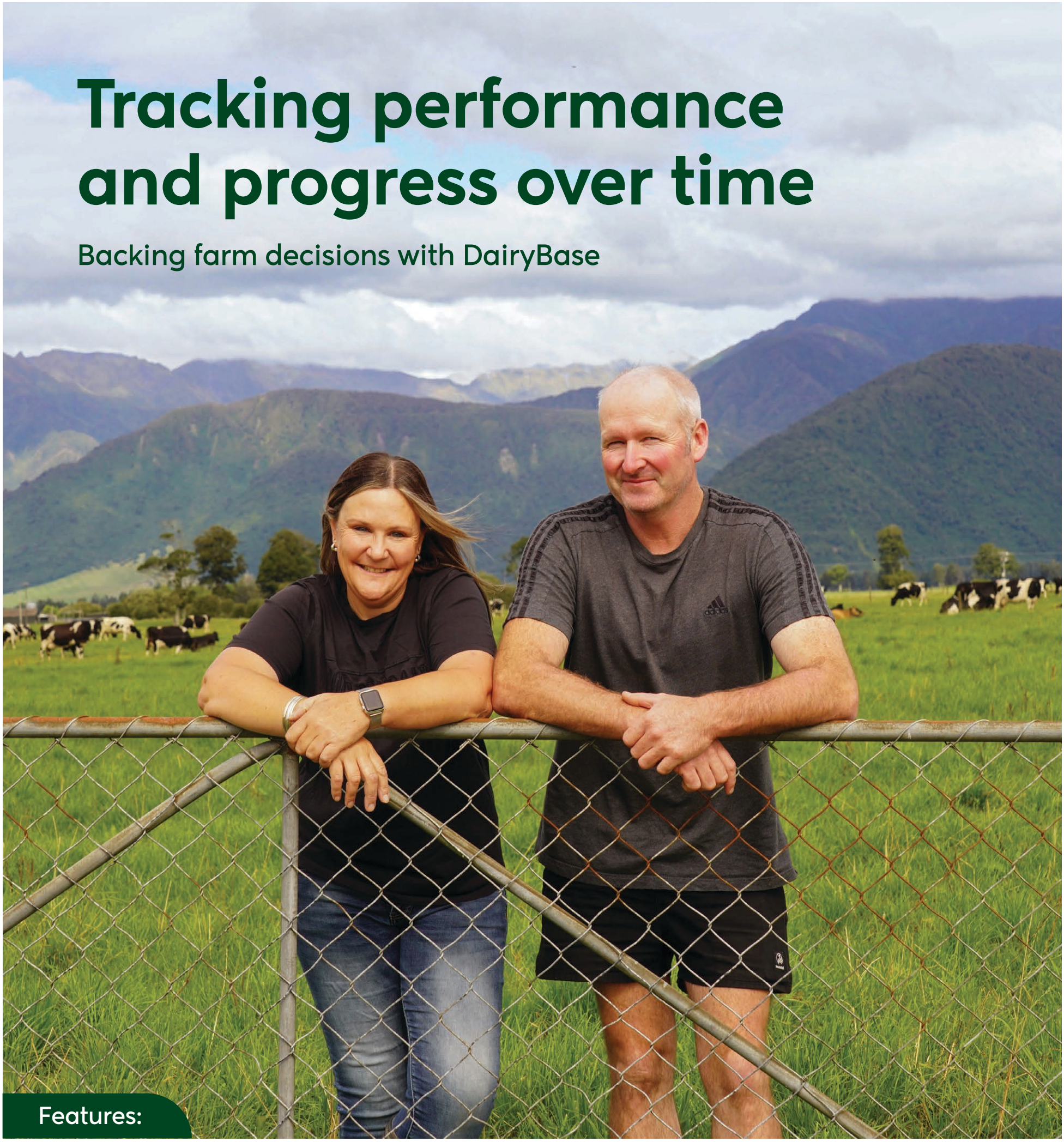
Inside Dairy

MAY-JULY 2026

By DairyNZ

Tracking performance and progress over time

Backing farm decisions with DairyBase



Features:

Over the fence...

As we near the end of the 2025/26 season, farmers remain focused on managing costs.

While it's been a solid season with increased milksolids production and a high payout forecast, optimism within the sector has been tempered in recent months. Global volatility has driven fuel prices higher, adding further pressure across the rural sector. Despite this, farmers continue to show resilience.

We have been working closely with MPI and other government agencies on farmers' behalf to monitor the situation, provide practical advice, and help ensure the right support is in place during this period of volatility.

Against this backdrop, the need to electrify the sector has come into sharper focus. In this edition of *Inside Dairy*, we explore opportunities for farmers nationwide to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and lower energy costs through our partnership with EECA.

Our cover story spotlights DairyBase, New Zealand's largest and most trusted dairy benchmarking database. A Hokitika farming couple share how using DairyBase has supported confident economic decision-making across their farming journey.

Ensuring our research delivers practical, on-farm benefits remains a core focus for DairyNZ. This edition of Inside Dairy highlights the real-world impact of that investment, from improved profitability and productivity to environmental gains.

Elsewhere, DairyNZ Chair Tracy Brown's Tiroroa Farm features in an article on improving water quality, demonstrating how consistent, proactive environmental practices can deliver lasting catchment-wide benefits, while maintaining profitability.

You'll also find economic insights, updates on genetic gain investments, examples of calf-rearing systems delivering excellent outcomes, policy and advocacy, and people news.

Finally, thank you to everyone who took part in the recent Milksolids Levy vote. The result reflects farmers' support for the work we do on your behalf and the value of investing collectively in the future of dairying. We will continue to help the sector drive productivity, strengthen farm systems, and compete on sustainability and deliver a positive future for New Zealand dairy farming.

As always, your feedback is welcome at **Campbell.Parker@ceo.dairynz.co.nz**

Ngā mihi,

Campbell Parker
DairyNZ chief executive

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West Coast dairy farmers, Carla and Chris Staples. Read their story on page 6.

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Levy vote results: Farmers vote yes to continue the levy

Farmers have voted to continue the Milksolids Levy that funds DairyNZ.

Thank you to those who voted and engaged in the process. We look forward to continuing to support you on farm, in your community, and moving the sector forward together.

Results	By Number of Eligible Voters		Weighted by Milksolids	
	Yes votes	Turnout	Yes votes	Turnout
Final by percentage	66%	47%	72%	57%

Note: For the vote to be passed, of those that voted more than 50% of levy payers needed to vote yes, and that those who voted yes produced more than 50% of the Milksolids produced by all voters. In this case 66% of voters voted Yes, and those voters produced 72% of the Milksolids produced by all voters.

With the formal levy application lodged for ministerial approval, this next stage of the process is now underway. We expect this will be completed before the General Election (7 November 2026) and will keep you updated.

With the levy vote confirmed all our energy shifts to what really matters – delivery.

We acknowledge that farmers have a range of perspectives, but overall feedback has been in support of our strategy and direction.

We remain focused on using our strong engine of dairy science to develop practical tools and resources that help drive productivity, strengthen farm systems, and support New Zealand dairy to compete on sustainability.

> *I would like to sincerely thank every farmer who took the time to participate in the vote. We're looking forward to continuing to work together.*
>
> **Tracy Brown,** DairyNZ Chair

CalvingSmart workshops

Build your team's confidence with CalvingSmart, a hands-on workshop covering key calving skills, including labour stages, calf presentation and calf resuscitation.

Using a lifelike cow and calf model, you'll sharpen practical skills to set cows and calves up for a great start to the season. Workshops are running in June and July around the country, with limited spaces available. Find one near you and register at **dairytraining.co.nz/calvingsmart**

Workplace 360 check-in

Before the new season starts, take a few minutes to review your Workplace 360 commitments – a practical step to strengthen how your team works together. If you've completed Workplace 360 this season, your report will be in your emails from DairyNZ, with the subject title "Your Workplace 360 report."

Workplace 360 is DairyNZ's simple self-assessment tool for building productive, positive workplaces. Fonterra farmers need to complete the assessment for the Co-operative Difference by May 31. Complete Workplace 360 at **dairynz.co.nz/workplace360**

See what's possible at Fieldays®

We're excited to connect with you at Fieldays, June 10-13, 2026, at Mystery Creek, Hamilton, and share practical tools, insights and science to help you tackle today's farming challenges with confidence. Visit site PC44 in the Pavilion for conversations with fellow farmers, sector partners, and our experts about DairyBase, building resilient pastures, supporting animal care, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions in ways that work on your farm.

See the latest DairyNZ science in action – practical solutions designed to deliver real value where it counts. Then head to site PB49 to meet the Dairy Training team and explore free, NZQA-accredited practical training. We'll also be at the Advocacy Hub and the MPI Science for Farmers site, ready to talk through opportunities, challenges and what's ahead for dairy. Learn more at **fieldays.co.nz**

Join the Pasture Summit autumn North Island event

Hear proven insights from high-performing pasture farmers and industry experts.

South Waikato – Monday May 11, hosted by Hugh and Anna Edwards, Trifecta Farming Ltd, Putāruru.

Find out more at **pasturesummit.co.nz**

Making a real difference on-farm

Meet Mike Borrie, DairyNZ's new chief farm solutions and engagement officer, whose focus is on delivering value for farmers' levy investment.

After 36 years at Fonterra, starting with its Dairy Co-operative predecessor, Mike Borrie is bringing a lifetime of experience to his new role at DairyNZ. Having joined in February as chief farm solutions and engagement officer, he's focused on ensuring farmers see the value of their levy investment and fostering collaboration across the team and sector.

Mike sees his role as bringing together farmers, scientists, technical specialists and regional teams to turn research into practical tools and advice that make a real difference on-farm.

"We want to be doing science that's useful and can be applied on-farm. The farmer's voice has to be part of every stage," he says. "I'm excited to see research come to life on farms."

A North Islander at heart, Mike grew up in Te Aroha. His father ran the Red Star service station at Waihou and fixed tractors and balers, sparking his early connection to the rural sector. Mike has always gravitated to roles involving people and relationships – an asset he says is vital when connecting with farmers.

"Farmer-to-farmer learning and knowledge sharing are key to our sector's success," he says. "At DairyNZ, we use a range of ways to connect, on-farm events, farmer-led discussion groups, podcasts, social media, and by working with the sector, we can efficiently extend the great work happening on farms."

Partnerships are central to this approach. Mike points to DairyNZ's collaborations with producers and AB companies, joint research programmes with organisations here and abroad, and partnerships with groups such as Dairy Women's Network, which support farmers and strengthen the sector.

For Mike Borrie, strong farmer engagement starts with listening. In his new role at DairyNZ, he's focused on collaboration, ensuring the voice of farmers is heard, and delivering value that farmers can see on-farm.

> ***If farmers benefit, the team grows, and DairyNZ works as one team, the levy investment has truly paid off. If we get that right, we're doing our job.***

What excites him most is adding tangible value to levy payers.

"If someone isn't seeing value, I want to hear about it and find out what they need."

He's also looking forward to fostering a highly collaborative culture within DairyNZ, where passionate staff feel supported and can grow.

For Mike, DairyNZ's core value is clear: delivering the best value to levy-paying farmers. From science and extension to advocacy and biosecurity, it's about making sure farmers experience the benefits every day.

"If farmers benefit, the team grows, and DairyNZ works as one team, the levy investment has truly paid off. If we get that right, we're doing our job."

Boosting the dairy-beef sector

A partnership between DairyNZ, the Government and other sector leaders is engaged in a four-year, $20.9 million programme to expand the dairy-beef sector.

DairyNZ, Beef + Lamb New Zealand, the Meat Industry Association of New Zealand, and members of the Dairy Companies Association of New Zealand have partnered with the Government in a new $20.9 million Dairy Beef Opportunities (DBO) programme, a four-year initiative aimed at growing New Zealand's dairy-beef sector and creating new revenue opportunities for farmers.

The programme is supported by the Government's new Primary Growth Sector Fund and was launched by Minister of Agriculture Todd McClay and partners in March at the Dennley Farm in Tirau.

The programme aims to unlock the value of non-replacement dairy calves – those not needed to replenish dairy herds or already entering dairy-beef systems – by developing innovative, New Zealand-focused approaches that suit the country's seasonal, pasture-based farming systems.

Unlocking value from dairy-beef through sector-wide collaboration. Left to right: Tracy Brown (DairyNZ), Nathan Guy (Meat Industry Association), Todd McClay (Minister for Agriculture), Alan Thomson (Beef + Lamb New Zealand), Guy Roper (DCANZ).

It focuses on three key areas:

Improving efficiency through genetics and systems – enhancing calf genetics, rearing, and finishing to increase productivity, profitability and farmer confidence in dairy-beef.

