

# Inside Dairy

AUG-OCT 2026

By DairyNZ

## Whenua, whānau and the future

Building a legacy through farming



### Features:

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**Driving genetic gain**

Stronger herds from better genetics

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**Greater pasture resilience**

Improving persistence under pressure

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**Chasing extra milk?**

Science reveals hidden costs



# Over the fence...

The new season is upon us, and for the dairy sector it brings a sense of promise. Many farms will be entering the 2026-27 season in their strongest position in years, providing a welcome buffer against increasing on farm costs fuelled by geopolitical disruptions.

Our latest economic insights show that dairy remains New Zealand's economic powerhouse, though the rising rate of costs is a growing concern.

As a cornerstone of the national economy, the dairy sector must continue to progress, innovate, and deliver environmental and productivity gains. In this edition of Inside Dairy, we showcase how the sector is transforming and evolving our environmental stewardship, animal care and efficient farm systems to maintain our reputation and competitiveness internationally.

The Responsible Dairy programme is central to this evolution. It is set to accelerate innovation, scale up adoption, and deliver environmental and productivity gains across the dairy sector. Complementing the significant work already underway, the programme will support farmers to reach the next level of productivity, efficiency, and sustainability within their individual businesses, while continuing to drive positive environmental outcomes.

Balancing environmental goals with a value-driven business model has been key to the success of our cover story, Tataiwhetu Trust. As Ahuwhenua Trophy winners, they have transformed several small, family-owned land holdings into a viable and sustainable organic farming business for future generations.

Elsewhere in this issue, we delve into the science behind profitable supplement use; cast a critical eye on wetlands, duck habitats, and nitrogen mitigation; and assess different feed strategies.

With pressure peaking on farm during spring, we shine a light on the partnership between DairyNZ and the Rural Support Trust, highlighting the crucial role the trust plays in supporting farmers through mental health challenges, tough seasons, and adverse weather events.

As always, your feedback is welcome at [Campbell.Parker@ceo.dairynz.co.nz](mailto:Campbell.Parker@ceo.dairynz.co.nz)

Ngā mihi,  
**Campbell Parker**  
DairyNZ chief executive

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**On the cover:**  
Desma Feakins and Wairakau Veroe of Tataiwhetu Trust in the Ruatoki Valley. Read their story on page 14.

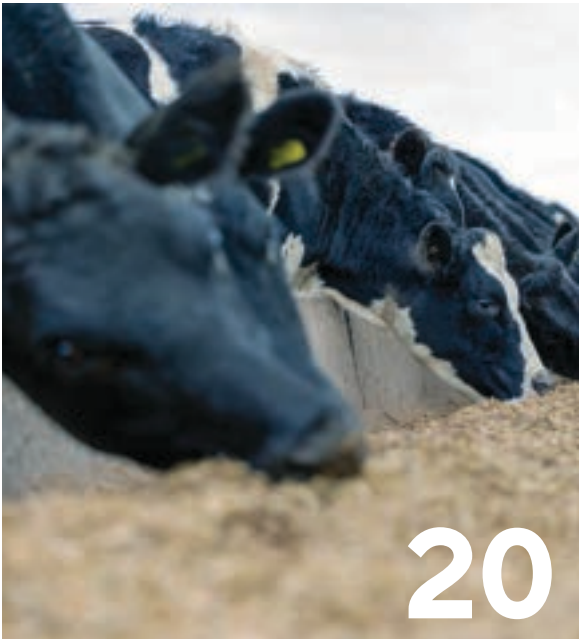
## Get connected

Stay up to date with advice, latest research, tools and resources.  
Read, browse, scroll, listen, or be there in person [dairynz.co.nz/get-connected](https://dairynz.co.nz/get-connected)



## DairyNZ Board of Directors (farmer elected)

- |                                                     |                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Tracy Brown<br>(chair)<br>027 291 1716              | Chris Lewis<br>027 289 8942                             |
| Cameron Henderson<br>(deputy chair)<br>021 113 8895 | Richard McIntyre<br>021 143 1588                        |
| Jacqueline Rowarth<br>027 694 4334                  | Adam Williamson<br>(associate director)<br>027 223 2667 |



## We appreciate your feedback

Email us at [insidedairy@dairynz.co.nz](mailto:insidedairy@dairynz.co.nz)

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This publication was accurate at the time of printing on 20 July 2026.

## Help shape the future of dairy – join the DairyNZ board

Levy-paying farmers with a passion for the dairy sector are encouraged to stand for this year's DairyNZ Board of Director elections. Nominations are now open for one farmer-elected board position and two roles on the Directors' Remuneration Committee.

Step up, bring your voice, and make a difference. Nominations close at noon on Friday, August 21, 2026. To learn more about the DairyNZ Board and the nomination process, head to [dairynz.co.nz/governance](https://dairynz.co.nz/governance)



## Tailored tools and insights for rural professionals

The Rural Professional Hub is your go-to source for tools, insights and resources to support your work with dairy farmers.

With an easy-to-use layout, you can quickly access practical guides, research, articles, insights and events – with new content added regularly.

Get ahead of your next farm visit and explore the hub at [dairynz.co.nz/rp](https://dairynz.co.nz/rp)

## New associate director committed to sector

DairyNZ's 2026-27 associate director, Adam Williamson, is already making his mark. The North Canterbury farmer began the one-year role on June 1 and has spent his first months meeting DairyNZ board and leadership members, connecting with farmers at field days, and completing media interviews.

