



Ballance
Farm Environment Awards®
Promoting Sustainable Profitable Farming

2011 SOUTHLAND WINNERS

GRANT AND BERNADETTE WELLER
 'CROSSHILL'

SUPREME AWARD WINNERS

ALSO WINNERS OF: WATERFORCE WATER QUALITY AWARD BALLANCE AGRI-NUTRIENTS HABITAT IMPROVEMENT AWARD

The Wellers are balancing farming profitably with environmental and succession protection on their family farm in the Waimea Valley, Northern Southland.

The award judges wrote that they were impressed with the "strong family involvement and 'buy in' of retention of natural habitat of the Hokonui Hills and the ability to achieve this while still operating a profitable and productive farm business." The judges commended the couple's approach noting: "Bernie and Grant have a very clear vision, mission and culture."

The Wellers state: "Our system is profit-based and our awareness of the environment and the organisms that depend on it only adds to our success and ability to drive our business forward. We would like to show that it is possible to achieve high performance and profitability in our stock through good genetics while farming in a way that protects and enhances the natural environment of the Hokonuis."

Their 890ha (850ha effective) property, on the northerly facing side of the Hokonuis between Balfour and Riversdale, has contour that ranges from the flat at 300asl to the tussock at

600asl. 700ha is native and oversown silver and red tussock with areas of native bush spread throughout. There are numerous waterways running down through the property and into the Waimea Stream. Bernie grew up here with her parents Pat and Mary Ryan and four siblings.

All recognise the 'special places' on the farm, and their emotional tie to it. Pat was allotted the home block of the property in a returned serviceman ballot in 1954, initially leasing because he couldn't afford to purchase. After many years hard graft as a single man, in 1967 he married Mary.

The Ryan family's connection to the land underpins their recent collective agreement of the need to formalise farm succession into Grant and Bernie's care. Explains Bernie: "This couldn't be happening without recognition of how important the place is to all of us, and that everyone has an ongoing role to play."

Pat and Mary still live in the main house on the home block of the farm and Bernie's siblings maintain close contact and commitment, with projects like an Auckland-based brother using farm-sourced seed to grow over 200 cabbage tree seedlings for planting on one of Crosshill's three areas that are being covenanted with QE II and Landcare trusts.



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GRANT AND BERNADETTE WELLER 'CROSSHILL'

SUPREME AWARD WINNERS

The chapter of Grant and Bernie's stewardship of the property began in 1995, when Bernie returned home from overseas. She was prompted to do so because she "wasn't keen" on her father's plan to lease out the farm. "I wasn't sure where that would take me but I knew I didn't want the farm to go outside the family." Fate stepped in soon after Bernie returned: "My first night in the Riversdale Pub I met a lovely young man called Grant Weller."

Aside from Grant's personal attributes which appealed to Bernie, she recognised he had "a wealth of farming knowledge". In 1997 they took on managing Crosshill together. They were married in 1999 and began leasing not long after, despite their accountant at the time having "reservations". "From the very start Dad told us to get on with it and make it ours, and that's what we have done. Grant quickly embarked on an intensive re-grassing and shelterbelt-planting programme. Since leasing we have paid for all the improvements on the farm."

Carrying approximately 5900su, last year the farm wintered 2600 Texel ewes, 753 two-tooths, 770 hoggets, 32 rams, 200 Hereford/Angus breeding cows, 85 heifers, 47 steers and 8 bulls. The Wellers were in the top two percent of Alliance producers for lamb yield last season.

In 2007 they began using the Falkirk system with Ian Walsh, "a holistic approach to livestock measurement, assessment and selection". Ian went through their rams, then the ewes, sorting them into two mobs - the A mob going to a maternal sire to breed replacements and B mob stock going to a terminal sire. "The result was instant," says Grant. "There was a big comparison between the two flocks, physically in their structure, but also in their temperament. Two years ago Ian did the same with our cows. It was like looking at two mobs of cows from different farms, it was quite dramatic."

In 2004 Grant and Bernie purchased from Pat and Mary the 56ha 'Lerrig' block of the farm, across the road from the home block. But it is only since July 2010 that real progress has been made on farm succession, after they enlisted the services of Brendan Harrex of Harrex Group. The Wellers emphatically attribute this milestone of family agreement and bank loan approval to "getting the right people involved to help". They believe the past year has seen a significant shift in their approach, which includes recognising the importance of partnering with "successful and innovative professionals" and top service providers; they rate as one of their top achievements their "vastly improved" business, accounting and decision-making systems.