Smarter breeding and lactation strategies – increasing the proportion of calves suitable for entering the beef system while meeting dairy and beef production needs.

Developing new pathways and value chains – creating innovative products and supply chain solutions for young dairy beef, helping processors manage livestock more efficiently and providing farmers with new revenue opportunities.

DairyNZ will lead the second pillar of work through its extended lactation and mating programmes projects.

DairyNZ Chair Tracy Brown says the programme will unlock new opportunities for dairy-beef across the country.

"This is a real opportunity to drive meaningful change for farmers and for our sector's future," she says.

Learn more about the programme at **dairynz.co.nz/dbo**

Backing the next generation

This summer, DairyNZ welcomed a new cohort of interns who joined our science or Māori internship programmes.

Meet the science interns

DairyNZ's science intern programme is designed to support the next generation of scientists while strengthening the future of New Zealand's dairy sector. The programme offers hands-on experience across a wide range of scientific disciplines, with interns working on a variety of projects, including on-farm time, sampling, data analysis, and engaging with farmers. Interns also gain exposure to other parts of the organisation and the wider sector.

The 2026 programme received almost 200 applicants for the four available places; many weren't from farms but brought incredible skills and fresh perspectives. Several interns are now exploring their next steps in the dairy sector. Keep an eye on the DairyNZ website and social channels for future opportunities like this.

Ella Wilson

From: Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Wellington

Studying: Completed a Master's in Conservation Biology with distinction at Victoria University in October 2025. Now hoping to start a PhD at Lincoln University later this year.

Hands-on this summer:

- Analysed three years of calf liveweight data from Ngāi Tahu Farming's Te Whenua Hou Te Whenua Whitiora project to compare a regenerative vs conventional dairy system.
- Developed models that could potentially help predict milestone weights of calves and investigated herd, year and sex interactions to assess system-level differences.
- Found, despite faster growth on the regenerative system, both herds reached weaning weight at a similar time, showing that multispecies pastures can support comparable pre-weaning performance.

Belle Yong

From: Auckland

Studying: Final semester, Bachelor of Science majoring in Computer Science at the University of Auckland.

Hands-on this summer:
Worked on the early stages of the Resilient Pasture Programme, processing NIWA climate data to explore how seasonal patterns affect pasture growth.

- Compared wearable data with progesterone data, analysing accuracy across different lactation groups.
- Participated in weekly farm walks, observing pasture growth and rating paddocks.
- Developed stronger skills in data analysis and modelling, and gained hands-on insights into farming systems.

Sofia Skinner

From: Auckland

Studying: Fourth-year Bachelor of Agricultural Science (Hon), Lincoln University. Her honours project, building on her internship, looks at psychosocial risks affecting employee experience and retention on New Zealand dairy farms.

Hands-on this summer:

- Analysed employee survey data (2019–2025) to understand what attracts and keeps people on farms, finding strong links between staff retention and positive relationships with managers and teammates.
- Attended the International Precision Dairy Farming Conference, on-farm events and workshops on artificial intelligence and technology opportunities in dairy systems.

Jacob Urlich

From: Waipu, near Whangārei

Studying: Completed a Bachelor of Agricultural Science with first-class honours at Lincoln University in 2025. Started a PhD, comparing regenerative and conventional pastures and their impact on animal production, after his internship.

Hands-on this summer:

- Assisted with the summer heat stress mitigation trial at Scott Farm in Hamilton.
- Collected and visualised trial data of cow behaviour to ensure smooth progress.
- Captured camera footage for an international collaboration aimed at automating respiration rate measurement.
- Gained hands-on experience in specialised, labour-intensive trial techniques such as respiration rates.

Meet the Māori interns

DairyNZ's Māori internship programme, now in its sixth year, offers opportunities for rangatahi Māori to build capability in science and agriculture. This year's interns completed joint internships, spending equal time at DairyNZ and the Bioeconomy Science Institute.

Find out more and watch the video at **dairynz.co.nz/maori-internships**

Amber Murfitt

From: Kawerau, Bay of Plenty

Iwi: Ngāti Raukawa

Studying: Final year of a Bachelor of Science, studying molecular and cellular biology and chemistry, at the University of Waikato.

Hands-on this summer:

- Worked alongside Māori advisors, environment specialists, and scientists from DairyNZ and the Bioeconomy Science Institute.
- Focused on catchment health, studying water quality and biodiversity, including eDNA testing and using tunnel trackers to identify skinks and other species.
- Participated in two noho marae at Maungatautari marae, deepening understanding of Mātauranga Māori – Māori knowledge and building networks with inspiring people.

Olivia Barlow

From: North Canterbury

Iwi: Ngāpuhi

Studying: Final year of a Bachelor of Science in finance and psychology at the University of Canterbury.

Hands-on this summer:

- Worked alongside Māori advisors, researchers and partnership specialists from both DairyNZ and the Bioeconomy Science Institute.
- Attended a two-day, Māori Biosecurity noho marae that focused on strengthening Māori-led biosecurity networks, identifying current and future biosecurity threats and hearing first-hand from Kaitiaki - environmental stewards.
- Gained insights into projects and research collaborations with Māori farms, agribusiness and iwi.

Tracking performance over time

DairyBase gives Chris and Carla Staples – and their bank – the confidence that comes with having the data to back farming decisions in the short and longer term.

West Coast dairy farmers Chris and Carla Staples have made extensive use of DairyBase as part of their farm business management. Their data shows per-hectare performance above the West Coast average, with physical KPIs translating through to financial results.

"With DairyBase, we can plan more effectively for our long-term growth," Carla explains. "The system tracks real information over time, giving us a clear picture of whether our farming decisions are delivering real results."

In 2024/25, the Staples' operating profit was $3,138 per hectare, compared with a district benchmark of $1,905, and their operating profit margin was 35.3% versus the benchmark's 25.6%. A similar pattern shows up on a per-kilogram basis, with operating profit of $3.81/kgMS compared with the benchmark of $2.59/kgMS. Over the past three years, their average operating profit has sat at around $2.46/kgMS.

Their operating expenses for 2024/25 were $7.00/kgMS, compared to the benchmark of $7.53/kgMS *(see graph)*. The results reflect tight cost control and strong production efficiency, with kilograms of milksolids per cow and per hectare consistently converting into operating profit and, over time, equity growth.

That focus on performance has underpinned the Staples' progression through the dairy system.

Chris and Carla Staples use DairyBase to track performance, compare results with local benchmarks, and plan their pathway through the dairy system.

Starting as variable-order sharemilkers, they focused on farm performance, cost control and building equity over several seasons, before moving into herd-owning sharemilking. Consistent results, careful cashflow management and a measured approach to risk supported the transition into farm ownership, alongside their wider family and business goals.

Decisions grounded in real performance

In seasons when payouts fluctuate and costs continue to rise, strong cashflow doesn't always tell the full story. Benchmarking helps farmers understand whether current results reflect underlying performance – and whether changes on-farm are having the intended effect.

They've found using DairyBase helps to identify their farm business strengths, as well as opportunities to improve, and supports more informed decision-making, Carla says.

"Being able to compare our performance in key areas like production, efficiency, profitability and cost controls against regional and national averages with benchmarking allows us to set realistic performance targets.

"It also helps give the bank confidence in our budgets, as the information is standardised, credible and easy to understand."

Alongside their financial results, the Staples keep a close eye on DairyBase's physical performance reports. Feed reconciliation and pasture-harvest graphs highlight trends clearly: in 2024/25, cows consumed 11.7 tDM per hectare, with 9.2 tDM harvested from pasture and crop – both above district averages.

Milksolids production per hectare has also held steady, rising from 777 kgMS/ha in 2022/23 to 829 kgMS/ha in 2023/24, and 823 kgMS/ha in 2024/25. Per-cow production sits well above the district benchmark and close to herd liveweight targets.

These figures reflect a system built around cow efficiency, pasture utilisation, and labour productivity – efficient, repeatable and designed to get the most from both cows and pasture.

These days, they use DairyBase for a quick seasonal check against the local benchmark to confirm they're on the right track.

Whether it's used intensively when building a business, or simply as a seasonal sense check, DairyBase helps farmers make decisions based on real performance. As more farmers take part, the benchmarks become stronger, giving everyone a clearer picture of how their business compares.

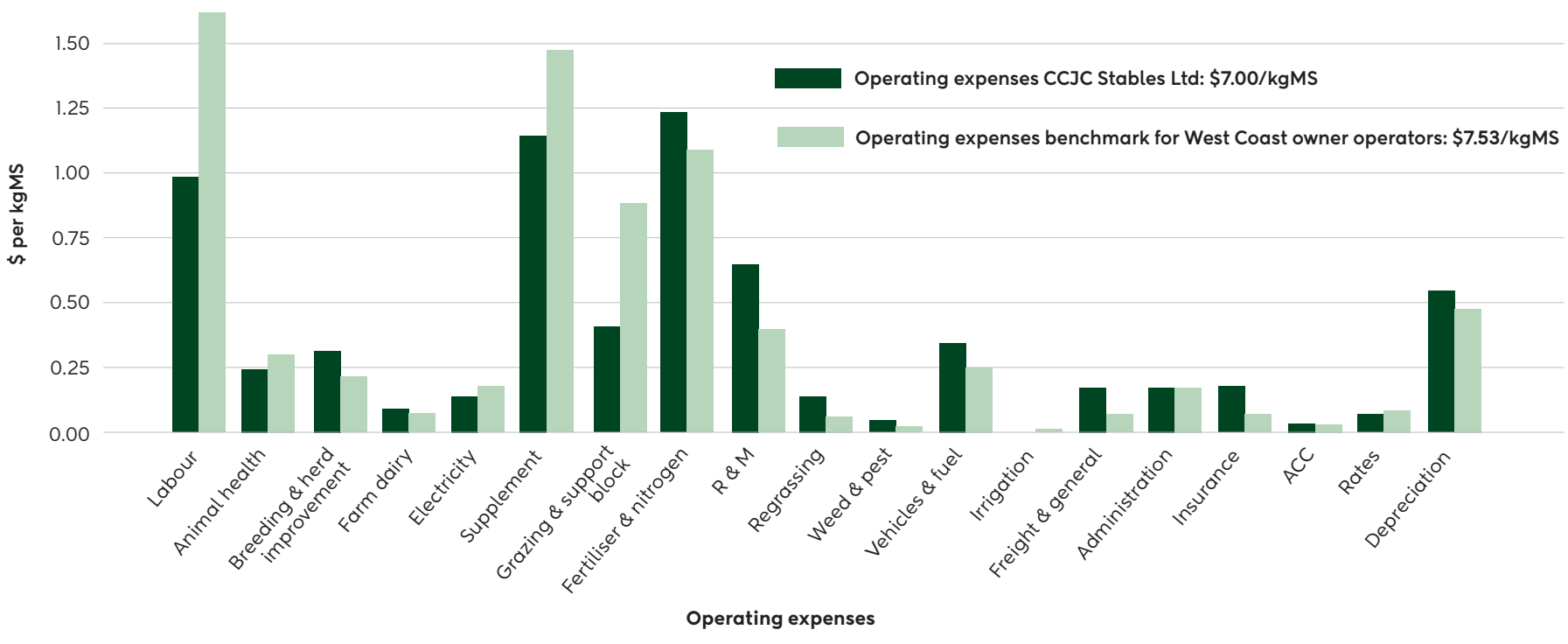
DairyBase is funded through farmers' collective investment in DairyNZ via the milksolids levy and is available to all dairy businesses, from contract milkers through to farm owners. With more than 2,000 participants each year, that shared data underpins one of New Zealand's most robust benchmarking datasets.

DairyBase links production, cost and profit data, helping farmers see what's driving performance and track progress over time. It supports both day-to-day decisions and longer-term planning.

Learn more and sign up for free at **dairynz.co.nz/dairybase**

Breakdown of operating expenses ($ per kgMS) for the 2024/25 season

Benchmark: 2024-25 Owner operator West Coast. Number of farms in benchmark: 28. Source: DairyBase, DairyNZ, 12 January 2026.



DairyBase is helping contract milkers like Keegan and Catherine Rodley strengthen their financial capability, supporting better decisions today and clearer pathways to sharemilking and farm ownership.

A navigation aid towards equity

For contract milkers, DairyBase has become an essential part of conversations around performance benchmarks, margin tracking and more.

Contract milkers are running increasingly sophisticated businesses, often juggling tight margins, variable seasons, and long-term aspirations for equity growth or farm ownership. To thrive, they need more than good stockmanship – they need clarity, confidence, and a solid understanding of their numbers. That's where DairyBase is proving to be a game-changer.