Adam is the 16th farmer selected for the sought-after position, which offers leadership development, hands-on governance experience, and mentorship from DairyNZ's eight board members, supporting future sector leaders.



## Have you moved farms?

If you've moved to a new address, stay connected and update your details at [dairynz.co.nz/change-address](https://dairynz.co.nz/change-address)

## IDF World Dairy Summit returns to New Zealand for 2026

The IDF World Dairy Summit will be held in Auckland on November 15-20 at the New Zealand International Convention Centre.

The theme is Healthy People, Healthy Planet, Healthy Economies, and the summit will feature speakers and expert panellists who will present, analyse and debate information, issues and opportunities facing the sector.

DairyNZ is proud to support showcasing NZ dairy farming to the world. Learn more about the summit at [idfws2026.com](https://idfws2026.com)



# New \$46m investment for dairy's future

Lifting productivity and reducing the dairy sector's environmental footprint is the focus of a new multi-partner initiative.

Backed by a \$46 million investment from government and industry partners, Responsible Dairy is a new seven-year programme led by DairyNZ to help farmers improve productivity, profitability and environmental performance. It was announced by the government at Fieldays in June.

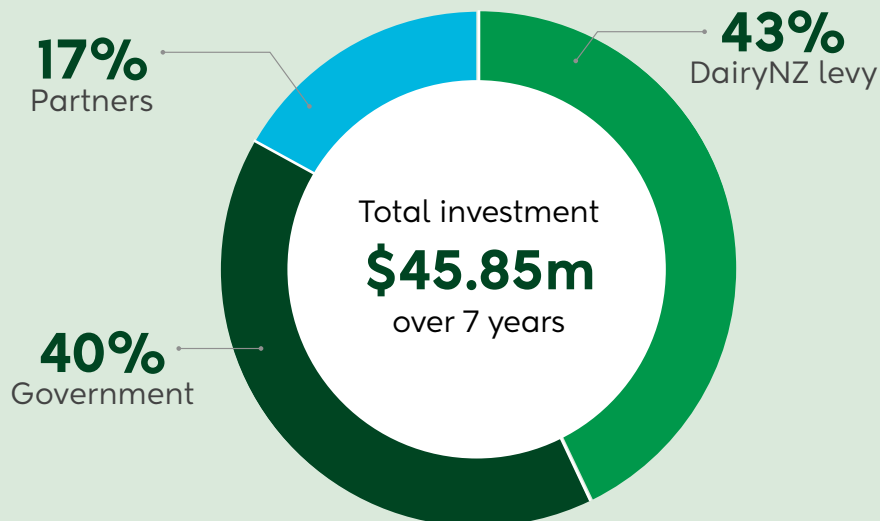
A key part of the programme will be developing a network of 35 to 40 partner farms across the country to showcase existing high-performing and low-footprint systems. These farms will also act as demonstration sites for testing and demonstrating new technologies, evaluating system changes, and providing practical insights for farmers across different regions.

DairyNZ chief executive Campbell Parker says while the dairy industry is a significant contributor to the country's economy, productivity has largely plateaued since 2015.

"This shows us there is a clear need to lift performance across farms.

## Responsible Dairy Programme

### Funding sources



Responsible Dairy aims to support farmers to adopt proven and emerging practices, technologies and systems that deliver both efficiency gains and reduced environmental footprint."

He says the programme builds on more than a decade of investment by farmers in effluent management,

infrastructure and environmental stewardship, and the positive outcomes that are being seen as a result of this work.

Responsible Dairy's long-term goals include a 20% increase in milksolids production from existing farms and land use change, and a 13% lift in sector profitability. Environmental

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*Global competitors are moving quickly and we need to continue evolving to maintain our competitive edge and protect the value of New Zealand dairy.*

goals are focused on reducing nitrogen leaching per hectare by 20%, increasing riparian planting on farms by 60% and protected wetland areas by 50%.

"Global competitors are moving quickly and we need to continue evolving to maintain our competitive edge and protect the value of New Zealand dairy," Campbell says.

Funders include the Ministry for Primary Industries, DairyNZ and other sector partners including all dairy companies, Rabobank, Halter, Gallagher, Pāmu, Dairy Holdings, Craigmore Sustainables and the Fertiliser Association of New Zealand.

Read more at [dairynz.co.nz/responsible-dairy](https://dairynz.co.nz/responsible-dairy)

# Farmer honoured for waterway mahi

Learning about how things once were and being inspired by what they could be, is what drove this award-winning farmer to reconnect people with a local waterway.

Waiuku dairy farmer Stu Muir has been recognised with the inaugural Kaitiaki Award at the Dairy Environment Leaders (DEL) Forum, honouring his long-standing commitment to environmental restoration and community leadership.

The award recognises Stu's commitment to kaitiakitanga, his contribution to the DEL programme and the positive impact he's had on both his farm and the Lower Waikato River Delta.

A fifth-generation farmer, Stu has quietly led one of the dairy sector's most powerful environmental restoration stories. What were once degraded, weed-choked waterways on his 500-cow farm are now thriving ecosystems with native species returning and water flowing again.

"My family has a long connection with Ngati Te Ata a Waiohua and Ngati

Tipa, our neighbours and this area, so you learn a lot about how things were and how things could be," Stu says.

