



Ballance
Farm Environment Awards®
 Promoting Sustainable Profitable Farming

2010 OTAGO REGION

THE ALDERTON FAMILY
 HILLCREST

SUPREME AWARD

NEW ZEALAND FARM ENVIRONMENT TRUST LIVESTOCK AWARD

Ronald and Carol Alderton's approach to farming has been praised by the award judges who described the Aldertons as "incredibly hard workers but astute in decision-making".

The couple came to the Waitahuna area, east of Lawrence, in 1979 when they purchased their 280ha home farm. Ronald had a share in his family property in West Otago, but the couple decided to "strike out on our own", and have never regretted their decision.

"We've never run at a loss," says Ronald of their sheep and farm forestry business, which currently supports 5630 SU and 40ha of trees. "I'll do whatever it takes. I can look back and say some of our happiest times have been when we've been busy as hell and had our backs to the wall."

In 1998 they purchased their second property, of 300ha. The boundaries between the two farms are less than four kilometres apart; the farms are run together. Son David, with his fiancée Paula and now their two sons Tyler (19months) and Michael (seven months) has been living on this property and working in partnership with his parents for the past six years.

David and his younger brother Bruce both attended Telford Rural Polytechnic. Ronald and Carol encouraged them to "upskill" if they expected a hand into farming. Bruce is currently in Ireland shearing and undertaking other agricultural work. He will come home to farm one day says Ronald, "but

I'm not ready to play golf all day just yet."

The Aldertons are staunch supporters of the family farm concept and this also encompasses a commitment to community involvement. The family share most of the workload planting and pruning their woodlots and Ronald still happily lines up alongside his sons in the shearing shed to wield his handpiece. All the ewes are half belly crutched in August, "it gives us something to do inside on a miserable day".

"My father was the same," says Ronald. "I can't see the point in having a family farm and having everybody else do the work on it. I've never complained all the years I've been farming. If prices have been down we've always just seen it as a challenge. We have never failed to top-dress and do a bit of fencing each year, and help out in the community, and we are proud of that."

Last year they wintered 3250 Wairere Romney ewes, 1130 two-tooths, 1150 hoggets and 50 rams. The home block carries the younger ewes. The second farm, which is a warmer property, is valuable for the older ewes, which are lambed before the younger sheep. The hoggets are moved between the two farms as required.

Ronald describes their climate as "temperate, we don't have any extremes". However they do expect snow each year, usually three to four falls of between 10-15cm, "but it doesn't last on the ground long". There are around six frosts "of any note" each year but the frost does hit harder in some hollows and shaded areas.



National Partners

Regional Partner





Contour is rolling with steep gullies. It was working around those gullies that prompted Ronald to begin what is now a significant part of the farm's operation. The first trees were planted in 1991 in gullies that were awkward to muster and in which the Aldertons could see weed control was going to become expensive and time-consuming.

“My father was a keen farm forester so when I came here I was pretty sick of planting and pruning trees for a while,” recalls Ronald. “It took me 10 years here to realise I needed to do it.” Two winters later he had his first gully prepared to plant, and thus began what has become a systematic approach to introducing trees into their farming operation.

The judges were impressed with what they described as “the continuous planting programme”. They noted: “Ronald was able to discuss the long-term treatment of the various paddocks and gullies. He already knew which plantings or fencing would take place in a certain spot in several years time.”

Ronald believes it is imperative to plan ahead, “and keep doing a little bit every year”. Their aim has been to have ten percent of their property in trees and they will achieve this next year. Eight more hectares of Douglas Fir will be planted this winter and six hectares of macrocarpa in 2011. They have

their planting and pruning cycles worked out, so the work is realistically spread through the years, allowing the Aldertons a better opportunity to undertake it all themselves.

Plantings are mainly pine, with some Douglas Fir and next year the macrocarpa added to the commercial woodlot areas. Eucalypts have been strategically planted for firewood, aesthetics and quick shelter. And for shelterbelts and ornamental purposes Robertson Gold, Poplar and Alders have been planted.

Ronald points out the benefits go beyond the value of the woodlot trees at harvest: “Apart from the shelter, tidying up the farm and making it easier to muster, by the time we come to harvest we should have back the money we would have otherwise had to spend on weed control on the areas we have planted.”