> ***It's the ambition that drives us, and DairyBase gives us the clarity to do that***

Contract milkers across the country are using DairyBase to benchmark performance, guide decision-making, and build a clear pathway for business growth. DairyBase isn't just for farm owners – contract milkers gain real value from using it early and using it often.

Building confidence through understanding

For Dairy Holdings contract milkers Keegan and Catherine Rodley, DairyBase has strengthened their understanding of their business, giving them confidence to make informed decisions and plan their next steps.

"It shows us the pathway, from contract milking to sharemilking to, one day, farm ownership. It's the ambition that drives us, and DairyBase gives us the clarity to do that," says Keegan.

Julius and Mary Caballero, also contract milkers within the Dairy Holdings network, began their journey without a strong financial base. Through DairyBase, they've learned to read their numbers, track their progress, and grow their equity.

"It makes our decisions sharper, and our pathway to sharemilking and ownership feels achievable," says Julius.

Why DairyBase matters for contract milkers

There is a noticeable shift happening across the sector, with contract milkers recognising that financial capability is just as important as operational skill.

DairyBase supports that shift by enabling them to benchmark their performance against similar businesses, better understand their cost structures, and identify opportunities for improvement.

For example, a contract milker might sit down with their farm owner and say: "Based on our DairyBase benchmarking, our labour efficiency is strong, but our feed costs are out of line with similar systems. We would like to look at tweaking this and lifting profit margins for both of us."

It also helps strengthen conversations with owners, lenders and advisors, builds confidence in business decision-making, and supports longer-term planning, including equity growth and the pathway to farm ownership.

Sharing DairyBase reports can help build trust and transparency, with statements like: "Here's my annual DairyBase report – this is how I'm tracking, and here's what I'm focusing on next season," or "Our goal is to move into a herd-owning position in five years. Here's how our current performance and cost structure support that path."

Ready to strengthen your business? Visit **dairynz.co.nz/dairybase** to learn more.

Contract milkers and DairyBase case study videos

We talked to Southland contract milkers, the Rodleys and the Caballeros to find out how they're using DairyBase to set themselves up now and for the future.

Find the videos at **dairynz.co.nz/dairybase**

An improved productivity platform

The DairyBase team will be at this year's National Fieldays® to share DairyBase enhancements and new data integrations that will save farmers time.

DairyBase, DairyNZ's longstanding benchmarking service, is being rebuilt to create a better, more intuitive experience for farmers.

The new DairyBase platform will be easier to navigate, more flexible, and better connected, with new data integrations with sector partners and improved reporting tools.

These enhancements will make it simpler to benchmark performance, spot trends and identify opportunities to strengthen your farm business.

This year's Fieldays will offer a chance to learn more about how DairyBase can benefit your business.

The DairyBase team will be on site to share upcoming enhancements, support you to link data from other organisations, and help you understand where your business sits on regional benchmarking graphs.

Strengthening the sector with trusted insights

DairyBase doesn't just help you strengthen your individual business – it also plays a vital role in supporting evidence-based decision-making across the dairy sector. Its comprehensive datasets inform economic benchmarking, sector analysis, and a wide range of DairyNZ research, providing a trusted, independent source of information.

This data underpins tools like the Econ Tracker, supports policy development, and helps drive practical, evidence-based decisions that benefit the sector.

Your data makes a difference

Every farmer who joins DairyBase strengthens the benchmarks. The more data we have, the more accurate and valuable the insights become – helping farmers make better decisions while boosting the sector's long-term productivity, sustainability and resilience.

For existing DairyBase members, there will be no change to the login process, and accounts will automatically switch to the new platform when it launches.

Winter smarts

The new season starts here.

dairynz.co.nz/
winter-smarts

Explore our research-backed tools and insights to support your decisions and help you prepare with confidence.

Cow care in winter

Good cow care in winter helps reduce animal health costs, support productivity, and improve staff morale and animal wellbeing. Having a plan you've shared with the team for wet weather and challenging paddock conditions is the best way to ensure they know what to do and when.

Cows need 8-10 hours of lying time each day, but muddy paddocks can reduce this, leading to fatigue and stress. When paddocks become too wet or high risk, be ready to shift cows to support their comfort. Options include stand-off areas, sheltered paddocks or tree cover, break-out areas when on crop, or adding extra straw where needed.

Getting the whole team aligned with your wintering plan now can reduce pressure later, improve confidence and create smoother workflows with clear routines for health checks, paddock assessments and feeding transitions.

For more options on caring for cows in winter, visit **dairynz.co.nz/winter-care**

Pasture renewal and winter management

Looking after new pastures over winter sets up your farm for resilient, productive paddocks, lowers costs, and helps you increase pasture grown and harvested.

Focus on three key actions to nurture new pasture through winter.

1. **Protect from pugging** – graze only when soils are firm, keep grazing periods short, and use on-off grazing or stand-off areas if needed.
2. **Graze lightly to encourage tillering** – remove just the top 2-3cm during first winter grazing when pasture can't be pulled out by hand-plucking (usually five to seven weeks after drilling). This helps plants grow and build resilience for the first summer, which is critical for long-term persistence.
3. **Manage weeds and nutrients** – early weed control and light tactical nitrogen application support fast growth and strong establishment.

Learn more in our new Pasture Renewal Guide
dairynz.co.nz/renewal-guide

Moving Day preparation and biosecurity farm planning

With Moving Day on June 1 fast approaching, planning now can help you manage biosecurity risks and set your farm up for a smooth start to the season. Having a biosecurity plan in place protects the health of your herd, your people and your bottom line. Strong biosecurity today is your insurance against tomorrow's risks.

- Create or check your biosecurity plan for moving stock to a new farm or bringing stock onto the property. Use our Biosecurity Farm Plan to get started **dairynz.co.nz/biosecurity-plan**
- Update NAIT records to ensure accurate tracking of stock movements.
- Check pre-movement testing requirements, such as TB, BVD, or Johne's testing, to avoid delays and minimise risk.

Plan ahead for stock purchase, using our pre-purchase checklist to assess biosecurity risks.

Visit our Moving Day page for checklists and planners at
dairynz.co.nz/moving-day

Transition cow care and feeding

Supporting your transition cows now sets you up for a successful season. Hitting body condition score (BCS) targets at calving supports reproduction, animal wellbeing and early-spring feed efficiency, while helping to reduce animal health costs.

Assessing individual cow BCS will identify lighter, early-calving cows that may require preferential feeding over the winter period. First and second calvers should be BCS 5.5 at calving, and mixed-age cows BCS 5. Cows below target BCS have a higher risk of mastitis and other infections, while over-conditioned cows are more susceptible to metabolic issues like milk fever and ketosis.

For a successful transition, feed cows based on condition; cows at or below target BCS should be fed 100% of their daily energy requirements. Feeding management of over-conditioned cows can help reduce post-calving metabolic issues.

Explore more transition cow-feeding guidance and tools at
dairynz.co.nz/transition-feeding

Feeding for BCS targets

Informed supplement decisions can make a real difference in improving calving BCS.

Use our **Supplement Calculator for Dry Cows** to compare feeds based on metabolisable energy (ME), cost and expected BCS response, so you can see the true cost per BCS gained and identify the best value options for your system.

Use the tool to guide winter feeding decisions
dairynz.co.nz/bcs-gain

BCS at calving targets

First and second calvers

Mixed-aged cows

Harvesting the sun: Practical guidance for solar on farms

Solar and battery systems are helping dairy farms save on energy, reduce emissions, and keep operations running smoothly.

DairyNZ and energy experts have valuable advice for farmers who are considering weather- and price-proofing their operations by switching to solar.

With energy costs rising and farms looking to strengthen their resilience, interest in solar, and solar + battery continues to grow. Understanding the technology and how to incorporate it into your farm takes time, which is why DairyNZ and the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority (EECA) are working together to provide dairy farmer-focused guidance on solar and battery storage.

Why solar on-farm

Solar can work on any farm, anywhere, but it's especially useful on dairy farms. With energy use high and power costs rising, many farmers are looking for ways to cut overheads and boost resilience – making solar paired with batteries a smart option.

Solar system costs have fallen significantly, with typical payback now around 4–6 years, compared with 10–12 years just a few years ago. A well-designed setup can deliver real savings, and in some cases, farmers can cut electricity bills by up to 70%. As with feed, using what you produce on-farm is best, and maximising your own solar generation, rather than selling back to the grid, tends to be the most profitable approach.

"Solar is a compelling option when it's integrated well," says EECA specialist Chris McArthur. Generation peaks in the middle of the day, so farmers get the best returns when they use that power on-site – especially for water heating, milk cooling, and shed services.

Battery storage can boost savings and add resilience

Paired with solar, batteries store excess energy for use during morning and afternoon milkings, cutting reliance on the grid and keeping critical services running during outages.

In areas with unreliable rural electricity, an adequately sized battery can provide real backup during storms or power outages. Demonstration farms show that on-farm solar and batteries can even support full or partial off-grid operations for several days when needed.

Benefits and considerations

Benefits

- Lower electricity bills and reduced exposure to volatile energy prices.
- Improved resilience, especially when solar is paired with batteries.
- Reduced emissions and stronger control over farm energy use.

Considerations

- Batteries increase up-front costs, so timing of use and system design matter.
- Payback depends on matching system size to energy use and understanding local pricing conditions.

Panel location and orientation, inverter sizing and installer experience all influence system performance.

Well-planned solar and battery systems can cut costs, support day-to-day operations, and give farms extra resilience when it's needed most.

Thinking about solar?

- Know your current energy use – establish where and when power is consumed.
- Choose the right-sized solar and battery storage to maximise on-site consumption.

Learn more at **dairynz.co.nz/solar-power**

Lessons from Fairbank Farms, Southland

Michael Farmer and Chris Stewart adopted solar and batteries early, aiming to boost resilience and environmental performance. Their 800-cow farm near Drummond ran for three days without grid power during a Southland wind event last October, allowing them to continue with milking, cooling and effluent management without generators.

Electricity use has dropped by around 60%, with an estimated payback of four to six years. These results reflect wider evidence from EECA's demonstration programme, showing strong returns when solar systems are tailored to a farm's energy profile.

Watch their video and read more at **dairynz.co.nz/eeca**

Fairbank Farms shows how solar and batteries can cut costs and keep operations running even when the grid goes down.

Meet the experts:

Tim Rutherford
DairyNZ environmental specialist

Chris McArthur
EECA clean tech lead

Where EECA can help

EECA's Solar on Farms programme provides:

- Support to compare quotes and navigate consents
- Best-practice guidance on solar and battery storage systems
- A dedicated farmer helpline: 0800 300 643

Explore case studies, tools, and videos at **eeca.govt.nz**

EECA

Science shows that giving calves early access to high-quality care and increased milk allowance pays off in growth, health and future performance.

Laying the right foundation

Research is confirming some age-old calf-rearing wisdom, and encouraging new thinking on other aspects of ensuring calves' optimum start to life.

Giving calves the best possible start to life has been shown to boost growth and resilience. There's also emerging evidence that access to more milk from the very start can improve first-lactation performance.

Scientists are still exploring exactly why this happens, but it's thought that early nutrition helps calves' mammary development and sets up their metabolism for stronger growth later.

Farmers tend to adapt calf-rearing practices to what best suits their operation, but there are some fundamentals many prioritise to establish the foundations of healthy, productive animals, DairyNZ's senior animal care specialist Penny Timmer-Arends explains.

"We know farmers take great pride in their livestock and strive to do the right thing," says Penny.

> ***Doing the fundamentals well sets the animals up for good future productivity.***

"Every farm will do things slightly differently to rear good calves depending on their people, shed set-up and equipment, and every calf-rearer has some key things that are really important to them.

"Doing the fundamentals well sets the animals up for good future productivity."

Some principles haven't changed, like having draught-free sheds and dry bedding to keep calves warm. Others have come to light more recently, including the importance of good colostrum management.

"Early colostrum is so important for calves to get the passive transfer of antibodies, which helps them respond to disease challenges until their own immune system is up and running," Penny says.

"The cow's very first milk is rich in antibodies, and it's so important to get it into the calf within about 12 hours to get the passive transfer of immunity."

Science shows that giving calves more milk early boosts growth and resilience, with benefits that can carry through to later performance.

"There's emerging evidence that by feeding more frequently, it's better for the wellbeing of calves and can impact future productivity over an animal's lifetime," Penny explains.

The link between higher weight gain before weaning and more milk in the first lactation is well proven in overseas systems.

There's been less research in New Zealand, but a seven-year trial led by the Bioeconomy Science Institute (formerly AgResearch) has found similar results. Scientists are still working to fully understand why, but early nutrition is thought to switch on mammary development and body tissue metabolism, leading to greater milk production in heifers.