"When you're brought up in the country and you see things degrading, you've got two options. You can either do nothing and whinge about it or you can quietly get stuck in and make a difference."

Stu chose the latter, working alongside others across the Mangati Stream catchment to restore waterways and reconnect the public with the landscape.

His proudest achievement has been opening up the entire Mangati Stream and creating a public walkway.

"It was the lifeblood and way of getting from the Waikato River to the Manukau Harbour and the north. By opening it up and building boardwalks, it helps intergenerational change because people can experience it."

Stu has been involved with DEL since its inception in 2007 and says the programme helps to create sector leaders by connecting farmers with catchment groups, councils and

others working to drive positive and sustainable environmental change.

"You get to listen to other farmers and hear from other people who broaden your mind and encourage lateral thinking.

"If you want intergenerational change you have to collaborate with people and that's the strength of the DEL organisation."

Ready to be a Dairy Environment Leader? Find out more at [dairynz.co.nz/del](https://dairynz.co.nz/del)



Listen to more about Stu Muir's journey on Talking Dairy [dairynz.co.nz/del-winner](https://dairynz.co.nz/del-winner)



From left, DairyNZ chair Tracy Brown, winner Stu Muir, Minister for the Environment Nicola Grigg and Dairy Environment Leaders chair Amber Carpenter.



Southland deer and dairy graziers, Michelle and Tony Roberts, won the prestigious Gordon Stephenson Trophy at the National Sustainability Showcase on July 2, 2026. They were named the 2026 National Ambassadors for Sustainable Farming and Growing, chosen from the Ballance Farm Environment Awards supreme regional winners.



2026 NZDIA winners, from left: Dairy Trainee of the Year, farm manager Mark Ready from Maruia; Share Farmers of the Year, contract milkers Scott and Stacey Mackereth from Edendale; Dairy Manager of the Year, farm manager Lauren McConnachie from Purata.

# Celebrating NZ's top farmers

The winners of two different industry awards show others what's possible for their businesses.

Innovation, strong leadership and sustainable farming practices are the common threads connecting this

year's winners of the New Zealand Dairy Industry Awards and the Ballance Farm Environment Awards.

Both awards recognise farmers at all stages of their career who are lifting on-farm performance while caring for their people, animals and environment.

DairyNZ chief executive Campbell Parker says sponsoring the awards, contributing judging expertise and helping facilitate field days allows DairyNZ to share learnings from these industry leaders with the wider sector.

"Our dairy farmers are some of the best in the world and these winners

highlight the breadth of talent helping to shape a strong and sustainable future for dairy."

Read each winner's story at [dairyindustryawards.co.nz](http://dairyindustryawards.co.nz) and [nzfetrust.org.nz](http://nzfetrust.org.nz)

# Entries open for next year's Ahuwhenua Trophy

Prestigious awards recognise excellence in Māori farming as well as up-and-coming young farmers. In 2027 it's dairy's turn for the honours.

Entries are open for the 2027 Ahuwhenua Trophy Excellence in Māori Farming Awards, so if you're looking for an opportunity to learn, develop new skills and connections, this competition could be for you.

Founded in 1933, the awards celebrate successful Māori agribusinesses and young farming leaders, alternating among the dairy, sheep and beef and horticulture sectors each year. The awards – honouring achievers in the dairy sector in 2027 – are open to Māori land trusts, incorporations and individual farmers who are in key decision-making roles.

DairyNZ Kaiārahi Ahuwhenua Brooke Sinclair says the competition is unique.

"The Ahuwhenua Awards are more than just showcasing the highest-performing farms. They highlight the many ways entrants operate their businesses in accordance with their own tikanga and values.

"The competition is about encouraging skills, leadership and development, and growing industry connections at all levels. While performance, productivity and profitability are important considerations, the judging extends beyond this and showcases the excellence behind all aspects of the farm business."

She says the team can work with people to assess their readiness.

"Before entering, a strong starting point is having accurate business data for the past three seasons. DairyBase is a useful tool for this and provides a solid foundation for benchmarking and performance insights."

DairyNZ sponsors the Young Māori Farmer category, contributes judging



Sonya Rimene, Anaru Smiler, Lynnette Te Maari Whata and Kingi Winiata Smiler celebrating Wairarapa Moana Incorporation's win at the 2024 Ahuwhenua Trophy Excellence in Māori Farming Award. Photo credit: Alphasix

expertise, and supports field days. The competition offers significant prizes, totalling nearly \$100,000 for the winner of the Ahuwhenua Trophy.

The Young Māori Farmer Award offers finalists education and mentoring

opportunities, with prizes worth up to \$5,000.

Read about how the awards have supported the business journey of 2021 Ahuwhenua Trophy winner, Tataiwhetu Trust, on page 14.

Thinking about entering and want to know more? Support is available from the Māori agribusiness team at [maoriagribusiness@dairynz.co.nz](mailto:maoriagribusiness@dairynz.co.nz)

Enter the 2027 Ahuwhenua Trophy Dairy competition at [ahuwhenuatrophy.maori.nz/enter](http://ahuwhenuatrophy.maori.nz/enter)

Entries close 2 December 2026.

If your budget changes or cashflow tightens, having a chat with a trusted advisor early is an important first step. Pictured here is DairyNZ area manager – West Coast Dan O’Keefe (centre) with farmers Michael Shearer and Caleb Russ.