In July they began using GrowFARM, a business coaching system run by Brendan and Kara Walsh. "We had been looking for something more than just an accounting package, a system that would give us a better understanding of how the farm business was going throughout the year. A huge focus of ours is producing consistent, quality produce, which is paying dividends not only in the bank account, but mentally it has been huge for us, as we drive our business forward to new levels. To have such positivity flow through our business at this time when there has been so much negativity in our industry has allowed us to stay focused on our goals."

Grant and Bernie have three daughters – Hannah (10), Aimee (8) and Lucy (6). The family have a strong involvement in the Riversdale community including the gymnastics and hockey clubs. Grant is past president and current club captain of the Riversdale Golf Club and he ensures he sets time aside weekly to play there.



JUDGES COMMENTS

- Maintaining or enhancing water quality is the driver behind existing vegetation protection & new plantings.
- Outstanding consideration given to protection of natural environment of the Hokonui, strong family involvement & 'buy in'.
- Excellent planning & goal setting; clear idea & documentation on this. Farm vision & mission statement recorded.
- Grazing management on hills preserves habitat, tussock retained for shelter, excellent shelter planting on finishing block.

WAYNE WEBB AND LANDCORP 'LYNMORE FARM'

BEEF + LAMB NEW ZEALAND LIVESTOCK AWARD PGG WRIGHTSON LAND AND LIFE AWARD

The management of both livestock and people is "outstanding" on this 2564ha sheep, beef and deer property south east of Te Anau, according to the award judges.



"Lynmore is a large scale property achieving results similar to intensive, small scale properties," wrote the judges in their feedback report. "Each staff member needs to look after about 3500su which demonstrates planning and careful design of stock policies. The working environment in terms of support and professional growth are very good."

On 2421ha effective, around 27,000su are wintered annually. Mainly a finishing unit, stock numbers can go up to 40,000su in the summer. Manager Wayne Webb says they finish around 25,000 lambs to 18kgs each year; lambs born on the place and between 10-12,000 bought in.

"It's all about pasture management, keeping the quality in the pasture," says Wayne, "that's why we are able to finish so many." Commented the judges: "This farm requires a high level of skill to integrate the different classes of stock in a challenging environment. It has very well thought out integrated stock policies to match climatic risk, feed supply and soil types."

Last year Lynmore wintered 12,500 breeding ewes, 3800 hoggets, 400 winter lambs, 1000 weaner calves, 650 R2 steers

and 2600 weaner deer, with 400 more weaner deer purchased in early spring. A combination of a number of former Lands and Survey blocks, Lynmore consists of flat to rolling contoured land. Lynmore contains 85ha of QEII covenanted bush, tussock wetland and ponds. Wayne describes the farm in one word as "green" and in a few more as having "a good balance between wet and dry; wet in the winter, great in the summer".

Including Wayne there are eight farm staff with specific responsibilities spread across the three units – finishing, deer and commercial. For big jobs like sheep vaccination or fencing, all staff work together. Wayne likes that Lynmore is a "good stepping stone" in a farming career. "I see myself as teaching them to do my job. With having the different blocks I can give them lots of responsibility which I think is important."

He is especially proud that in his nine years as manager at Lynmore, four staff members have progressed onto other properties to be "really good managers". The staff turnover is low with staff enjoying the lifestyle the region offers with plenty of hunting, fishing and diving nearby and the farm's target of staff working no longer than an average of 90 hours per fortnight. "The problem is the farm is busy all year round," says Wayne who admits with a grin he has to include himself when reminding people to go on holiday. With his partner Karen McRae and her daughter Lydia (13), Wayne enjoys riding with the Birchwood Hunt. The club recently celebrated its centennial with a Hunt Week across four farms, including Lynmore.

Karen is an auxiliary staff member, undertaking administration and data input in the office and care of the substantial number of natives, the planting of which is ongoing on the property.



JUDGES COMMENTS

- Outstanding overall livestock management demonstrated over large & complex farm; good understanding of whole farm system.
- Excellent integration of livestock types & classes; results through efficiency & well-planned grazing management.
- Wayne's staff management & passion for staff success evident; under him Lynmore has outstanding record for staff progression.
- Community supported through committee membership, hosting farm field days & participation in farm discussion groups.



WILLIE AND PHILLIPA MENLOVE 'SWEETACRES'

HILL LABORATORIES HARVEST AWARD BALLANCE AGRI-NUTRIENTS NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT AWARD

When Willie achieved his Bachelor of Commerce from Lincoln, he didn't waste any time getting home to his family's 2000ha Northern Southland farm. There was no OE with mates for Willie: "I decided to come straight back and get stuck in," he says emphatically.



