALLANCE AGRI-NUTRIENTS NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT AWARD

Hindon Farm is a 1226ha sheep breeding and finishing, and beef and deer finishing property up in the hinterland between Middlemarch and Mosgiel where, Dave says wryly, "if it's not snowing it's a drought".



The award judges commended the production gain that has been sustainably achieved at Hindon in Dave's time as manager. They wrote: "In his five years on this farm performance has lifted considerably in what can be described as a harsh and variable climate."

Contour on the property is gently rolling with some steep gullies. The effective area is 1200ha, with approximately 950ha cultivatable. Wintered last year were 4700 ewes, 1600 hoggets, 64 rams and others, 80 R2 steers and heifers, 300 R1 steers and heifers and 2100 R1 stags and hinds.

Annual rainfall averages between 550 and 750mm, but this is typically not evenly spread. A weather station on the property is linked into a decision support computer model, Farmax, highlighting critical soil moisture thresholds. Dave uses this to assist with crucial destocking decisions.

The climatic variations of this area make flexibility the key management factor. "The high proportion of finishing stock allows for rapid destocking as droughts develop," noted the judges who commended the shift in deer policy out of breeding to finishing, carrying weaners with Elk genetics that fatten earlier "thus allowing more strategic feed for lamb fattening later on". The judges noted other measures being successfully used to

smooth seasonal affects. Approximately 27ha of lucerne is growing in drier areas. "Establishing a lucerne grazing block in a district where little lucerne is grown demonstrates an enthusiasm to apply new technologies," wrote the judges. Another crop being used for summer feed is goliath rape. The judges described these and other strategies as, "innovative use of a variety of specialist brassica crops and pasture-herb mixes to meet the demands of the different stock requirements through the year."

Self-feeding silage stacks have been set up for cattle in winter brassica crops. Commented the judges: "This eliminates the use of fuel to feed out this conserved feed and also enhances the safety of workers by avoiding towing the heavy feedout wagons in the slippery conditions that winter often presents."

There are three staff members at Hindon Farm. Nigel Kavanaugh, who has been there two years, is being supported to progress through AgITO courses. And a "keen" young local man Josh Adam has just been employed.

Dave is overseeing a removal or change in production of a number of chunks of land on Hindon Farm. There are four areas totalling 30ha that have been protected with QEII covenanting. These areas are mostly native grassland and also take in the main stream through the deer unit, which is now double fenced.

Douglas Fir woodlots are being established in previously grazed gullies, some of which were heavily gorse infested when the



### JUDGES COMMENTS

- Excellent pasture & soil monitoring using various technologies resulting in optimum production.
- Innovative use of specialist brassica crops & pasture-herb mixes meeting differing stock demands through year.
- An astute manager with an operative nutrient management plan; annual soil tests & regular herbage samples taken.
- Budgets set in advance with a fertiliser programme prioritised to meet financial objectives. Only Fertmark contractors used.

Vaughans arrived. This forestry initiative arose from Dave's concern about shelter at Hindon. "You can't ever have too much shelter on a farm like this," he observes. "I got talking with the forestry guys at Landcorp and we came up with a plan to use those gullies to plant for forestry and carbon credits."

The woodlots will provide some shelter but Dave is also ensuring shelterbelts are being established in a network around the farm. The judges commended this, writing, "an innovative aspect of both the shelter belts and woodlots is to plant tussocks on the edges to provide natural ground level shelter and to enhance the biodiversity of areas sown in pasture."

Soil tests are taken annually to monitor paddocks "as well as anything going into crop or any areas we aren't happy with". Dave also has herbage tests undertaken. "The herbage tests give us a fuller picture of what is going on, they give us reassurance that our fertiliser policy is working. At the moment our fertility levels on the farm are excellent. We are giving the soil and grass the optimum chance to perform, as long as we get the right amount of moisture, but that's always the unknown."