# Budget reviews help spot pressure early

**Regularly reviewing your budget throughout the season can help to ease cashflow pressure and keep options open when conditions change.**

While there are plenty of reasons for optimism this season, including a strong milk price forecast, favourable growing conditions in many regions and the return of Fonterra capital, uncertainty remains. Rising input costs, inflationary pressures and weather variability could still affect profitability and cashflow. Regular budget reviews help ensure surplus cash is used strategically while keeping options open if conditions change.

August and September can be some of the toughest months for farm cashflow. Milk income is still building, but bills for feed, fertiliser, fuel and repairs keep arriving. Regular budget check-ins can help identify pressure points early, giving farmers more options and helping avoid reactive decisions later in the season.

Recent DairyBase benchmarking analysis shows the top 20% of profitable farms produce milk for around 90c/kg MS less than the

average farm, helping them maintain stronger profit margins. Even in strong payout seasons, the data consistently shows a wide spread in profitability and returns, highlighting that resilience comes less from milk price and more from cost control, efficient systems and disciplined decision-making.

As costs continue to rise, the strongest-performing farms aren't necessarily making major system changes. Instead, they're focused on the fundamentals: spending carefully, monitoring cashflow closely and staying flexible. DairyBase data shows these farms consistently maintain a stronger margin between income and expenses, regardless of the season.

## Practical actions when costs start to bite

### Grow and utilise more high-quality pasture

Every extra kilogram of dry matter grown and utilised reduces reliance on bought-in feed. Monitor pasture growth to guide grazing decisions, keep feed budgets current and adjust supplement use as conditions change to ensure every input

delivers value (read about the science and costs to produce marginal milk on page 20).

Analysis of 17 years of DairyBase data shows a clear link between pasture eaten and profitability.

On average, each additional tonne of pasture and crop consumed per hectare lifts operating profit by around \$370/ha/year. This long-term, inflation-adjusted result holds across different farm systems and seasons, making pasture and crop eaten per hectare one of the most reliable drivers of profit.

### Prioritise spending

Protect feed supply and animal health first. If cashflow is tight, consider delaying non-urgent repairs, maintenance or capital upgrades until finances improve.

### Be precise with fertiliser

Target fertiliser applications to areas most likely to deliver a return through spring growth. Focus on applying nutrients where they will have the greatest impact and ensure nitrogen is used strategically.

### Get your team involved

Share key business goals and challenges with staff and encourage ideas for improving efficiency. Well-maintained equipment and efficient routines can save time and money while reducing the risk of costly breakdowns.

### Hold the line on welfare and compliance

Cutting corners may reduce costs in the short term, but it often creates bigger expenses later and can limit future options for the business.

### Tools and support to keep you on track

The earlier you understand your cashflow and cost position, the more choices you'll have, whatever the season delivers. Find tools, events and local support to help you stay on track at [dairynz.co.nz](http://dairynz.co.nz)

### Budget tips from top farmers

- Review costs regularly and cut spending that doesn't add value.
- Track cashflow and compare actual spending against your budget.
- Identify pressure points early and plan for different scenarios, such as lower milk prices or higher input costs.
- If cashflow tightens, talk to your bank manager, accountant or advisor early.

For more budget case study farmer updates visit [dairynz.co.nz/budget-case-studies](http://dairynz.co.nz/budget-case-studies)

Learn more about practical options to future-proof your business including stress-testing budgets, planning for different cost scenarios and more with DairyNZ economist Mark Storey and farm system specialist Mark Speight on Talking Dairy



[dairynz.co.nz/podcast-122](http://dairynz.co.nz/podcast-122)

### Meet the experts:



**Sarah Brown**  
DairyNZ Business specialist



**Paul Bird**  
DairyNZ Senior business specialist

# How DAiSY™ takes you one step further

Other AI chat tools can be helpful for quick orientation and clear summaries, but when you need advice tailored to New Zealand farming conditions, access to a trusted, research-led source of information is essential.

When making spring nitrogen decisions, a generic answer is not always enough. Timing, application rates and trade-offs depend on pasture growth, soil temperature, feed demand, and environmental risk, and those factors can shift quickly through the season.

To compare how DAiSY, our AI-powered website assistant, handles this complexity, we asked both DAiSY and a general-purpose AI model three common spring nitrogen questions:

1. What is the lowest practical amount of nitrogen to apply on a New Zealand dairy farm?
2. Is liquid nitrogen more effective than granular urea for New Zealand dairy farms?
3. When is the best time to apply nitrogen on my dairy farm?

## DAiSY turns answers into actions

In analysing the results, DairyNZ's senior farm system specialist, Ron Pellow, says across the three questions, both AI tools landed on broadly similar baseline recommendations, including

typical spring timing windows and common rate ranges, for example.

"The difference wasn't that one tool was 'right' and the other was 'wrong'. The difference was in the level of local context and decision support," Ron says.

He says compared with the general-purpose AI model, DAiSY consistently:

**Adds value on top of generally correct knowledge** by translating principles into on-farm suggestions (for example, soil temperature and pasture response expectations), rather than stopping at a rule of thumb.

**Goes beyond simply answering the question to recommending what to actually do**, helping you check whether there's a genuine feed deficit, how soon you're likely to see a response, and how to plan grazing and supplements around it.