Ronald and Carol are comfortable with the harvesting of many of the trees being more likely to benefit their sons than themselves. “The trees are part of the succession plan, but most of all they were planted because that is the best use for the ground they are on.” Commented the judges: “The farm is managed as if it is going to be the Aldertons forever.”



- Exceptional commitment to top performance, based on long-term records, detailed monitoring & prudent expenditure.
- Innovative development systematically clearing plant pests & strategic fencing for forestry & pasture renewal programme.
- Focus ensuring nutrient budget completed annually; care in application of fertiliser; awareness of waterway protection.
- Impressive family commitment to community over many years; good long-term succession plans in place.
- Minimising winter soil and pasture damage & impact on water quality by focus on sheep.

NEVILLE & BERNADETTE LESLIE LONGRIDGE FARM

BALLANCE NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT AWARD HILL LABORATORIES HARVEST AWARD

Neville and Bernadette's decision 10 years ago to move from Marlborough to South Otago was driven by their passion for farming, and they say they've no regrets in making the change.



The award judges agreed the outcome of the Leslies' move was a positive one, commenting: "This is an equally shared farming partnership that very clearly showed a deep love of farming."

Longridge Farm is a 425ha (361ha effective) sheep and beef unit situated north of Balclutha. The contour is rolling with some gullies,

around 280ha is cultivatable with a wheel tractor. Last year Longridge wintered 2800 Romney ewes, 500 two-tooths, 35 rams, 43 M/A breeding cows, 10 R2 in-calf cows, 15 beef heifers, 17 beef steers and three bulls.

It was noted by the judges that this is "a very well presented farm with attention to detail". The judges appreciated "the very high level of focus on improving the farm, in particular shelter and now enhancing the range of biodiversity".

The farm was 463ha, but two years ago some original thinking saw that reduced, with the sale of 39.5ha to a neighbour. The sale was, says Neville, "a win-win situation". The Leslies knew their neighbour was looking to expand, or move away. "He'd been a good neighbour to us," explains Neville. "By him taking that land it paid off our debt, reduced our workload and we got to keep our neighbour."

The Leslies have an understanding of the importance of scale to their neighbour, because of their situation in Marlborough. They had 140ha, divided by a main road that was getting steadily busier. Sheep farming was becoming less viable and in the region "the grapes were beginning to drive everything". So they began the new millennium by moving south. Two of their three sons – now all in their 20s – moved with them. Clinton stayed in Blenheim where he works in retail, Fraser is an agricultural contractor working in South Otago and Cameron is a musician based in Invercargill, where he also works in the media.

With parts of the farm exposed to the prevailing and sharp southwesterly winds, planting shelter was an early priority for the Leslies. Says Neville: "The previous owner had been there 26 years and he hadn't planted a tree. But he'd cut down quite a few!"

Their first plantings were two two-hectare blocks. "We could see it was either plant them in trees or pay for the war on the gorse," says Neville. They have found strategic placing of their woodlots to be a cost-effective way of combating gorse. "At least the trees can get ahead of the gorse."

Consecutive good years on the farm in 2002 and 2003 set them on their way with the fencing and planting programme. Neville and Bernadette now have 48ha of forestry; mainly pine, but also small lots of Douglas Fir and macrocarpa. "We thought, we're only going to be here so long, it was no good waiting till we were about to leave to plant," says Neville.



JUDGES COMMENTS

- Impressive integration of sheep & cattle alongside improved pasture quality, rising production, high-yielding winterfeed crop & whole crop silage.
- Prudent land use converting steep gorse gullies into woodlots, 48ha established so far.
- Excellent soil management: use of aerator; feed pad for wet & winter, placed by woodlot for shelter, cattle self-feed silage.
- Forestry blocks managed under joint scheme, all silviculture work now carried out by other partner.



They say they have been “amazed” at how quickly the trees have become an asset to the farm, beyond their potential cash value at harvest. “We thought it would be a long time before we’d see the benefits, but everything we are planting has grown really well, their shelter ability has been phenomenal.” Shelter is a major factor in the improvement in lambing

percentage, Neville believes, and the protection of pasture from drying winds this summer has also been noticeable.