Meet the experts:

Penny Timmer-Arends
DairyNZ senior animal care specialist

Kat Kevey
DairyNZ senior design specialist

Gold (1st milking) colostrum is the highest quality colostrum and should be fed to newborns, but quality can vary. Brix refractometers can be used to measure the antibody level in colostrum. Gold colostrum that measures 22% or more is considered high quality. For the best results, the highest quality colostrum you have available should be fed to newborns.

Updated calf-rearing resources coming this winter

Updated DairyNZ calf-rearing resources will be available this winter, reflecting the latest research and offering independent guidance on housing, health, colostrum, feeding and weaning – helping farmers put science into practice and give calves the best possible start.

"We took a farmer-centred approach to developing these, including interviews to understand what farmers and rural professionals wanted. We also went back to farmers to test early drafts of the resources," says DairyNZ senior design specialist Kat Kevey, who led the development of the new suite of resources. A Canterbury-based farmer herself, Kat is no stranger to rearing calves.

At the heart of the resources is a comprehensive manual covering the foundations of calf rearing. It's underpinned by the latest science and balanced with practical know-how from farmers.

"Experienced calf rearers also told us they wanted something to help new team members, so we've created a poster showing the signs of a healthy calf that can go up in the calf shed," Kat explains.

One barrier to feeding calves more milk, more often, is time during the busiest period on-farm. Fitting in a second feeding around milking, pasture management, springer checks, and off-farm commitments can be challenging.

"Farmers I spoke to were open to change, but couldn't find New Zealand guidance on how to adopt ad lib feeding. DairyNZ has now developed an ad lib feeding guide, informed by farmer experience, so we know it will work in our systems."

The release of the resources will be supported by on-farm events over the dry period.

Find out more at **dairynz.co.nz/calves**

‘Feeding more often feels natural and important to me’

It’s all hands on deck at this Canterbury farm as the crew race to get colostrum into calves as quickly as possible. The payoff is in excellent calf health.

Strong colostrum management and frequent feeding help Canterbury farmer Cara Minson raise healthy calves.

Cara Minson feeds calves twice a day for their first two weeks, then switches to once daily. The busy mum of two has a strong track record in calf health, which she attributes largely to careful colostrum management.

“I don’t tend to get sick calves, and put it down to making sure I’ve got really good quality gold and getting it into them as fast as possible,” Cara explains. “That’s so crucial because if you get that wrong, you get sick calves.”

To help with this, Cara uses a highly insulated 125-litre milk cart she calls ‘Wanda’ for storing and transporting colostrum.

“We don’t have to re-heat it because the tank keeps it relatively warm, and we use it within 18 hours. Any leftovers go to older calves.”

Every calf gets two to three litres of colostrum as quickly as possible, with tube-feeding used if necessary.

“Feeding twice a day is full-on – we start at 6am and finish after 5pm – but it’s working for us because I don’t get sick calves, and feeding more often feels natural and important to me personally.”

Cara relies on a small team during this busy time.

“It’s very physical work. I look after the team, making sure they get breaks and days off – that’s really important.”

Students from nearby Lincoln University, a couple of full-time staff, and Cara’s daughters, aged 15 and 13, help when they can.

Cara prioritises hiring people with animal experience wherever possible – it makes a real difference on-farm.

“We train everyone in the shed on how to get the first colostrum to the calves quickly and at the best quality. That includes cleaning teats before collection and testing with a refractometer to ensure top-quality milk.

“What we do seems to work without doing anything fancy. It’s just doing the basics right.”

Visit **dairynz.co.nz/feeding-calves** for more information and keep an eye out for new resources this winter.

Farm facts:

Location: Canterbury
Structure: Owner-operator
Effective area: 260ha
Herd size: 840 cows
PSC: 20 July
Calves reared:
270 replacements &
200 beef calves

Good as gold: the calves who feed themselves

Ad lib feeding lets calves have milk whenever they want, and it’s working well for this south Otago farmer and her youngsters.

Emma McLeod says ad lib feeding keeps calves calmer, healthier and growing well on her South Otago farm.

Emma McLeod transitioned to ad lib feeding last year, letting calves access milk whenever they need it. She says it’s great for calf growth and health – and it makes life easier for her as a busy mum of three.

Emma made the feeders by recycling 200-litre drums from the cowsheds and adding teats.

“I chose the ad lib system because it’s so easy,” she says. “With three kids and morning feeds, the calves always have access to food.

“My friends who use it said it’s a game-changer, so I jumped on board too.”

Each morning, she does a quick check and tops up the drums if needed. Once the kids are at school, she washes out and refills the containers with a 24-hour milk allocation, checking calves’ condition and making sure everyone’s fed. Key signs she looks for are perky ears, bright eyes, a shiny coat, and a full tummy.

“If they’ve drunk it all, I just give them a bit more,” Emma says.

“The point is to get them drinking as much as possible in those early days when we’ve got lots of transition milk.”

She hasn’t seen any drop in meal uptake, and reports healthier, more settled calves growing faster.

“It’s calmer and more relaxed. When I arrive at the shed, they’re not hungry, so I can focus on the new calves and giving them the gold colostrum.”

Ensuring every calf gets the best colostrum quickly is Emma’s top priority. She tests levels carefully, feeding only milk with a Brix rating over 25.

“I make sure their first two feeds are gold, and they can drink as much as they like. I prefer not to tube-feed, but I get them to stand to take their first drink until they’re full. I reckon you can see later if a calf hasn’t had gold – it shows in growth rates and health at weaning.”

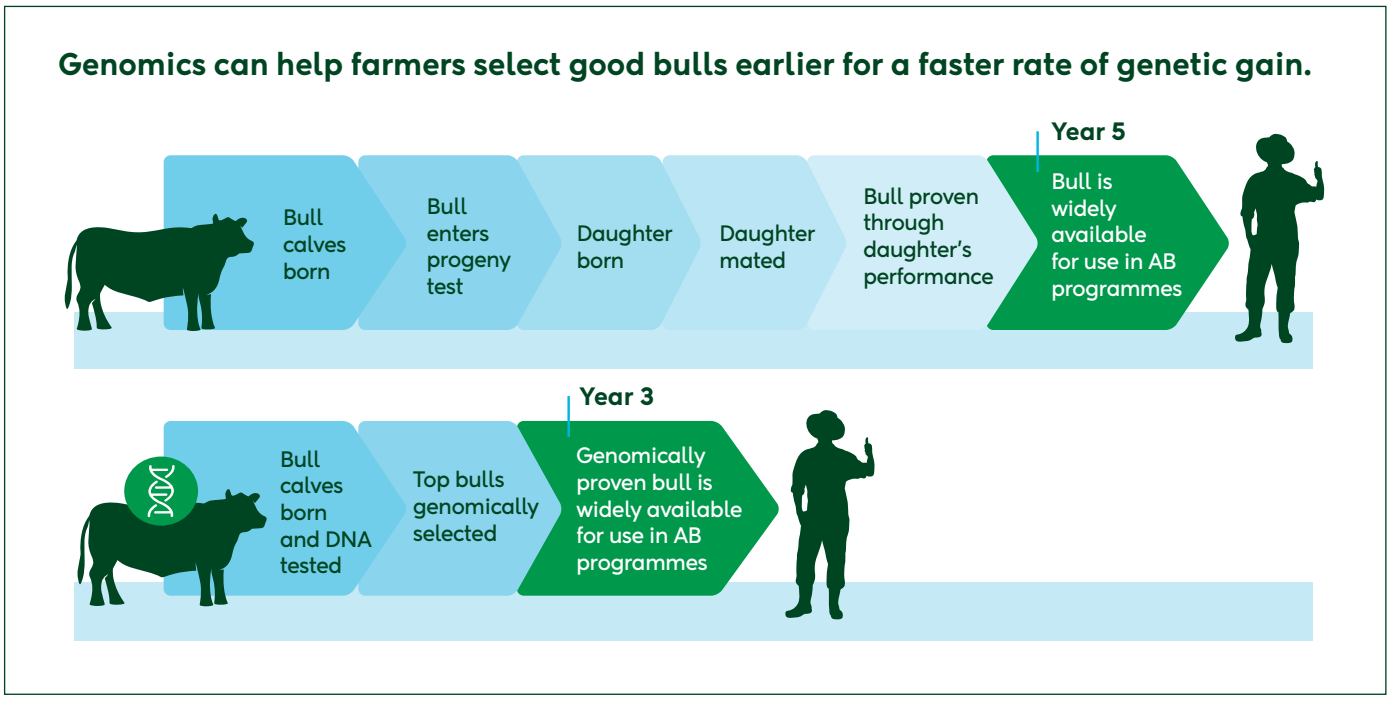
For anyone thinking about ad lib feeding, Emma’s advice is simple: “Just do it! The benefits are there for the calves and for us, so why not adopt it?”

Farm facts:

Location: South Otago
Structure: Herd-owning sharemilkers
Effective area: 150ha
Herd size: 470 cows
PSC: 13 August
Calves reared:
120 replacements

Breeding efficiency into every generation

Genetics plays a central role in helping farmers lift per-cow productivity over time.



National cow numbers peaked around 2014 and have since flattened or declined, driven by tighter environmental regulations, economic pressures and land-use change. As a result, much of the growth in milksolids production is increasingly coming from lifting performance per cow rather than running more cows.

It's all about efficiency rather than scale, says NZ Animal Evaluation geneticist Becky Curry. That means cows that produce more within the same system and environmental limits.

"New Zealand cows are already producing more milksolids than they were in 2005," she says.

"That lift has come from two main areas: changes in farm management – including feeding, animal health and milking practices – and steady genetic improvement by selecting each new generation of cows with higher production potential than the last."

Around two-thirds of the increase in per cow actual milksolids produced can be traced back to changes in the national herd's genetics. It shows the central role genetics plays in helping farmers and the wider sector lift productivity and efficiency over time.

Fast-tracking genetic gain through genomics

Traditionally, it takes around five years for a bull to receive proven breeding indexes through daughter-proving schemes. But with genomics, bulls can be identified earlier and become widely available within two to three years. This allows high BW bulls to be used earlier, shortening the time between generations and accelerating genetic gain.

"A higher rate of genetic gain means more offspring with the traits farmers are selecting for, in a shorter period," Becky says.

"That supports higher productivity, improved efficiency and better long-term sustainability."

Genomics also gives farmers greater agility.

"It allows faster responses to market demands, climate pressures and economic conditions, and makes it easier to pivot breeding decisions if farm goals change."

The Industry Working Group (IWG) report, published in mid-2024, found that New Zealand was lagging behind other international dairy nations in the use of genomics and, therefore, in our rate of genetic gain. This was largely due to lower confidence in genomically evaluated young sires.

Confidence is expected to improve as tools and systems continue to develop, including the OneBW project. Currently, the presence of multiple BW calculations in the marketplace can create confusion for farmers comparing bulls across providers. OneBW brings genomic and non-genomic evaluations together into a single BW index, independently verified (by DairyNZ) for accuracy and published consistently by all parties.

The project sits within the Future Focused Animal Evaluation (FFAE) programme, where DairyNZ, NZ Animal Evaluation, LIC and CRV are working together to address the challenges identified in the IWG report.

Find out more at **dairynz.co.nz/ae-future-focus**

Meet the expert:

Becky Curry
NZ Animal Evaluation geneticist

Defining success for your team and business

Understanding what success looks like for you and your business is the foundation of this year's People Expo, whatever life and career stage you're in.

DairyNZ and Dairy Women's Network team up each year to deliver People Expo, empowering the people who will shape the future of New Zealand dairy farming.

In 2026, we're focusing on progression because we know there are many farm owners who are looking to step back but who don't have a succession plan yet. And we know there are people working on-farm who want to know how to take that next step in their career. This event is for both groups.

If you're a farm owner preparing to transition out of operational responsibilities, or an emerging leader progressing into roles such as farm manager, contract milker, sharemilker or equity partner, the People Expo has the insights and tools you need to define your vision of success and chart a clear path towards it.

We're bringing thought leaders and farmers together to share their experiences, knowledge and insights.

People Expo 2026 will be headlined by James Laughlin, the best-selling author of Habits of High Performers and host of a chart-topping podcast, seven-time world champion, mental skills coach for Canterbury rugby, and a certified coach and trainer.

James's goal is to inspire you and your team to determine what success looks like for your team and your business, and to leave everyone in the room equipped with strategies, tools and a roadmap for success.

James will be joined by Greg Duncan, Dairy Australia's farm business lead, who works nationally with partners and farmers to build stronger, more resilient businesses.

Greg will host a panel of leading local farmers, sharing their stories of succession and progression, the rationale behind their decisions, and the leadership those decisions required to implement.

Add this event to your calendar now and join us for this incredible farmer-focused experience, where you'll find out what success looks like for you.