**Shows stronger seasonal nuance**, including within-spring variation and how pasture dynamics change as you move from early to late spring (not just a high-level 'spring is best' message).



### DAiSY

-  Grounded in DairyNZ research and guidance
-  More tailored to NZ pasture-based systems
-  Provides actionable, on-farm decision cues
-  Reflects seasonal and system complexity
-  Reinforces best practice and trade-offs
-  Links to trusted tools and support

### Other AI

-  Strong general knowledge
-  Clear summaries and rules of thumb
-  Broad, globally-informed answers
-  Good for quick orientation

VS

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*The difference wasn't that one tool was 'right' and the other was 'wrong'. The difference was in the level of local context and decision support.*

**Makes trade-offs more explicit** by linking nitrogen decisions to whole-farm impacts (for example, what reduced N can mean for pasture grown, milksolids and stocking or feeding decisions).

**Reinforces best-practice behaviour** – in this case, suggesting the application of just enough N when it's likely to be used by the plant and

avoiding unnecessary applications when conditions don't support a good response.

"Because DAiSY's answers are grounded in DairyNZ research, its local relevance helps by providing seasonal nuance, practical decision cues and clearer links to whole-farm impacts, helping you apply information with confidence," Ron says.

Have a question? Ask DAiSY today  
[dairynz.co.nz/daisy](https://dairynz.co.nz/daisy)

## Meet the expert:



**Ron Pellow**  
DairyNZ senior farm system specialist

## What's new with DAiSY?

We've recently made updates and improvements to DAiSY to make it even easier for you to access credible information fast. These include:

- **A dedicated DAiSY page that provides a clearer and easier chat experience.** You can save this to your phone or computer screen just like an app.
- **Recent conversations are remembered**, so you can pick up where you left off.
- **A better understanding of seasons and regions.** This means responses and guidance will be aligned to what's currently happening where you're farming.
- **It's easier to find local events and contacts.** If you're looking for a DairyNZ staff member or an event happening near you, DAiSY can now help more effectively.
- **Multi-language support.** If you've got team members who may not be confident in English, DAiSY can now be used in any language. This can help to improve understanding, onboarding and day-to-day decision-making across the team.



Like all generative AI, DAiSY can make mistakes. While we've taken reasonable steps to ensure DAiSY provides accurate information, you should still check the source information and the answers provided to make your own decision on its relevance and appropriateness for you.

# Genetic gain drives herd productivity, year by year

**Herd-owning sharemilkers Tania and Johnno Burrows know that building a more valuable farm system starts with getting the fundamentals right and improving the genetics of their herd with tools that help make the right decisions.**

For sharemilkers Tania and Johnno Burrows, improving herd genetics was about building a more efficient, more valuable farm system over time. Their approach – focused on getting the basics right and using tools well – was front and centre at a recent DairyNZ Progressing Dairy Event on lifting productivity through genetic gain.

Held at Alpine Dairies in Darfield and hosted by the couple, the event was supported by Fonterra, LIC and CRV and focused on practical ways to lift genetic gain on-farm.

The couple milk 750 cows on 211 hectares and focus on a tight calving spread to drive production and reduce animal wastage. Their efforts have been recognised and they were named one of three winners of the Fonterra & ASB First Farm Award in the New Zealand Dairy Industry Awards.

Last spring, Johnno and Tania saw a lift in the six-week in-calf rate from 74% to 79% and a drop in the not-in-calf rate from 11% to 9% over a 10-week mating period. They credited the progress to their efforts to identify and manage non-cycling cows early.

In addition, they synchronised their heifers and used sexed semen, resulting in a 64% conception rate. This approach enabled more replacements from their youngest and highest-breeding worth animals, supporting greater rates of genetic gain.

The Burrows use DNA testing and animal evaluation reports to guide breeding decisions, alongside breeding worth (BW) and production worth (PW) to help determine which animals to retain. They also use wearable technology for heat detection, helping to improve mating outcomes and reproductive performance within the herd.

They also support their team to build capability. Johnno manages their herd's artificial insemination, which provides a unique opportunity for the team to learn about breeding and be fully involved in the process, so by the end of mating everyone is able to identify which cows to put forward for mating.

"We spread the workload and encourage ownership in the process amongst the team. We discuss how important each of their roles are in nailing the basics of farming as we prepare for mating," Tania says.

"Milking 750 cows through a 40-a-side herringbone shed, with yard space for 500 cows only, requires a higher number of staff. The farm is also a challenging shape that requires the cows to walk a long way to the back, so we employ three full-timers and a Dairy Training NextGen\* student."

**Why genetic gain matters for whole-farm productivity at Alpine Dairies**

Tania says that, in the big picture, they are financially driven to make the most of the opportunities available within their farm system.

"We see genetic gain as assuring a scalable asset, with a financial focus in terms of investment.

"Improving the genetic quality of our cows helps us breed more efficient,



Farmers gathered at Alpine Dairies for a Progressing Dairy Event focused on practical ways to lift productivity through genetic gain.

**“Genetic gain compounds, and every year you select better animals, you build on the previous generation.**

higher milk-yielding and more fertile animals, making them a more valuable asset as a 50:50 sharemilker.”

A key focus is reducing wastage across the farm system. To achieve this, they use dairy-beef, sexed semen and genomic bulls, supported by a tight calving spread that gives more cows enough time between calving and mating, which supports better cycling and heats to lift submission and conception rates.