In recent years they have widened their planting programme to include riparian areas and shelterbelts. Some natives are being used and the judges were impressed with the work. They noted: “The young thuya plicata shelter belts are growing well. Other varieties have been tried and are also looking well. Extensive and detailed presentation of what had been planted and how well each had worked.”

Neville and Bernadette have just entered into a partnership with Milton forestry contractors Craig and Dyane Maaka. “It’s given them a bit of a hand, they are keen workers. They get a half share of everything harvested at the end, but for that they have to do all the work from now on. It’s another win-win situation.”

Soil productivity has been another focus for the Leslies. Compaction was a big issue, “most of the country hadn’t been turned over for 30 years”. Around 20ha of swedes are planted annually as part of a pasture renewal programme. Neville is proud of his win this season in their discussion group swede contest. “I’d never grown swedes till we came here. I made the trophy for the contest but it’s taken me eight years to win it!”

Drainage in cultivated paddocks and soil aeration is undertaken. Another measure to combat soil compaction has been the construction of a winter feed pad, from which the cattle self feed silage. About five hectares of barley is grown annually. This is put into a pit for cereal silage, it is “guaranteed silage”. “If it gets dry, we can struggle to grow the grass for silage,” explains Neville. Any spare grass is still cut for silage however, and put on the top of the pit to combat rats.

Soil fertility has required careful attention: “The p levels were pretty low when we got here. On the worst country we’ve had to really stoke it to get it going.” Working with their fertiliser representative regularly is a priority. The judges noted the way the Leslies considered their variety of land uses and types. They wrote: “A systematic approach to monitoring soil fertility every year on at least five of the same paddocks to provide long-term trends related to production. Followed up with herbage tests on the pasture at least every three years.”



JUDGES COMMENTS

- Great enthusiasm improving whole farm environment & performance; seeks wide range of advice.
- Analyses data, keeps records, ensures this information used to lift farm performance.
- Systematic approach to optimising soil fertility, including herbage tests, and monitoring prior to sowing crops.
- Outstanding fertility management, including nutrient budget, optimised fertiliser use & minimising nutrient loss to water.



THE SMITH FAMILY GLENSPEC HOLDINGS

MASSEY UNIVERSITY DISCOVERY AWARD

The combination of solid farming practises and innovative thinking are features of the Smith's Maniototo family farming business.



Phil Smith heads the mainly halfbred sheep operation which he candidly admits “wouldn't work” without his wife Donna, his parents Basil and Valerie and children Jessica (12), Ben (10) and Douglas (7). The senior Smiths live in Naseby while Phil, Donna and children live on the 280ha home farm, east of Naseby.

Within a 15 km radius of the town seven blocks of land totalling 1170ha are owned and 485ha is leased. Vital summer grazing is utilised via a shareholding in the high country 'Soldiers Syndicate'. Last year 6700 ewes, 1400 hoggets and 200 cattle were wintered. Contour ranges from flat to very steep; winters are harsh and summers dry. “You've got to farm on gut feeling, there's no text book for it round here,” says Phil.

Commented the award judges: “The judging team was impressed with your farming operation in what is a challenging environment. The way you have built up a string of tidy properties to achieve a more secure farming system, whilst protecting the natural attributes and being very involved in the community, is commendable.”

The judges commended the action taken by the Smiths following attendance at a BNZ seminar which, the judges

wrote, “gave them the confidence to invest in a contract spray company on a profit shared basis along with installing 50ha of K-line irrigation”.

The retention of the Soldiers Syndicate's special grazing lease, by way of a High Court decision last year, was “huge for the family”, says Phil. The award judges recognized the knowledge obtained by the Smiths to contribute to the case. “If we didn't win that court case, we would no longer have been viable on our home properties,” Phil explains. “You can't farm round here without irrigation or an outlet for the sheep in the summer. If you haven't got that, it just doesn't work”.

Phil's great grandparents came to the Naseby area for gold mining. They bought the original 120ha of the home block. Phil and Basil have been farming together happily for over 20 years. Off farm income generated by Phil's bulldozing and silage contracting has generated cash flow to buy four blocks of land, double their stock numbers and improve the productivity of their animals.