PEOPLE EXPO

June 16: Palmerston North
June 18: Te Awamutu
June 30: Invercargill
July 2: Dunsandel

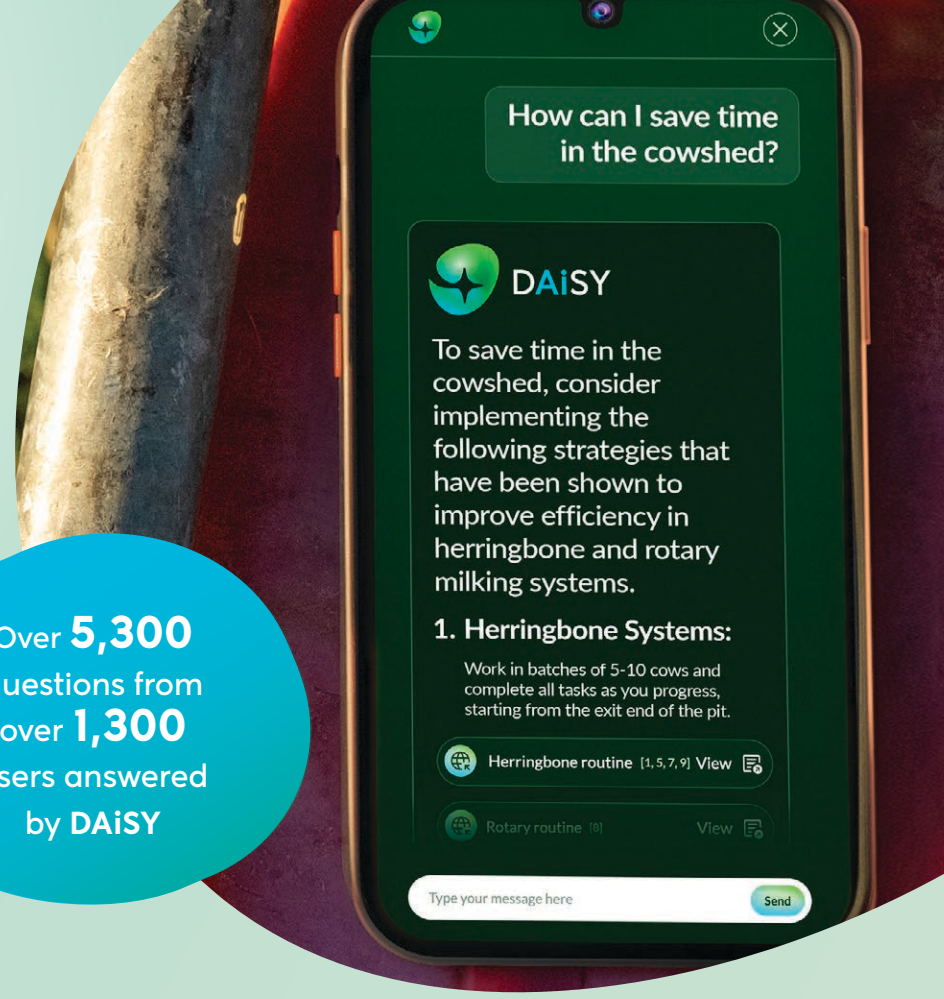
Find out more and register at **dairynz.co.nz/peopleexpo**

Why you can trust DAiSY™

DAiSY isn't pulling answers from the internet or making things up. It only uses content from the DairyNZ website, so every response is backed by DairyNZ research, tools, and on-farm guidance you already rely on.

- **Science-backed information**, based on proven farm systems research relevant to NZ.
- **Practical, everyday advice,** drawn from the same resources farmers use today.
- **Clear source links,** so you can see exactly where the information comes from and explore further if you want to.

Think of DAiSY as a faster way to tap into the knowledge you've already invested in, helping you turn trusted research into confident on-farm decisions.



Over **5,300** questions from over **1,300** users answered by **DAiSY**

DAiSY Prompting Tips

DAiSY works best when you ask questions the same way you'd talk them through with someone who knows dairy farming. The more context you give, the more useful the answer will be.

Here are a few simple ways to get the most out of DAiSY:

Add some detail:

Share what's happening on farm and what you're trying to solve. For example, instead of "mastitis", try "What should I do about a few mastitis cases late in calving?"

Be specific:

Specific questions lead to clearer answers. "How do I treat mastitis on farm?" works better than a single keyword.

Use everyday language:

No need for technical terms. Just ask the question the way you would out loud.

Refine as you go:

If the first answer isn't quite right, try asking in a different way, add more detail, or ask DAiSY to suggest a better prompt.

Say what you've already tried:

Let DAiSY know what's worked or not so far, so it can tailor the advice.

Tell DAiSY what matters most:

Say what you're aiming for – e.g., saving time, reducing costs, improving cow condition.

Ask follow-up questions:

DAiSY is built for back-and-forth conversation. Follow up questions can help you narrow things

Check the source links:

Every answer links back to the DairyNZ webpages it's based on, so you can dig deeper if you want. down.

Use the feedback buttons:

Thumbs-up or down helps improve DAiSY over time.

Try it yourself

Ask DAiSY a question about what you're dealing with on-farm right now – or try one of these:

Achieving BCS before calving:
How should I adjust my feed plan and management to ensure cows reach target BCS by June?

Preparing for calving:
What are the best management practices for transition cows to minimise metabolic problems and set them up for maximum milk production?

Feed budget:
What are the best strategies for managing pasture and supplement use in June to keep cows in good condition and control costs?

Farmer feedback

"DAiSY is very good, it provided templates I asked for. A lot quicker to find resources I wanted than trawling through the website."

"I asked DAiSY a few questions and it was great."

"Such a fantastic tool. Great work!"

"DAiSY is a game changer!"

"DAiSY is a great tool that I can use whenever and wherever I want, from answering basic questions or even solving more complex tasks for the running of our farm."

DAiSY™ Knows dairy

For more about DAiSY visit **dairynz.co.nz/about-daisy**

Keen to know more about how farmers are using AI on-farm and what the future holds?

See the research we're doing: **dairynz.co.nz/using-ai**

Listen to our podcast: **dairynz.co.nz/podcast-116**

Powered by AI. Grounded in DairyNZ research.

DAiSY answers questions using only trusted DairyNZ website content, with clear links back to the source every time.

Dairy holds strong but the race is on for productivity growth

New Zealand dairy is world-renowned, but our productivity growth has flattened in recent years relative to our international counterparts. The longer that gap persists, the more our hard-won cost advantage may get compromised.

Over the past year, we have seen record milksolids production. In the 2024/25 season, average milksolids per cow reached a new record of 414kg, up from a five-year average of 400kg. Meanwhile, cow numbers declined 0.5%.

On top of this, New Zealand is still the lowest-cost milk producer in the world. Our pasture-based system (where cows graze outside year-round rather than being housed) and our focus on homegrown feed gives us a natural cost advantage that no other major dairy-producing country can currently match.

From an economic perspective, however, a critical scorecard for how our sector is performing over time is via productivity growth.

Productivity growth matters for competitiveness because it indicates levers farmers can actually control. Prices, weather and regulations are largely beyond our control, but how efficiently we use our land and inputs is not.

Total Factor Productivity (TFP) measures how much milk we get from all our inputs combined – such as land, feed, labour and capital. Unlike measures like milk per cow, which focus on a single part of the system, TFP shows whether we're genuinely becoming more efficient or simply spending more to produce more.

Improving TFP is how we stay competitive no matter what global prices do.

Since 2012/13, New Zealand's TFP index has been flat. This can, in part, be viewed as the sector holding steady in the face of some dramatic upheavals. Farmers have weathered extreme weather events, volatility in payout prices, trade disruptions, and rising compliance costs – and have come out the other side still standing.

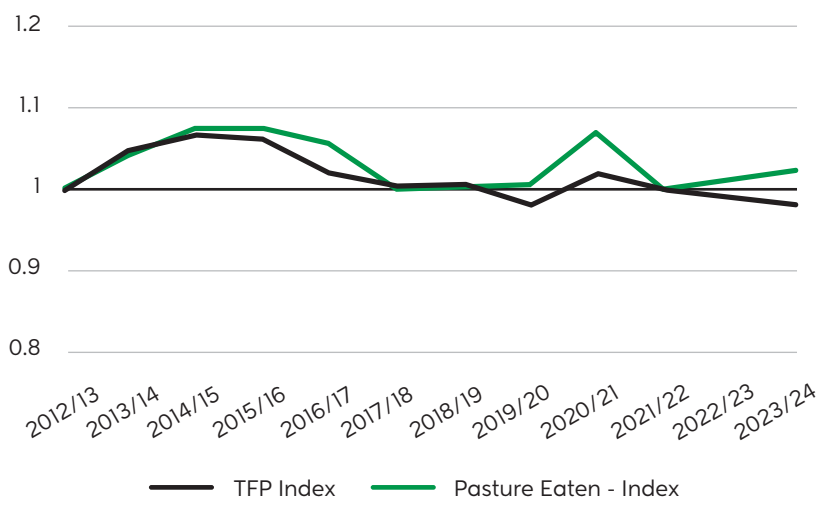
While, in the short term, TFP stability shows resilience, in the long term, flat productivity growth is not something we can ignore.

While New Zealand has held steady (and Australia has declined), other nations have progressed. The United States dairy sector, for example, has been growing its productivity at 2.5% per year, driven by sustained investment in research and technology. Every year that gap persists, our hard-won cost advantage may get compromised in the long run.

Higher productivity growth means producing the same amount of milk with fewer inputs (lower feed costs, efficient use of staff, better use of land), or more milk with the same inputs.

So when we look at the increasing productivity of our cows, what is holding TFP growth back? Part of the answer lies in our increasing use of supplements. They can help fill feed gaps, especially in tough seasons, but when they start replacing pasture or supporting higher stocking rates than pasture alone could carry, costs rise and margins tighten. That chips away at New Zealand's cost advantage, leaving farms more exposed when conditions change.

Productivity growth since 2012/13



Flat TFP is not failure, but stability without progress is not a strategy for long-run competitiveness.

Source: DairyBase, DairyNZ. April 2025.

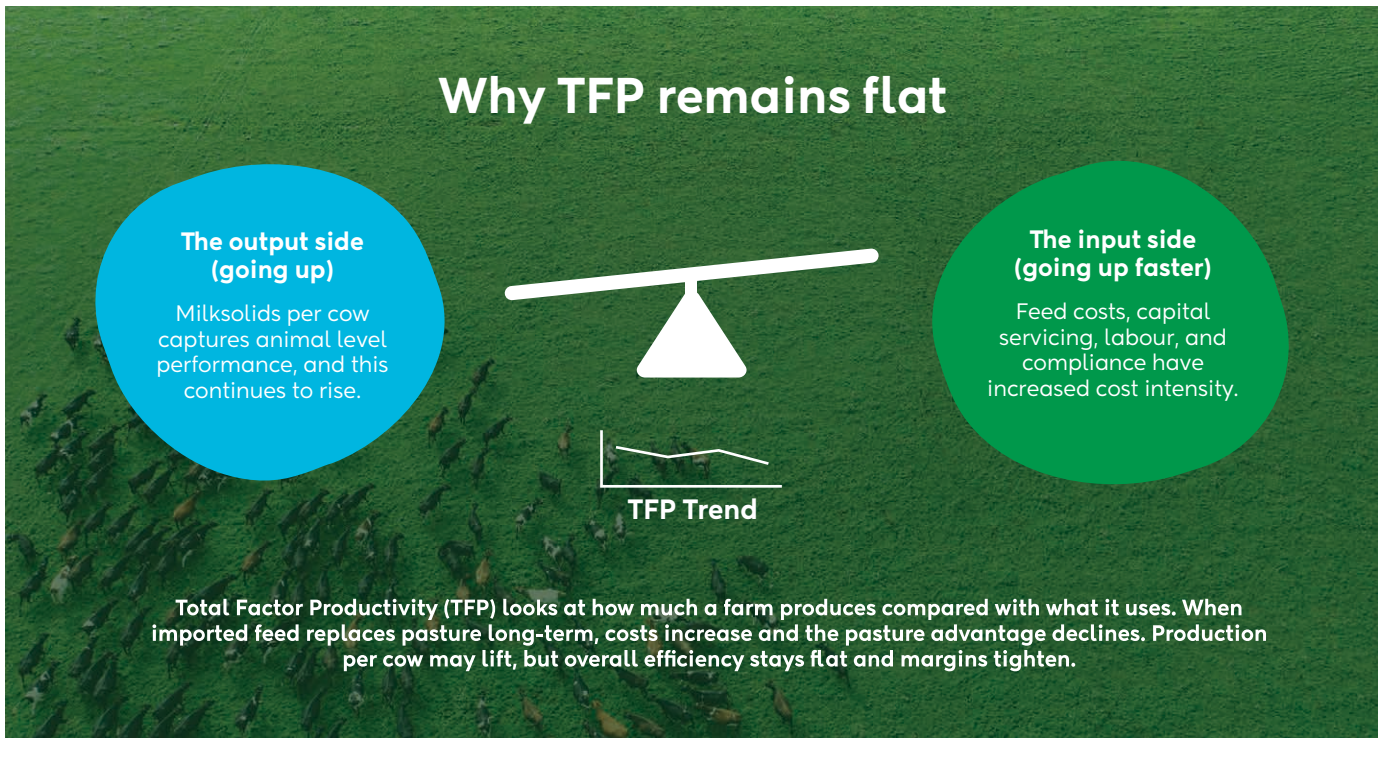
> ***"Total Factor Productivity tells us whether we're genuinely becoming more efficient or simply spending more to produce more.***

Homegrown feed and pasture are at the heart of NZ dairy's competitive advantage. Data across all farm systems show that productivity rises and falls with the amount of pasture eaten. Protecting and growing the pasture base – through better varieties, precision management, and smarter grazing tools – is probably the single most powerful thing the sector collectively can do to stay competitive.