Strong culling policies also help keep the system efficient.

When making breeding decisions, Johnno says, they consider BW and PW, analyse data collected through wearables and work closely with



Tania and Johnno Burrows run 750 cows on 211 hectares at Alpine Dairies in Darfield, focusing on a tight calving spread and strong reproductive performance to support genetic gain.





### Turning practical breeding decisions into genetic gain

Alongside on-farm experience, science and data are continuing to shape how breeding decisions are made and refined – including ongoing improvements to the BW index.

DairyNZ geneticist Becky Curry says these tools are helping farmers take a more targeted approach to herd improvement and productivity.

In her presentation, Becky highlighted practical approaches to breeding and genetics to boost herd productivity and support long-term success.

“Once farmers would keep anything that had four legs, but now we need to be more targeted in the animals we have.

“We don’t just want more cows; we need better cows that are more efficient.”

Cows are producing significantly more than they were 10 years ago. In 2005, the average New Zealand cow produced about 355 kilograms of milksolids; by 2024, that had increased to 439kg MS.

Analysis from the DairyNZ Strain Trial showed that about two-thirds (56kg) of that 84kg increase could be attributed to genetic gain.

“So, the old saying ‘20% breeding, 80% feeding’ doesn’t really stack up anymore,” Becky said.

“Genetics has played a massive role in lifting cow production in this country. Genetic gain compounds, and every year you select better animals, you build on the previous generation.”

Picking the best bulls to suit your farm is key to accelerating genetic progress, Becky explained, starting with identifying clear priorities.

“Be clear on what matters most for your herd and system, using herd data to understand strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improvement, while defining a clear breeding objective with simple, measurable goals that guide bull selection and inform breeding decisions.

“Confirm your AB plan and work with your AB provider to select bull teams so that your breeding goals translate into a practical mating plan.

“And remember, reproduction underpins your farm’s genetic gain, with monitoring key reproduction metrics crucial to keeping the breeding plan on track and aligned with breeding goals.”

The message was clear – focus on the basics, use the tools available, and keep building on small gains.

Over time, those decisions compound, lifting herd performance and whole-farm productivity.

sector professionals to make the best decisions for their individual herd.

They “aim for the best outcomes and are always looking for the next small gain each year”.

They use a large genomic bull team with a minimum of 10 bulls, alternating bulls each day to spread risk while still capturing gains from high-genetic-merit sires.

Looking ahead, they plan to mate the lowest-BW cows to beef semen from the start of mating, while the

highest-BW cows will be mated to sexed semen. Mid-range animals will be mated to genomic bulls to continue lifting herd quality.

Their key message to event attendees was clear: “No matter what, you have to nail the basics first.”

This includes feed levels, mineral status and consistency in farming routines and practices.

“Simple and sustainable systems are always better; it needs to be user friendly for people.”

#### Genetic farm facts and Canterbury averages for the 2025-26 season

|                     | Burrows herd     | Canterbury benchmark* |
|---------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Herd BW             | \$112            | \$84                  |
| 2024 born BW        | \$170            | \$138                 |
| 2025 born BW        | \$221            | \$159                 |
| 6-week in-calf rate | 79%              | 70.1%                 |
| Not-in-calf rate    | 9%               | 13.5%                 |
| Mating length       | 10 weeks, all AB | NA                    |

\* Source: LIC (fertility statistics); DairyNZ Animal Evaluation (Breeding Worth statistics).



Becky Curry, NZ Animal Evaluation geneticist, shared practical insights on using genetics and data to improve breeding decisions and lift herd productivity.

### Spring actions to lift genetic gain

#### Identify your priorities

Be clear on what matters most for your herd and system, including the type of cow you want long term, and what suits your farming conditions and goals.

#### Use herd data to guide decisions

Draw on herd test results, fertility and health records, genetic information (BW, PW, BVs) and culling data to identify strengths and gaps.

#### Set a clear breeding objective

Turn priorities into simple, measurable goals that guide bull selection and herd improvement.

#### Confirm your AB plan

Work with your AB provider to select bulls with strong BW and the traits that align with your breeding goals.

#### Get reproduction right

Strong reproduction underpins genetic gain by enabling better selection and more flexibility in mating decisions.

#### Monitor and adjust

Track key performance measures and adjust your plan as needed to stay aligned with long-term breeding goals.

Explore genetic resources at [dairynz.co.nz/genetic-gain](https://dairynz.co.nz/genetic-gain)

\* NextGen is a NZQA-accredited pilot programme in Canterbury, designed for 16- to 20-year-olds, providing them with the foundation for a successful career in dairy farming.

#### Meet the expert:



**Becky Curry**  
NZ Animal Evaluation geneticist

**DairyNZ**  
**Progressing Dairy Events**

Progressing Dairy Events bring practical science and farmer experience together to support better on-farm decisions. Find an event near you at [dairynz.co.nz/events](https://dairynz.co.nz/events)

# Spring smarts

## Get the most from spring

Explore our research-backed tools and resources to support key management decisions and help drive farm performance throughout the season.



[dairynz.co.nz/  
spring-smarts](https://dairynz.co.nz/spring-smarts)



### Know your numbers, back your decisions

Regular financial check-ins help you make more confident, agile, in-season decisions during a busy period.