“We do have a lot of blocks,” acknowledges Phil, “but we have grown with it, we've only ever taken on one block at a time. It's easier to manage than you'd think. There is a set of yards and a road frontage for each block, and whatever you do is only a small job”. The roads are “our farm laneway” says Phil. “The sheep know where they are going, they rattle along pretty quick.” Moving sheep is avoided on a Thursday however. “A mob of 1000 sheep and wheelie bin day in Naseby doesn't work,” says Phil with his characteristic dry humour.



JUDGES COMMENTS

- *Inherent passion to improve the land & farm performance by taking advice & utilising a great network of expertise.*
- *Fantastic team approach to achieve their business goals; innovative thinking & forward planning.*
- *Knowledge sought to enable response & management of legal submission for Soldiers Syndicate tussock grazing review.*
- *Extensive understanding of dry environment farming and importance of halfbred sheep; clear succession plan.*

PHILL HUNT & LIZZIE CARRUTHERS FORK FARM

PGG WRIGHTSON LAND AND LIFE AWARD

Phill and Lizzie's dedication to the stewardship of Fork Farm's distinctive environment and to upholding the Wanaka property's place in local social history is clear and genuine.



This commitment, and the couple's demonstrable teamwork both on the farm and for community input, impressed the award judges. They wrote: "The teamwork is particularly notable, along with your commitment to family and community. Your appreciation of the heritage of the farm combined with your clear goals should provide a great platform for the future of your farm and business.

You have a clear understanding of what sustainability means."

Fork Farm sits in the Maungawera Valley northeast of Wanaka. Much of the 474ha that now comprises the property was once the granary area of the original Wanaka Station. Contour comprises half valley floor and a quarter each rolling hills and steep faces.

Last year they wintered 2600 Romney ewes, 650 hoggets, 185 hinds, 180 weaners, R2 and stags, 30 cows and, for weed control, 50 Cashmere goats. They achieve 160 per cent lambing (to sale) and they won the Romney category of the 2009 National Ewe Hogget competition, accolades Phill believes rests more rightly on Lizzie's shoulders than his. "We are a complete partnership," he says, explaining Lizzie has stockmanship in spades "and she does as much, if not more on the farm than I do".

The couple are conscious of providing water protection and stock shelter provision. All the waterways in the deer unit are now protected and they have an integrated fencing and planting programme underway with the ultimate aim to fence all waterways and either plant a new shelterbelt or undertake maintenance work on an existing one annually.

Accepting the variability of the climate is a key to managing Fork Farm, says Phill. "The challenge of this property is never knowing what's around the corner. It would be hard if you didn't understand it – you've just always got to be prepared for either stocking up or destocking."

The Hunt family have owned the property for 82 years. Phill took over the operation in 1989 and Lizzie joined him there in 1993 whilst retaining her South Otago farming partnership with her father. The couple have been living in the historic homestead since 1997. They have two daughters, Hillary (10) and Fiona (5).

At the end of March they organised a 'high tea' to celebrate the 100th birthday of the two-storey homestead. Built by Scottish stonemasons, the grand old lady has exterior walls almost a metre wide. In the past 13 years the couple have overseen extensive work to ensure the home will be right for another century. Their move into tourism was prompted by the financial demand of the house repairs. They began with B&B, moved into lunches and sheepdog displays and have now settled to the less demanding business of provision of a venue (about 12 times annually) for technical tour groups, mainly from North America.

JUDGES COMMENTS

- Great custodians, real passion to manage sustainably; aspire to an operation that is profitable for the next generation.
- Impressive integration of sheep, cattle & deer; good understanding of soil & climate; consideration for shade, shelter & water quality.
- Fantastic community spirit & including leadership of Otago TBFree Committee, Upper Clutha A&P, Wanaka St Johns.
- Amazing passion for protecting heritage values of farm & buildings, particularly the historic homestead.



ROBERT & JILL REID
VERTERBURN STATION

OTAGO REGIONAL COUNCIL SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE
MANAGEMENT AWARD

The Reids have spent the past 31 years developing what they took on as a bare tussock run block, but treading lightly on their environment has always been a consideration.



The couple purchased the 1391ha of rolling to medium hill country west of Outram from Robert's father, who farmed down on the Taieri. Bordering Lake Mahinerangi at an altitude of up to 525metres, the property was home to 1000 sheep, 100 beef cows and an old set of yards for each.