New technologies like AI-driven pasture tools could help farmers further improve efficiency, but many are still unproven at scale and expensive. More research and investment are needed so farmers can have practical, affordable tools that genuinely lift productivity.

The choices made today on-farm – pasture, feed systems and technology – will shape the future of New Zealand dairy. We've shown we can be resilient. The next step is making sure we keep and enhance our edge.

Find valuable tools to support your business at **dairynz.co.nz/business-resources**



Meet the experts:

Dr Mubashir Qasim
DairyNZ senior economist

Dr Mario Fernandez
DairyNZ principal economist

Local government reform and what it could mean for farmers

DairyNZ is advocating for systems and structures that deliver efficient services while ensuring farmers' perspectives are represented.

Alongside changes to the Resource Management Act, the Government has also been consulting on reforms to local government. While the two processes are separate, both will influence how decisions are made about rating, land use, environmental management and infrastructure in rural areas.

Local government plays a key role in how farmers operate day to day. Regional and district councils are responsible for planning rules, compliance and monitoring, flood protection, pest management and the environmental policies that affect farming systems. Changes to how these councils are structured or governed could affect the effectiveness of those decisions.

The coalition government consulted on a proposal late last year. The proposal suggested replacing elected regional councillors with a Combined Territorial Board comprised of the mayors of district and city councils. DairyNZ does not believe that approach would be in the best interests of dairy farmers or rural communities.

DairyNZ made a submission on the consultation, working alongside other primary sector organisations to highlight the importance of strong rural representation and practical decision-making.

Mayors are typically elected through a population-based approach. They already carry significant responsibilities in their own districts and cities.

Most do not have the time, experience or the local resource-management context needed to make complex decisions affecting rural land use.

Instead, DairyNZ recommended a more balanced approach. This would retain some elected regional councillors on the board alongside mayors and the regional council chair, helping ensure decisions include people with knowledge of regional resource management and a mandate to represent rural communities.

DairyNZ also noted that local government reform is being considered alongside major resource management reforms.

Together, these changes could significantly influence how farmers are regulated in the future, so it is important that the two processes align and that regional decision-making remains well resourced and effective.

Local government reform will influence how decisions about rating, land use, infrastructure and environmental management are made.

At the same time, DairyNZ supports the broader goal of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of local government. There may be opportunities to strengthen coordination and capability across regions, particularly in areas such as emergency management, pest control, planning and climate adaptation.

As the reform process continues, DairyNZ will continue to advocate for local government structures that deliver efficient services while ensuring farmers' perspectives are well represented in regional decisions.

Keep across DairyNZ's policy and advocacy work at **dairynz.co.nz/policy-and-advocacy**

Meet the expert:

Anna Sing
DairyNZ senior regional policy advisor

Advocating for the RMA reform the sector needs

DairyNZ supports reform of the country's resource management system, and is working hard to make sure the new approach is fit for purpose.

New Zealand's resource management system is undergoing a major overhaul that will reshape the regulations farmers are working under for decades to come.

The Resource Management Act (RMA) reform matters because it affects how all natural resources are managed, and how easy or costly it is for farmers to get consents for everyday activities and future development. In practice, it will influence what farmers can do on their land, the level of compliance required, and the costs and certainty they have to invest for the long term.

In December 2025, the government released two Bills to replace the RMA, aiming to reduce the costs and complexity farmers face. With more than 700 pages of detailed legislation, the details of how the legislation is drafted and implemented will determine what it means on-farm.

DairyNZ supports reform of the RMA, which has become costly and complex while too often failing to deliver meaningful environmental improvements. But the proposed replacement Natural Environment Bill and Planning Bill do not yet fully deliver on their stated aim of enabling primary sector growth within limits.

Lessons from the past 15 years of freshwater policy haven't been carried through, and some provisions around limits, caps and action plans need to be changed before they can work in practice. Some proposals, including the introduction of more market-based tools and resource use levies, need further testing before they are introduced. Without stronger safeguards, the new system could create new challenges rather than workable outcomes for farmers.

DairyNZ is working with farmers and the wider sector to make sure RMA reform delivers practical outcomes for farmers and the environment.

To shape the reforms, DairyNZ worked with milk processors and the wider sector to submit. We continue to monitor developments and advocate for practical, farm-friendly outcomes as the Bills progress toward law in mid-2026.

Find the latest information at **dairynz.co.nz/rma-reform**

Meet the expert:

David Cooper
DairyNZ principal policy advisor

Creating open-water wetland environments on Tiroroa Farms not only traps sediment but also provides habitat for fish and bird life.

Three decades of nurturing the land

Long before habitat restoration became a buzzword in the dairy sector, Wynn and Tracy Brown set about restoring the environment on their Matamata farm.

A lifelong love for nature has turned Wynn and Tracy Brown's Matamata dairy farm into a canvas for sharing their passion while also creating a sustainable, profitable, and resilient dairy business.

Tracy credits her Far North whakapapa and upbringing for her connection to water, and Wynn says he has always been interested in native trees and the bush.

The Browns held a DairyNZ Progressing Dairy Event on their farm in March, where they outlined their 30-year journey and their work to protect and restore the environment while maintaining a profitable farm.

The farm was originally an 180-hectare sheep and beef farm that was converted to dairy in the 1990s and has since expanded from 320 to just under 700 cows.

At a Progressing Dairy Event in March, Wynn and Tracy Brown share their 30-year journey of restoring native habitat while running a profitable dairy farm.

Today, Tiroroa Farms is 220ha effective and includes 100ha that is used to graze heifers. It is managed by Ella Wharmby, who is assisted by two other staff.

"Our main focus here is pasture utilisation. It's not a high-producing farm, but a very cost-effective farm because we can still produce a kilogram of milksolids for under $4," Wynn says.

The farm is at the top of the Mangapapa Catchment, which flows to the Waitoa River, then the Piako River and from there into the Hauraki Gulf.

There are about 110 landowners within the Mangapapa catchment.

Wynn says in hindsight, they made good decisions during the conversion around fencing and raceway locations. A lot of unsuitable land was fenced off, allowing the good land to be farmed better.

"We did a lot of that early on, before the Water Accord and Clean Streams. We were seen as outliers or greenies at that stage of our journey.

"We could see what was coming, but it also made sense in our country – we would be losing stock, and soil from steep sidlings would end up in waterways. It wasn't just about the environment; it just made good business sense."

It was a big learning curve for them, especially early on, with little knowledge and resources available.

"We didn't really know much at all, we just had a passion, and we wanted to make the farm workable, we wanted to protect some of those sensitive areas."

But they also knew the importance of protecting water, Tracy adds.

"It was driven by values, and the whole thing has been an absolute journey."

It was around 2010, after the whole 'dirty dairying' issue, that they got involved in the wider dairy sector, sharing some of the good work farmers had been doing and motivating other farmers.

They won the Ballance Farm Environment Awards for Waikato, then Tracy became the regional coordinator.

They were involved in the early days of the Dairy Environment Leaders (DEL) network, which Tracy chaired for 10 years. Tracy also now chairs the DairyNZ board.

"Farmers were mobilised across New Zealand through DEL to make on-farm

Farm facts:

Location: Matamata, Waikato
Structure: Owner-operator
Effective area: 220ha
Herd size: 660 cows
System: 3
Production: 1083kgMS/ha
Operating expenses: $3.89kgMS
GHG emissions: 870kgCO^2e/kgMS

change, and it was an absolute pleasure to be involved in that," she says.

The March event included a stop at some of the Browns' wetlands and waterways, so farmers could see the work the couple had done over the years.

An eDNA test conducted last year detected banded kōkopu and short-finned eel in a small spring-fed stream flowing from a remnant kahikatea bush stand. The test involves taking a water sample from the farm's waterway and analysing it for evidence of species interacting with that water. At the event, some of these fish were caught by Waikato Regional Council staff for people to see.

Josh Smith from Waikato Regional Council says it was "really cool" to see the fish in the Browns' waterway.

"Banded kōkopu are reasonably common coastally, but here inland they're quite rare," he says.

The banded kōkopu is a migratory species (it's actually one of five "whitebait" species), which means part of its life cycle involves moving between freshwater and saltwater environments.

DairyNZ principal scientist Dr Craig Depree says fish populations in a waterway are a great indicator of stream health. Streams flowing through farmed catchments act as both highways and homes for these animals.

"That shows the important role of pastoral streams and why we need to value and protect them," Craig says.

Riparian planting is one of the most effective actions farmers can take to improve stream health because it re-establishes shade along streams. Shade reduces sediment, cools stream water, increases oxygen and prevents weed growth.

"Even narrow strips planted along pastoral streams can reinstate many of the native benefits that native forest streams have, which were lost as a result of catchment development," says Craig.

He says it is small streams – with many only a metre wide – that are really important as habitats for native fish. These waterways make up three-quarters of streams nationwide.

> ***"We didn't really know much at all, we just had a passion, and we wanted to make the farm workable, we wanted to protect some of those sensitive areas.***

"As well as being most of the habitat for fish, they also carry a disproportionately large amount of the contaminants because they see a lot of land use."

"We have to reduce contaminants, but the problem is that contaminants get used as a proxy measure for stream health.

"While we must keep tabs on those contaminants and ensure the way we are farming is minimising the loss of contaminants to waterways, we are not going to get to where we need in terms of healthy streams with abundant life if we just pull nutrient contaminant levers.

In the waterways, banded kōkopu, like this one, show the importance of protecting and restoring remnant bush habitat areas on-farm.

"We need to be thinking about those things that are really limiting [stream health], and we know that one of the greatest pressures on pastoral streams relates to the removal of streamside (riparian) vegetation."

He also pointed out that the science supporting the benefits of stream shading is much more robust than the science supporting contaminant-based limit-setting.

While planting natives is rewarding, there is an ongoing battle to control invasive pest plants on the farm. The Browns use a drone operator to spray pussy willow along the wetland gully areas, as demonstrated at the field day. In the past, Wynn would have had to remove those trees manually with a chainsaw or with spray, which was time-consuming and dangerous.

They began a pest programme 10 to 15 years after planting the trees, when they noticed fewer birds around. That programme includes automated traps for rodents and other pest species, as well as bait stations throughout the farm, and Wynn also regularly shoots feral cats.

"The planting is only a small part of the work and the budget in a lot of ways," Tracy says.

They did most of the planting in the days before funding was established to help farmers, and so progressed this in achievable 'bite-sized' chunks over the years.

DairyNZ area manager Stephanie Gudgeon says the work the Browns have done and the example they have set is inspirational.

"You are role models for farmers in the area, and to see this restorative journey and your values of belonging and protecting the land is inspiring.

"Behind it all is a business that supports people, animals and profitability."

A drone is used on the Browns' farm to remove invasive pussy willow, a safer and more efficient method for managing unwanted species.

Take action on your farm

Find practical ways to improve water quality with DairyNZ's resources at **dairynz.co.nz/waterways**

Talk to your local area manager for advice tailored to your farm, and get involved with Progressing Dairy events or your catchment group to see what's working for others in your region.

DairyNZ Progressing Dairy Events

Meet the experts:

Dr Craig Depree
DairyNZ principal scientist

Stephanie Gudgeon
DairyNZ area manager

The model and the method: study highlights a different way of farming

Michael and Cheryl Shearer and Jordan and Caleb Russ were selected for DairyNZ's Workplace Productivity Study because of their non-traditional business structure and strong focus on workplace efficiency.