Short check-ins against budget can help you keep track of cashflow, feed position, labour costs, and production as the season progresses. This makes it easier to identify emerging cost pressures early and adjust plans before they affect profitability.

The DairyNZ Econ Tracker brings together up-to-date economic information for New Zealand dairy farming, helping you test budget assumptions and understand how your farm is tracking against sector trends. It provides benchmarks such as breakeven milk price, forecast payout, and farm working expenses, supporting more confident in-season decisions.

For more support with financial planning this spring, use the DairyNZ Econ Tracker at [dairynz.co.nz/econtracker](https://dairynz.co.nz/econtracker)

### Setting calves up for success

Healthy calves now mean more productive cows later. The nutrition calves receive in their first weeks of life can have a lasting impact, and providing enough milk more often from birth supports stronger growth, a more resilient immune system, and better outcomes throughout a cow's lifetime.

Research shows that growth before weaning can influence first lactation milk production, making early nutrition an important investment in the future of your herd. DairyNZ's new calf rearing guide brings together practical, evidence-based advice to help farmers give calves the best start in life. It also provides an opportunity to review your current approach ahead of proposed changes to the Dairy Cattle Code of Welfare, which is likely to place greater emphasis on calf nutrition from birth.

Use our new calf rearing guide to make informed feeding decisions from birth that support growth, health and future performance.

Visit [dairynz.co.nz/calf-rearing-guide](https://dairynz.co.nz/calf-rearing-guide)

### Mastitis prevention and early detection

Spring is a high-risk period for mastitis, particularly for freshly calved cows in wetter conditions.

Paying close attention to teat health and picking up problems early can help reduce infections, maintain milk quality, and minimise disruption during a busy time of year. Our updated mastitis resources provide practical guidance to support prevention and detection.

Healthy teats are the cow's first line of defence against mastitis. Good teat spraying, hygienic milking practices, and managing exposure to challenging conditions can help keep teats in good condition and reduce infection risk. Regular teat monitoring can help identify damage before it increases infection risk.

At every milking, keep an eye out for signs of clinical mastitis, such as swelling, heat, pain, or changes in milk appearance. Acting quickly when genuine cases occur can help reduce infection spread and limit chronic cases.

Find the key steps to assess teat health and reduce mastitis risk at [dairynz.co.nz/teat-health](https://dairynz.co.nz/teat-health)



### Setting up winter crops

Spring is when many of the key decisions for next winter's crops are made. Taking the time to plan crop establishment from September can help protect valuable topsoil and reduce environmental risk.

The location and layout of winter crops can have a significant impact on soil and sediment losses. Leaving critical source areas like swales and gullies in permanent grass can significantly reduce topsoil losses, while maintaining grass buffers around waterways, drains and wetlands can help reduce the risk of sediment reaching water.

Clear communication with contractors can help ensure cultivation and spraying occur in the right areas. It's also worth considering how crop design will support winter grazing management, including cow movement, break-out areas, and opportunities for increased cow comfort.

For more guidance on establishing winter crops while reducing environmental risk visit [dairynz.co.nz/cultivation](https://dairynz.co.nz/cultivation)

### Turn pasture into profit

Spring pasture growth can change quickly, making regular pasture assessment one of the most valuable tools for managing feed supply. Measuring pasture and monitoring grazing residuals can help you make timely decisions around pasture surpluses, maximise the amount of homegrown feed eaten by cows, and boost profit.

Maintaining target post-grazing residuals is key to keeping pasture quality through spring. Allowing plants to reach the three-leaf stage before grazing, adjusting rotation length as growth rates change, and identifying surpluses early can help maintain pasture quality and quantity. Taking out surplus paddocks promptly allows them to re-enter the grazing rotation earlier.

Use the Spring Rotation Planner to help you stay on track through early spring, supporting better pasture utilisation and reduced reliance on imported feed.

Learn more at [dairynz.co.nz/srp](https://dairynz.co.nz/srp)





# Feeding for peak milk and stronger persistence

Spring feed management plays a key role in helping cows reach peak milk, hold production, and make the most of pasture while keeping supplement use targeted.

Peak milk and lactation persistence are shaped well before calving. By this point in the season, average pasture cover and herd body condition score targets should already be in place. The priority now is to manage available feed in a way that supports cow performance and pasture quality.

The DairyNZ Spring Rotation Planner is one of the most useful tools for this period. Setting area allocations before balance date helps maximise pasture growth and reduce feed pressure.

**“Energy is often the first limiting nutrient in early lactation, making pasture quantity and quality important drivers of production.”**

Once calving is underway, feed wedge-based grazing plans and three-leaf-stage grazing indicators can support rotation decisions, with the planner adjusted as August and September growth rates become clearer.

As calving progresses, later-calving cows at BCS 5.0-5.5 can be held on maintenance diets to reduce metabolic risk and support animal health and reproduction.

In the lead-up to mating, the focus moves to maximising high-energy dry matter intake. Energy is often the first limiting nutrient in early lactation,

making pasture quantity and quality important drivers of production. Extra energy supplied from pasture can reduce reliance on more expensive supplements.

Accurate feed allocation helps maximise intake, minimise waste, identify surplus pasture for harvest, and maintain pasture quality.

Where supplements are used, they should have a clear role. Meeting energy requirements comes first, followed by checking whether protein, fibre or carbohydrate is needed using tools such as FeedChecker. DairyBase data shows every \$1 spent on supplementary feed can add \$1.50-\$2.00 in total cost, so targeted use matters.