The outcome 18 years later is, according to the award judges, "outstanding hill country development" with Willie's "commitment and passion" resulting in "very efficient management of a large scale property".

Willie is the third generation of his family to make his mark on Sweetacres, a farm the award judges described as being "a rabbit-infested and undeveloped run block" in

1929 when Gray Menlove bought it. Now a productive, diverse property spanning both sides of the main road north of Lumsden, the farm incorporates native hill ranging up to 609m, developed hill, rolling paddocks and river flats.

The judges wrote: "Building on previous development Willie has set up a highly productive, efficient and profitable operation, and achieved a high level of self sufficiency in an environment where adverse weather can have a significant impact on stock performance or carrying capacity."

Last year Sweetacres wintered 5000 ewes, 1200 hoggets, 83 breeding cows, 15 yearlings, 5 R2 cattle, 735 hinds, 680 mixed sex weaner deer, 50 mixed age stags and 460 dairy cows.

Willie's grandfather Gray took on the property after the previous owner "got beaten by the rabbits". Gray counted 30,000 dead

rabbits within his newly fenced boundaries in his first year and the rabbits have never had the chance to take hold since.

In the 1980s Willie's father Ted began "big picture" development, which Willie confesses he was "itching to get in and do something with" when he finished Lincoln. In 1983, Ted added to the scope of the property by purchasing 120ha of adjacent river flats. Four years ago Willie installed rotorainer irrigation on 50ha of the flats, expenditure he doesn't regret, especially given the risk of summer dry on the property. "It gives us certainty in making decisions," he explains.

The development of Sweetacres has been thorough, but gradual. "I didn't want to rush in and do the whole lot at once," says Willie. "It's been a bit trial and error, not groundbreaking stuff." On developing hill country he says he has learnt the value of turning soil over by May, ensuring the frosts do much of the work breaking up the soil. This is followed with "a good hit" of fertiliser, according to need ascertained by soil testing, then two years of crop followed by a spray and direct drilling into grass.

The judges commented: "There has been a huge investment of time, money and planning in fencing, lanes, developing 250ha of grass from tussock, irrigation on the flats, taking on dairy grazing and creating an associated water scheme. This has changed the balance of the farm, increasing options and income."

The judges praised Willie's focus on "trailing things, learning and improving farming techniques and systems". Examples given included, "using fescue to resist porina and other pasture pests, applying nitrogen before brassica sowing to build soil reserves



JUDGES COMMENTS

- Wise & efficient use of nutrients to achieve maximum productivity gains.
- Good soil testing record & this historical data is used to support fertiliser application decisions.
- Excellent buffer zones to maintain water quality through retention of native tussock.
- Allocation of nutrients is appropriate to land type.

and reduce applications later, integrating lucerne on the flats, setting up and improving the irrigation system, developing a spray boom set-up, training young stock to respect fences and staged tailing to minimise stress”.

A lifetime of “watching the place” ensures Willie is vigilant and aware of the importance of maintaining environmental balance, he believes. “I certainly know that weather is the major thing that can kick us in the butt, so shelter is vital.” He was pleased to have tangible evidence “that we hadn’t overdone our development” during the vicious spring storms last year. “Looking at how the stock handled it made me realise we left enough shelter. Unlike most people, our lambing percentage was up last year, by about five percent.”

The Perendale ewes are pre-lamb shorn with a cover comb in early July and initially put into blocks containing good tussock shelter, shut up since February. “I have no fear about putting shorn sheep up there,” says Willie, “it’s like a big covered yard!”

The judges noted the development and protection of wetlands on the property, describing it “excellent”. Explains Willie, “anything that had wet runners or was going into gullies I’ve left as shelter and a nutrient soak”. Commented the judges: “Shelter plantings on the flats are almost complete. These act as a visual barrier for deer and minimise fence pacing and damage as well as providing shelter and reducing moisture loss. Tussock has been retained in the gullies during development – this provides shelter and acts as a buffer/filtering zone along small waterways. These areas are not fertilised.”

A comprehensive soil testing programme is in place, undertaken at least annually, monitoring pasture soil and gaining insight into areas to be cropped. “I believe if you are going to the time and expense of developing, there is no point in cutting corners on fertility,” says Willie. Last winter was the second season dairy cows were grazed on the farm. The herd is walked from a nearby dairy farm and is taken care of while on the farm by the herd owner and staff.