A partnership of two couples, who are also friends, shares insights with DairyNZ researchers as they explore practical ways to drive workplace productivity on-farm.

Different business structures can shape how work gets done on-farm. That's what made the Shearer and Russ arrangement stand out in the Workplace Productivity Study. By taking a non-traditional approach, the two families have built a successful farming business on the West Coast.

Michael and Cheryl Shearer were dairy farmers in Marlborough, and their friends, Caleb and Jordan Russ, were exploring ways to work closer to home. Caleb, a mechanical engineer, was particularly open to trying dairying. The two couples now own a farm, with Michael and Caleb acting as directors and each of the four owning a 25% share in Hebron Farming.

The home farm peak milks 460 cows on 220 hectares, with a 35ha support block. Michael and Caleb work on the farm daily, with Caleb applying his engineering skills to repairs and maintenance. Jordan manages farm administration, and Cheryl focuses on young stock and milking when required.

Practical insights from the farm

DairyNZ worked with farming businesses to develop the Workplace Productivity case studies to better understand workplace productivity on-farm. The case studies aimed to explore practical ways for farmers to be more productive, says DairyNZ post-doctoral scientist Dr Lucy Hall.

"We all know that dairy farming, especially at peak periods, can be incredibly busy.

"We wanted to understand what farmers are already doing on the ground, and use those real-world insights to help shape the research. As well as develop practical ideas to enable and drive more productive farm workplaces."

In setting up the study, Lucy and her team reached out to the DairyNZ regional team to identify suitable participants.

"We talked to the area managers about what we were looking for," Lucy says.

"They hold an enormous amount of knowledge of farmers in their area, and guided us towards farmers who could provide practical insights."

West Coast area manager Dan O'Keefe recommended Hebron Farming, knowing they were open to sharing their approach.

"I knew they would be interested in the project as efficiency is core to their business," Dan says.

"Their business structure means they aren't reliant on staff, and they have been making a lot of changes to their farm infrastructure to drive labour efficiency – for example, installing technology in the shed."

"For Hebron Farming, how their business is structured and how it came about is really interesting," Lucy says.

"Everyone across the two families chips in and helps out. It's a good example of what can be done when you think outside the box."

Before embarking on their West Coast journey, Michael and Cheryl already had experience with business relationships, having previously farmed with Michael's parents in Marlborough. They also had a strong relationship with their accountant, who helped crunch the numbers on

DairyNZ area managers like Dan O'Keefe, left, with Caleb Russ, play a key role in connecting farmers with research opportunities, helping to identify farms like Hebron Farming that can offer practical, real-world insights.

Farm facts: Hebron Farming

Location: Reefton
Structure: Owner-operators
Effective area: 220ha
Support block: 35ha
Herd size: 460 cows
System: 2-3
Production: 715kgMS/ha
Operating expenses: $5.69kgMS

Michael and Cheryl Shearer bring experience and a clear focus on communication and structure, helping to shape how work is organised within Hebron Farming.

how a partnership with the Russes could work.

Michael also bounced the idea off other sector support in his network.

The shared ownership model, says Michael, is "a good way to combine experience and knowledge and use combined finances".

Before launching into the farming business, the couples had serious business conversations.

"We had to be fairly open on both sides about exactly where we were financially, so we could know what the possibilities are," Michael adds.

"We treat it kind of like a marriage. Communication is key. If we have disagreements, we work through them. We have the same goals and mindset," Caleb says.

"Being equal owners gives us the best options for tax and ensures no one is able to strong-arm anyone else," says Michael.

Lucy highlights their strong communication and teamwork, noting how they play to each other's strengths. She also points to practices that go against the usual norms – like taking a golfing day in the middle of calving.

"They work seven days a week at that time of the season and milk once a day season-round, but the fact that they can take time out at peak calving speaks volumes about their priorities.

"They make sure they're not run off their feet and can enjoy the lifestyle dairy can give. It also challenges our assumptions as researchers and shows what farmers are actually doing."

The mating period is another example. Because the team do much of their own tractor work and pasture conservation – mowing, raking and baling – the mating period can be busier for them than calving.

Caleb and Jordan Russ contribute complementary skills to the business, supporting a shared-ownership model allowing the farm to operate efficiently without relying on staff.

"Another example going against our assumptions," Lucy says, "but it works for them and their system – largely because they focus on profit per hour worked as a key driver of productivity."

On-farm study in action

The case study ran for 12 months, with the research team visiting at key points throughout the year. The farmers also kept task logs during busy periods. The goal was to capture what farms were doing differently or in ways that might offer practical lessons for others.

"It was fairly easy to take part," Michael says. "We documented what we did on specific days throughout the season to get an idea of how much time we were spending on tasks.

"We also wore smart watches to monitor stress, sleep and physical activity. It was pretty low effort."

And as information started coming back from other farms involved in the study, Michael enjoyed seeing what they were doing. He hopes more efficiency metrics will be available in the future.

"It will be great to have more metrics available; we really only have cows per full-time equivalent at the moment in DairyBase.

"Having more insight into production – for example, if a farm has higher production than another, how much time does it take to get that production? I think it'll give us great insight across the different systems and help us as farmers benchmark and look for opportunities to improve."

Hebron Farming shows how a mix of skills, clear roles and open communication can lift on-farm productivity. It also highlights the value of farmer–researcher partnerships, where real-world experience helps shape research that's practical and grounded.

> ***"Their business structure means they aren't reliant on staff, and they have been making a lot of changes to their farm infrastructure to drive labour efficiency.***

Data from the case study farms is helping us understand practical changes that farmers can make to save time and create attractive workplaces. Key insights are now available on the DairyNZ website at **dairynz.co.nz/productivity-study**

The next phase of the research will look at the technologies and farm practices that could transform dairy workplaces over the next 5–10 years – including the potential role of generative Artificial Intelligence.

Want to be involved in future research or trials? Get in touch with your DairyNZ area manager at **dairynz.co.nz/regional-team**

Meet the experts:

Dr Lucy Hall
DairyNZ post-doctoral scientist

Dan O'Keefe
DairyNZ area manager – West Coast

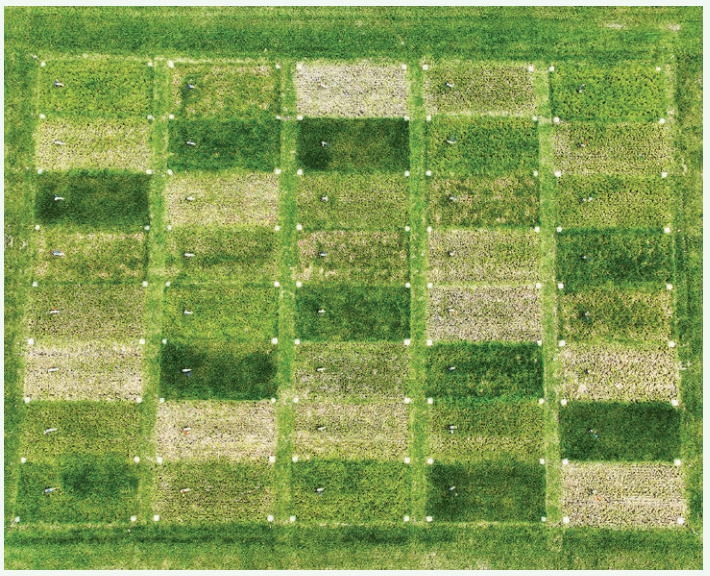
Summer trials: science in action on-farm

Over summer, DairyNZ ran a range of on-farm trials exploring everything from cow behaviour to farm system performance. Lead scientists share a snapshot of what happened in the field, with photos capturing the work in action and showing how levy-funded research delivers practical value for farmers.

Pasture Management for Persistence

Lead scientist:
Dr Elena Minnee
DairyNZ senior scientist

A five-year research trial, established at Scott Farm in autumn 2025, is re-evaluating perennial ryegrass pasture management for summer-dry regions. The study is looking at how different pre-grazing and residual pasture masses affect plant growth above and below ground. Using mini-rhizotrons (transparent tubes inserted into the ground that cameras are lowered into to take high-resolution images of roots), researchers are monitoring changes in root mass over time under each management approach. The goal is to provide practical insights to help farmers grow more resilient, persistent pastures in challenging conditions.



Drone image of replicated plot study.

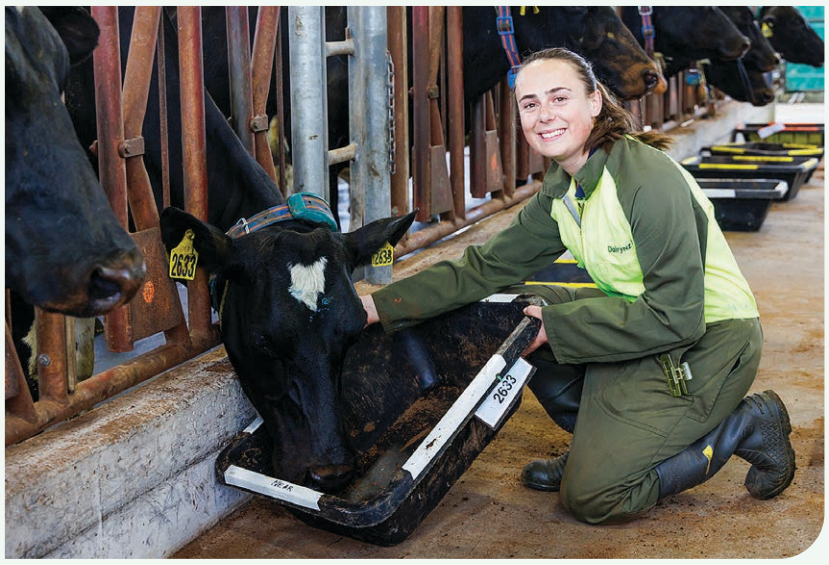
A rhizotron installed in the research plot. The transparent tube lets researchers lower a specialised camera into the soil to capture high-resolution images of plant roots.

Targeted Supplementary Feed Trial

Lead scientist:
Dr Konagh Garrett
DairyNZ scientist

DairyNZ recently completed the spring and summer phases of its Targeted Supplementary Feed Trial at Lye Farm, Waikato. The technical team is now processing and analysing samples, and we look forward to sharing the results soon. The trial investigated how different types and amounts of starch- and fat-based supplements affect methane emissions in pasture-fed dairy cows, and how responses change as pasture quality shifts through the season.

The research also looked at cow productivity and wider farm system impacts, providing a clearer picture of the value of targeted supplementation as a greenhouse gas mitigation strategy. Sixty cows were monitored in individual feed stalls, allowing precise measurement of feed intake, feeding behaviour, and methane emissions. Freshly cut pasture was delivered twice daily using a cut-and-carry method, with supplements also offered after each milking. This setup aimed to mimic paddock grazing and in-shed feeding while capturing accurate data.



DairyNZ senior research technician Eliza Hay, who has been involved in the trial work on Scott Farm.

Low N Farmlet Trial (part of the Low N Systems programme)

Low N Systems Programme lead scientist:
Dr Claire Phyn
DairyNZ principal scientist

Researchers from DairyNZ, Lincoln University, the Bioeconomy Science Institute (formerly AgResearch), Fonterra and AbacusBio are in the third season of multi-year studies at the Lincoln University Research Dairy Farm. The Low N Farmlet Trial is testing how a combination of strategies can reduce nitrogen (N) leaching by more than 40% while keeping a viable dairy business.

So far, using lower N fertiliser, slightly reduced stocking rates and diverse pastures has reduced N leaching on the milking platform by around 45%. Greenhouse gas emissions are down 12% per hectare and emissions intensity by 5% per kgMS.

These reductions were linked to 11% lower profitability in the first two years, although the trade-off was moderated by selecting complementary mitigations suited to the farm's soil and climate. Switching the support block to a pasture-based wintering system also reduced N losses compared with kale wintering followed by an oats catch crop.

Work continues to assess the economics and land requirements under different scenarios, helping identify practical options to reduce N while maintaining a productive system.

Physical Activity and Stress of Farmers Across the Dairy Season

Lead scientist:
Dr Lucy Hall
DairyNZ post-doc scientist

In the 2025/26 season, DairyNZ collected around-the-clock physical activity and stress data from 45 farmers using Garmin Instinct 2 watches. The study linked this information to farm management, working hours, tasks and participants' wellbeing, providing evidence of what drives fatigue and stress at different times of the year. These insights will help inform strategies to support farmers' health, productivity and retention in the sector.