The purchase came with some well-heeded words of

advice. "When we took over," recalls Robert, "everyone around here had diggers up their gullies, draining. But my father said, 'be careful what you do, those bogs are very important'. I have come to realise as I have got older just how important those very deep natural collection points for water are."

The award judges noted the commitment to long-term sustainability. They wrote: "The judging team was very impressed with the property and with what has been achieved in the past 30 years, starting from a 'blank canvas'. Of particular note are the tree plantings, fencing and evidence of a vision to work within the landscape.

"Production has not exceeded the carrying capacity of the environment which has left room for the next generation to further develop the vision to create a highly productive parkland-like farm."

Robert and Jill have two adult children. Kate, who is an environmental lawyer in London, and Andrew who came home onto the farm at Christmas equipped with a B AgSci and 18 months of overseas experience. Robert's father bought Verterburn from a Reid cousin; Andrew's path to stewardship of the farm is backed by being 6th generation in the area and an inter-generational oral wisdom specific to the district.

Farming at Verterburn requires the expectation of extremes. From May to September it can be "either fine and frosty, or very cold and stormy, with snow". Last year they wintered 3700 Perendale ewes, 1000 hoggets, 110 rams, 205 cows, 185 yearlings, 180 calves and seven bulls.

In addition to the 1331ha effective grazing on the property there is 60ha of woodlots. Robert and Jill planted their first stand of Douglas Fir in the early 80s, "but then the crunch came". Their policy to never allow cashflow debt to carry over each year "keeps you safe", but did not allow for much more planting until 1999. As they continue creating woodlots for shelter and eventual commercial value they are also refencing to protect waterways and bog areas. Natives are being planted in some areas. To discourage stock from walking in creeks, 30 dams with crossings have been established.

The Reids value Verterburn being part of the ARGOS sustainable farming programme. "We are learning all the time. One of the most significant benefits was to find we were not putting enough lime on our direct drill country, and that was locking up our phosphate."



JUDGES COMMENTS

- Passion to ensure long-term sustainability, incorporate new ideas (ARGOS research) on this low cost input farm.
- Impressive parkland environ and homestead, magnificent large pond with wildlife & beautiful vista.
- Prudent use of creeks & spring areas; native & improved tussock bound lake, preventing soil & stock effluent entering lake.
- 60ha forestry for shelter, snow protection interlinked now with new shelter belts & long-term carbon storage.

RICHARD PLUNKET, ANDREA LUDEMANN & RICHARD'S FATHER ALLAN BANARACH FARM LTD

LIC DAIRY FARM MERIT AWARD

The judges were impressed with the clear vision, long term goals and planning on this 123ha milking platform at Hilderthorpe North Otago (with 340 ha support farm). The owners have a strong focus on productivity with 1500kg ms/ha produced. The judges noted the special places and environment created around the farm, in particular the diverse pond complex on boundary creek.

The detail in the farm layout along with additional plantings and development will have a major impact in the future to enhance the environment and sustainability of the farm. Innovative thinking in producing their own unique farm operations manual along with a history of community involvement was evident.



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, Horizons, Wellington, Canterbury, Otago and Southland.

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 Supreme Winners property: **The Alderton Family**.

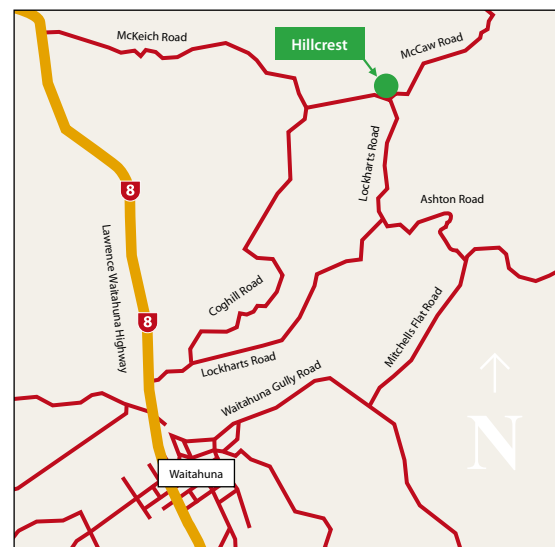
When: Thursday, 19th of November 2010.

Where: Hillcrest
349 McKeich Road
RD 3, Lawrence 9593

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FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT: www.bfea.org.nz

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