Hindon Farm has been involved with a number of research projects including drench tests and Johnes disease vaccination trials with deer, creep grazing trials with lambs and sheep electronic identification tags. "We are handy to Agresearch Invermay, explains Dave. "I showed an interest so now we keep getting asked to be involved. It's a good thing as far as we are

concerned; we try to be at the leading edge. You get those guys on the farm, you can learn a lot from them."

Dave attended Telford and gained a Diploma of Agriculture from Massey, then tried his hand at dairy farming. However he found high country shepherding much more to his liking, progressing from that to managing a farm in the Te Anau area. Dave and Hayley separately travelled and worked overseas for 18 months prior to taking on the job at Hindon Farm.

Hayley was a full-time secondary school teacher but since their daughter Rebecca was born in February 2010 she has taken on a part-time role with Plunket, taking Rebecca into secondary school classrooms for baby care awareness. She is a committee member of Taieri Parents Centre and sets up the draw for secondary school girls' hockey in Otago.

A keen dog trialler, Dave is president of the Taieri Dog Trial Club. He is also president of the Hindon rural water scheme, involved with the Lee Stream farm discussion group and hosted a number of field days on the property last year when Hindon was the Landcorp monitor farm.

The couple have a goal of farm ownership but for now they are happy with the challenges of farming at Hindon, and the opportunities to upskill that the job offers. "Landcorp are fantastic to work for," says Dave, "they are very progressive, you can get stuck in, that is the perfect structure for me!"



## JUDGES COMMENTS

- Good animal performance in a challenging climate; achieves maximum profit per kg DM produced. QEII covenants on native areas.
- Excellent initiative matching climate & feed supply by changing deer policy from breeding to Elk genetic weaners (fatten earlier).
- Strategic monitoring of pasture covers, growth rates & stock using Farmax & links to farm climate station.
- Diversification into lucerne; using outside technical advice. A comprehensive animal health plan for all stock classes.

## SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

### Barry and Liz Gray Graylands Farm, Owaka.

“The passion & innovative work in enhancing the biodiversity values on the farm, in particular the exceptional shelterbelt design & woodlots utilising an impressive range of both exotic & native tree & shrub species.”

### Alex and Ann Restieaux Beacon Downs, Clinton.

“The innovative & straightforward door design for protecting the grain shed by utilising heavy duty windbreak type cloth that allows air flow in, keeps birds out & repels any rain. The grain is cost-effectively dried by a gas burner system.”

## 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, Greater Wellington, Canterbury, Southland and Otago.

This is their eighth year in the Otago region.

## THE AIM

The aim of the Ballance Farm Environment Awards is to encourage and support farmers to pursue good environmental practices. When farmers enter the awards, a team of judges 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, and a chance for farmers to get information and advice from the various judging representatives.

## FIELD DAY

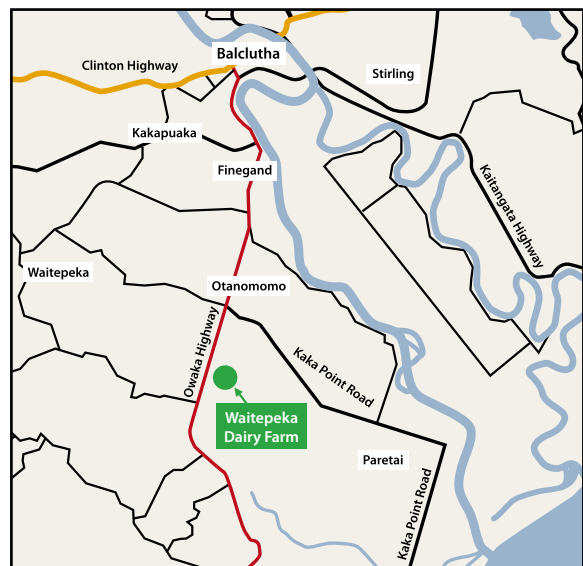
The field day will be held at the 2011 Supreme Winners property.

### Peter and Helen Gilder and Landcorp

**When:** To be advised  
**Where:** Waitepeka Dairy Farm  
735/737 Owaka Highway  
R.D.1. Balclutha

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FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:

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