Extended Lactation Trial (Holsteins and Jerseys)

Lead scientist:
Dr Lydia Farrell
DairyNZ scientist

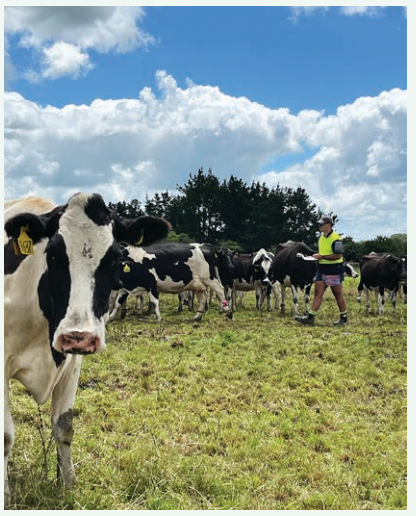
At DairyNZ Scott Farm, researchers are comparing a 24-month calving interval with the usual 12 months under a typical Waikato pasture-based system. The farmlet trial began with Friesian cows in '23/'24, showing promise for production, management and profitability. In '25/'26, Jersey farmlets were added, helping assess likely crossbreed performance.

The extended lactation system calves half the herd each spring, spreading the on-farm workload more evenly across the year and hopefully improving labour productivity. Fewer calvings and a lower replacement rate mean nearly 60% fewer non-replacement calves, making it easier to rear the remaining animals as dairy-beef.

Heat Stress Mitigation Trial

Lead scientist:
Dr Charlotte Reed
DairyNZ scientist

Our 2025/26 summer Heat Stress Mitigation Trial at DairyNZ Scott Farm, Waikato, has been developed with farmers. It measures the behaviour, physiology and production of cows under different heat-stress mitigation strategies, with the goal of providing farmers with the information they need to make informed decisions to minimise the effect of heat stress. Strategies being compared include providing shade, using yard misters or sprinklers, and adjusting milking frequency.



What's coming up?

Digital Indicators Study

A study at Scott Farm, which is part of the Cow Quality of Life project, will develop knowledge for assessing cows' physical and thermal comfort in pasture-based dairy systems. Groups of cows will be monitored across the season to understand how everyday conditions – heat, muddy paddocks, or a feed pinch – affect their behaviour.

On-animal sensors (wearables) will track their responses, while also recognising the benefits of grazing systems, such as freedom of movement and natural behaviours like grazing.

The aim is to create a method that can objectively measure and demonstrate the high standards of animal care on New Zealand farms.

At the same time, the tool will provide farmers with feedback to manage risks like heat stress and support cow wellbeing and milk production.

Lead scientists:

Dr Stacey Hendriks
DairyNZ scientist

Dr Paul Edwards
DairyNZ senior scientist

Linking farm outcomes with cow data from wearables

Farmers told us they want clear, independent guidance on how to get the most value from wearable technology.

The next phase of this work will use real farm data to show what typical cow behaviour patterns look like across different farm systems, and how they link to business benchmarks (such as production, reproduction, labour and profit).

The aim is to give farmers practical benchmarks and make it easier to spot opportunities that have the greatest impact.

Lead scientist:

Dr Susanne Meier
DairyNZ senior scientist

Te Ao Māori values a lesson from insightful survey

A research partnership shines a light on deep-rooted practices that inform the way Māori farmers nurture the land and the relationships linked to it.

Māori dairy farms produce the same high-quality milk as any other farm, but the way the farmers own and manage their land can look quite different. These differences are rooted in Te Ao Māori (the Māori worldview) and mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge systems), which guide decision-making, governance and environmental management on Māori farms.

A recent research partnership between DairyNZ and the Bioeconomy Science Institute Maiangi Taiao (formerly AgResearch) has helped shed light on these approaches. The work provides insight into Māori farming practices and supports stronger, more effective engagement with Māori dairy operators across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Māori-owned dairy enterprises make up an increasingly significant part of the sector, comprising over 10% of all dairying land, with over 15% of the on-farm workforce identifying as Māori.

As part of the DairyNZ-led Low N Systems programme, six farms in the Waikato and Bay of Plenty regions were selected to provide deeper insights into how Māori values and knowledge shape farming practices, particularly in environmental management.

DairyNZ lead researcher Dr Claire Phyn notes that while these farms are case studies and not intended to represent all Māori dairy operations, "Each has provided valuable insights, across a range of different ownership and operational structures."

Raina Meha, senior Kaupapa Māori researcher at the Bioeconomy Science Institute Maiangi Taiao, says ownership on Māori farms often extends well beyond those living and working on the land.

"They can represent many share-holders in Māori land trusts and incorporations, with expectations around due diligence and farm operations," she says.

The six Māori farming entities were keen to participate, seeing the project as an opportunity to share their stories directly with the researchers.

Raina says a common theme across all farms was the importance placed on whenua (land), whakapapa (kinship), and whanaungatanga (relationships).

"It wasn't a surprise these stood out, given their history, legacy and view of the future. Each farm was different, but they shared these values in common."

Research insights and recommendations

The research report includes several key recommendations to help build stronger relationships and engagement across the sector, enabling DairyNZ and others to better support Māori farming operations to lift productivity, profitability and sustainability while meeting their owner aspirations.

The first is to start by understanding how whenua and people are connected through whānau, hapū and iwi, and how the farming operation supports those connections.

Knowledge of whakapapa connections is also important, as these tribal relationships often go back centuries and influence economic, social and cultural priorities. Seeking advice from experienced colleagues or advisors can support effective, genuine engagement.

> ***"For Māori, it's as much about what happened on the land in the past as it is about what will happen in the future.***

"Often the temptation is to get straight into farm system, or production and profitability metrics," Claire says.

"But building the relationship first, understanding the history of the whenua and people, and referencing that at the start is important for meaningful discussions and long-term connections."

An understanding of the complexities of Māori land ownership is also essential.

"For Māori, it's as much about what happened on the land in the past as it is about what will happen in the future," Raina says.

She points out that several Māori dairy farms had debt, andpushing debt down could influence decisions around management practices and expansion in the future.

Research found Māori-owned farms had three themes in common: the importance placed on whenua (land), whakapapa (kinship), and whanaungatanga (relationships).

"And there is a need to consider the complex legal frameworks and unique ownership structures that can exist around Māori land, and how these can shape land management," says Claire.

It's important to recognise that Māori farms often balance multiple priorities and perspectives: running a profitable business, caring for the whenua as kaitiaki (guardians) for future generations, reducing debt and protecting ownership, and meeting wider environmental, social, and cultural responsibilities.

"It could involve not using some land due to its cultural significance. But there are also social and cultural obligations, like giving back to your people beyond the farm itself," says Raina.

Some of the farms highlighted how they are incorporating mātauranga Māori knowledge systems alongside western science and conventional practices to enrich farm management and environmental outcomes. Examples included restoring natural waterway ecosystems using cultural frameworks and monitoring approaches, as well as reducing nitrogen leaching through improved farm systems.

The insights from these case studies will inform ongoing engagement with Māori farms across a range of DairyNZ-led research projects and activities nationwide. These include the Resilient Pastures programme in Te Tai Tokerau (Northland), Waikato and the Bay of Plenty, along with catchment action to improve water quality and ecosystem health.

Find out more about the Resilient Pastures programme at **dairynz.co.nz/resilientpastures** and practical solutions for catchments at **dairynz.co.nz/catchment-solutions**

Meet the research team:

Raina Meha
Ngāti Pikiao, Ngāti Makino, Ngāti Kahungunu, Te Aitanga a Māhaki; Bioeconomy Science Institute (formerly AgResearch) senior Kaupapa Māori researcher

Sara Tairi
Ngati Koroki Kahukura; DairyNZ Kaiakiaki - Māori development advisor

Claire Phyn
DairyNZ principal scientist

Snapped around the regions

A look at the people, research and on-farm activity driving progress across the dairy sector. Want to be featured? Tag our Instagram or Facebook @DairyNZ

Driving productivity through genetic improvement. (L-R) Jess Terry, Chris Terry, Becky Curry and Shayla McGrory at a South Wairarapa Genetic Gain event in partnership with Fonterra, LIC and CRV.

Dr Stacey Hendriks presents on wearable tech at a Progressing Dairy Event in Southland, hosted by Ferdinand and Stacey Vries.

Mount Tarawera and Lake Rerewhaaitu made a picturesque backdrop for a Progressing Dairy Event on wearable tech at Paul and Sarah Koopal's farm.

Research technicians Ashton, Eliza and Jacob, score cows on the afternoon yard for the heat stress trial.

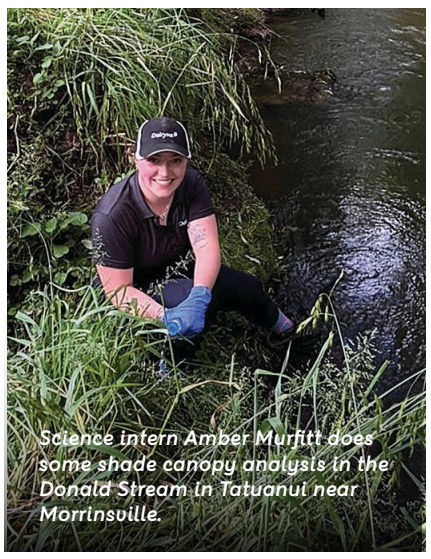
Inside the Lye Farm methane research barn during the Targeted Supplementary Feed Trial.

Taking dairy to Wellington. (L-R) Tracy Brown, Nick Robinson, Chris Lewis, Campbell Parker and Roger Lincoln grabbed a quick snap before meeting with members of parliament.

The popular Taranaki Dairy Tech Expo had over 220 visitors and 43 farm tech exhibitors in attendance.

Scott Montgomerie and Shishir Khatry from Orini Downs host over 50 people at a discussion group in their new 70-bail rotary shed fit with ErgoPod cupping system technology.

Balfour dairy farmer Brendon Stevens now has a wetland and bioreactor as part of the Balfour Catchment Group project using science solutions to reduce nitrogen loss.



Science intern Amber Murfitt does some shade canopy analysis in the Donald Stream in Tatuanui near Morrinsville.

Unlocking tech's potential in our unique dairy landscape

Precision dairying technology will be crucial for New Zealand to remain a global leader, but it needs to be designed for our pastoral systems, says Dr Jenny Jago, science partnerships and impact advisor at DairyNZ.

As New Zealand aims to double primary sector export value by 2034, technology will be central to unlocking the potential of its pasture-based dairy systems.

At the 2025 International Precision Dairy Farming Conference, Dr Jenny Jago looked at where the sector stands and how innovation can drive productivity.

"Dairy already contributes significantly to New Zealand's economy," she said.

"But to meet these targets, we need to keep lifting productivity, and precision technologies are expected to play a big part."

Adopting new tools isn't always straightforward. Dr Jago noted that uptake is shaped not just by what a technology can do, but by economic and market conditions.

One of New Zealand's biggest advantages – and opportunities – is its pasture-based system. Globally, only 10-15% of milk comes from grazing cows, making New Zealand an outlier. A lot of technology is built for indoor herds, which doesn't always suit New Zealand's cows grazing year-round.

"This gap highlights the need for technologies designed for our systems, and for New Zealand to continue developing solutions suited to its unique model."

The sector has a long history of innovation. Since deregulation in the 1980s, dairy farmers have operated in a free market that rewards efficiency and practical solutions.

> ***"For a technology to succeed here, it has to prove economic value quickly.***

"For a technology to succeed here, it has to prove economic value quickly," Dr Jago said. "It needs to deliver benefits in the short term while standing up to changing conditions."

Tools that save time or reduce workload – particularly automation – are highly valued. And environmental sustainability is another driver.

"Sustainability is at the centre of rising global expectations.

"Technologies that help manage inputs and reduce excess outputs, including greenhouse gas emissions, are increasingly important for an export-focused sector."

Looking back, many influential technologies weren't obvious winners at first. Electric fences transformed pasture management, artificial insemination reshaped herd genetics, and nitrogen fertiliser and irrigation lifted productivity, she said.

Today, the focus is on data-driven decision support. So far, farmers have mainly adopted wearable technologies to streamline manual tasks such as heat detection. We're now beginning to see the next step: farmers using richer, real-time data to guide more complex on-farm decisions.

Dr Jenny Jago, science partnerships and impact advisor at DairyNZ, says the pasture-based nature of New Zealand's dairy system sets it apart globally – and should shape how technology is developed and adopted on-farm.

"There's huge potential in technologies that measure and monitor pasture productivity. For them to succeed, they must be easy to use, cost-effective, and directly relevant to day-to-day decisions – not just promising in theory."

Global ideas, on-farm impact

More than 400 people from 22 countries gathered in Ōtautahi Christchurch in December 2025 for the 4th International Precision Dairy Farming Conference, hosted by DairyNZ. See highlights, proceedings and more, including the *Precision Dairy Farming podcast series* from the 2025 conference at **dairynz.co.nz/conference**

4th International Precision Dairy Farming Conference