“It works really well,” says Willie, “they bring their own tractors up here and feed the cows themselves.” Willie puts in about 120ha of crop, including fodder beet, swede and kale and makes silage and hay. The dairy cows get about 23ha of crop and a portion of the silage.

Willie employs one full-time staff member and Ted, who lives in Lumsden, enjoys “filling the gaps”. Willie and Phil, who met while at high school, are pleased to have a good chunk of their development work completed. “We have got the infrastructure in place and most things done now so we are in a position to enjoy it.” The couple have three children – Sam (11), Elliot (9) and Ruby (6). Through the children, sporting and farming interests the family have strong community involvement.



JUDGES COMMENTS

- Outstanding hill country development; achieved using crops & suitable lime & fertiliser application.
- Pasture quality & quantity excellent on developed hill blocks.
- Excellent retention of natural gully vegetation for shelter & waterway buffer zone considered throughout development.
- Good use of lucerne crops on lighter soils to optimise farm production.

GEOFF AND JODELLE CLARK 'GLENDALE'

LIC DAIRY FARM AWARD

The 2009 conversion of this 391ha Hokonui family sheep farm into a dairy unit impressed the award judges.



At the southern end of the Hokonui Hills, Glendale was a rough block when Geoff's grandfather took it on in 1927. Today, 720 cows are milked on the property, which has 310ha (effective) flat to rolling contour; the balance of the land is steeper faces.

"The conversion of this farm has been done well, particularly given the topography and water sensitive areas," wrote the judges in their feedback report. "Geoff has made an

effort to use a few key people and his own skills rather than get bogged down with the surge of advice offered to farmers in the conversion process."

The decision to convert was "a massive one" says the couple. A proven team, Geoff and Jodelle enjoy sheep farming – for three years prior to conversion Geoff was the southern representative for Rissington Breedline and Jodelle was in charge of the farm's day-to-day care.

They considered many options ranging from converting part of Glendale to selling up in favour of a larger sheep and beef property. Many factors influenced their final decision, including confidence in global demand for dairy products, a "genuine" interest in dairy farming systems and, perhaps most decisively, "it's a family farm, we love it, we love the area."

Though Geoff admits, "the key word in the conversion is challenge", the couple have no regrets. "A lot of conversions seem to want to start with a clean sheet," explains Geoff. "Because of our history on the place, and with it not being flat, there was a bit more planning that had to be done. We knew we wanted to have as little disruption to things that we have spent time and effort on in the past."

The judges praised the Clarks' environmental priorities in the conversion, noting as "impressive" their conservation of trees, fencing of gullies, the use of the farm quarry as a stand-off pad, and the recognition of the sensitivity of the Upper Makarewa and other waterways running through Glendale. "They have made a conscious effort to keep those waterways pristine," the judges wrote.

The judges noted the "healthy relationship" between the Clarks and staff. Geoff and Jodelle clearly value the farm's four employees and appreciate that all have stayed on for a second season; "they've stuck with us through the conversion blues". Geoff describes himself as "the gopher" and "No 1 tractor driver", and the farm manager, Daniel Hart as "integral". "He uplifted his family from Matamata and came down here to something that wasn't even a dairy farm. He has helped me learn a lot about dairy farming, we work really well together," says Geoff, who doesn't discount future business partnerships. "Dan and (his wife) Roelie are the kind of people you'd like to grow your business with."

The Clarks live on their 40ha dairy support/sheep property near Glendale with children Thomas (9), Sam (8), Harry (6) and Poppi (2).



JUDGES COMMENTS

- Excellent planning & thought gone into conversion; very sympathetic conversion with regard to contour & existing shelter.
- Excellent information gathering & use of outside advice through the conversion process; this is ongoing.
- Strong value placed on retention of farm's natural features; good lane system from environmental & stock perspective.
- Systems being put in place on the farm that will give potential to achieve excellent production.

DAVID AND FIONA HUGHES 'BALLYHOOLEY DAIRIES'

MASSEY UNIVERSITY DISCOVERY AWARD

Self confessed “late starters” in the dairy industry, David and Fiona made the move from Taranaki to Southland in 1995 for a larger scale sharemilking job, and they’ve been progressing admirably ever since.



The couple now own two adjoining Central Southland dairy farms, one of which has a groundbreaking effluent system, designed by David, which has attracted 500 visitors in the past 14 months. The award judges summarised: “We were very impressed with the farming operation, in particular the approach taken to effluent management and the utilisation of the effluent for nutrient value – it was outstanding.”

The Hughes’ two farms are adjacent to each other, on flat land on the edge of the Drummond township. They were converted from deer and sheep to dairying by the couple. The home farm is 260ha and milking 800 cows. The farm upon which David’s much-admired effluent system is installed is the subject of their entry into these awards. 650 cows are milked on this 220ha property.

Formerly an industrial electrician, David says he had “visualised in my mind what I wanted” for the ultimate effluent system by the time they bought and converted their second farm. Paramount was having “failsafe capacity and contingency at the pump station at the cowshed,” explains David. “In this district if it’s raining you store, if it’s sunny you spread. Very important to have that choice, and a contingency on rainy nights if there’s

a pump failure.” There is just one pump, “gravity does most of the work”.

With the idea in his head, David went out “looking for the bits needed” with the help of an industry friend. He says the pump station he envisaged was “easy to do from the picture in my head”. But the storage facility was a different story. His idea was based on a Williams pre-cast concrete tank, but that company were not in the south. He went to Hynds and told them he needed a three million-litre tank. The design work was done with MWH engineering in Invercargill. “To their credit, from the time I asked the question, ‘could it be done’, it only took a year.”

David says the co-operation of authorities has been a key factor in allowing him the time and space to get his system working, despite being out of consent for a time. “The more I talked to them the better they understood what I was trying to do,” he says. “Originally I did this for our farm. But it has become much more than that, and I’m more than happy to help the industry.”

Commented the judges: “The effluent system at the Hughes farm is outstanding and an absolute credit to David’s determination to ‘get it right’ from its onset. The megapond is the first of its kind in New Zealand and its conception is a result of David’s futuristic approach towards addressing the issues that were and unfortunately still are being faced by the industry.”

David and Fiona have four children – Courtney (17), Brady (14), Jacob (12) and Kendall (10). They love Southland; “we’d never farm in the north again”.



JUDGES COMMENTS

- Award given for overall effluent system designed by David, with advice & assistance from Hynds & (the late) John White.
- Innovative stone trap design; excellent energy efficiency; reduced mesh diameter in solid separation press reduces odour.
- 90 day storage; above ground concrete pond to overcome soil constraints & minimise environmental impact risk.
- Adaptation of travelling irrigator arms achieves even effluent spread, ensures compliance; system designed to minimise human error risk.

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 10th year in the Southland region.

THE AIM

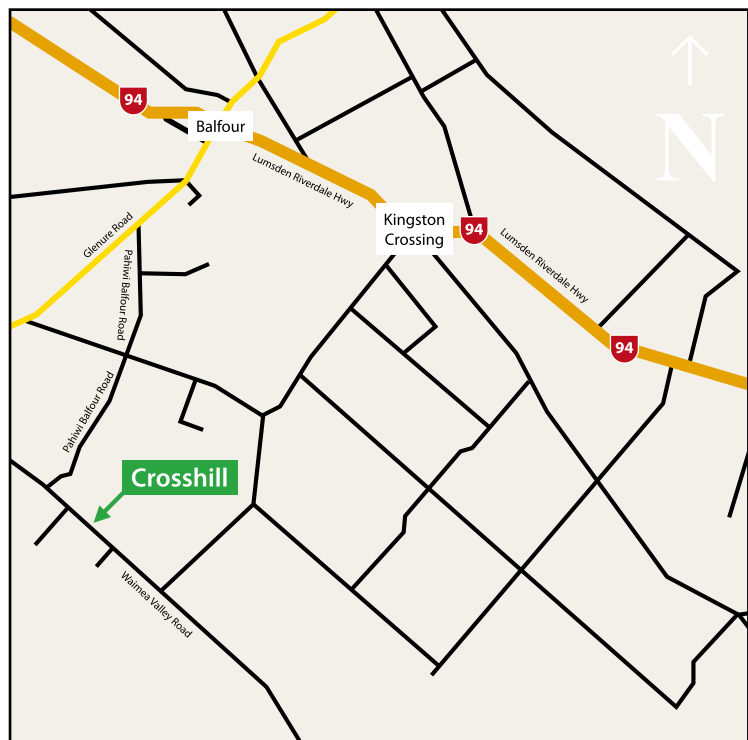
The aim of the Ballance Farm Environment Awards is to encourage and support farmers to pursue good environmental practices. When farmers enter the awards, a team of judges visit the farm and discuss the entire farming operation. The awards are designed to be a positive experience for everyone, an exchange 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.

Grant and Bernadette Weller

- When:** Tuesday, May 10th 2011
- Where:** 2014 Waimea Valley Road
Glenure 9776
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