Strong lactation persistence depends on limiting body condition loss from calving to mating, maintaining target residuals, and adjusting rotation length as leaf emergence rates change.

Spring pasture remains the lowest-cost feed source. Managing it well supports milk production, pasture quality, and profitability.

Find DairyNZ feed tools and resources at [dairynz.co.nz/feed-strategies](https://dairynz.co.nz/feed-strategies)

## Meet the expert:



**Mark Williams**  
DairyNZ farm system specialist

# Set up for repro success

Decisions made between calving and mating are critical to herd reproductive performance. Here's what to focus on to give your herd the best chance of success.

## ① Ace your transition

Body condition score (BCS) at calving is the biggest driver of transition cow health and repro performance. Cows calving at BCS 5.0 (mature) or 5.5 (first/second calvers) cycle earlier and get in-calf faster.

- Monitor BCS closely. Aim for no more than 1.0 BCS loss from calving to mating, and keep all cows above BCS 4.0 at mating.
- Identify and manage high-risk cows. Those with difficult calvings, retained membranes, metritis, lameness or mastitis are less likely to cycle and get in-calf.
- Using an anti-inflammatory (pain relief) alongside routine treatments for mastitis and lameness can improve repro outcomes for affected cows.
- Keep transition cows well fed and minimise stress, especially in the first six to eight weeks post-calving.

## ② Record pre-mating heats

- Without tech: Use tail paint or other physical heat detection aids, observe for standing heat and increased activity, and record heats to identify cycling cows.
- With tech: Wearables can reliably detect heats and alert you to non-cyclers. Aim for 85% of cows cycling by mating start. Cows with at least one pre-mating heat are your best candidates for sexed semen or high-value artificial insemination.

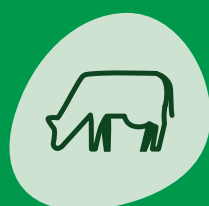
## ③ Prepare for mating

- Monitor non-cyclers and intervene early.
- Prioritise early calvers and healthy cows for high-value AI (e.g. sexed semen).
- Have a clear mating plan, including communication with AB technicians and facilities, and ensure team members understand their roles.

For more repro and mating solutions visit [dairynz.co.nz/repro](https://dairynz.co.nz/repro)

## For a high six-week in-calf rate, aim for these targets:

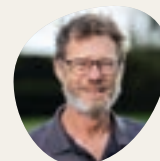
- ✓ 85%+ cycling by mating start
- ✓ 90%+ submission in three weeks
- ✓ BCS 4.0+ at mating
- ✓ Cows gaining weight pre-mating
- ✓ If you're not hitting targets, review nutrition, check for health issues, and consider once-a-day milking for at-risk groups.



## Meet the experts:



**Penny Timmer-Arends**  
DairyNZ senior animal care specialist



**Dr Chris Burke**  
DairyNZ senior scientist



# Feed decisions sharpen award-winning manager's confidence

**Taranaki dairy manager Miriam Lauridsen says learning to question feed costs and pasture decisions through a Dairy Training course has improved both her confidence and on-farm decision-making.**

When summer dry conditions hit the coastal Taranaki farm she manages, Miriam Lauridsen started looking more closely at one key question: was extra feed paying its way?

After completing Dairy Training's Feed for Profit course, the 29-year-old pasture, forage and herd manager says she now approaches supplement use, feed budgeting and production decisions with a stronger understanding of profitability.

## What Miriam took from Feed for Profit

- Comparing supplement costs against production gains.
- Using feed budgeting to support decisions.
- Use of DairyNZ tool Supplement Price Calculator.
- Learning from other farmers' systems.

Farming has been part of Miriam's life from the beginning. Growing up on her parents' dairy and dry stock farms, she developed a love for milking cows, rearing calves and working outdoors. She's currently based on a 370-cow System 3 farm, south of New Plymouth.

Early in her dairy career Miriam studied an Apprenticeship in Agriculture – Dairy Farming with Primary ITO and she's keen to keep learning and growing her skills. She says industry training and development opportunities, including the Dairy Training courses, are an ideal way to do it.

Feed for Profit focuses on practical skills for 2ICs, managers and farm owners. Miriam says the course helped strengthen her understanding of feed budgeting, pasture management and how feed decisions affect profitability.

She says completing the course in November was ideal timing because she could immediately apply what she had learned on-farm.

"As we are summer dry, we often bring in more supplements over this period, so the course made me stop and ask myself: Is it going to be more valuable to bring in supplements or is it better to drop a bit of production?"

"It also showed us there were times when supplement prices were low enough that feeding more could profitably lift production."

Miriam says she now regularly uses tools such as the Supplement Price Calculator to help assess feed costs and production decisions.

"The course has helped me with knowing the 'why' behind what I do. Before I would just get into doing the jobs, but now I stop and think about why things are important."

Miriam says she enjoyed the four small in-person workshops because they allowed attendees to talk and learn from each other as well.

"The connections and conversations with others in the class were really valuable because learning about what each other is doing is helpful. There are always things you could be doing better."

Keen to continue challenging herself, Miriam entered the Dairy Industry Awards. She won the 2026 Taranaki Farm Manager of the Year and then went on to nationals, where she placed runner-up in May. This followed her runner-up placing in the Taranaki Dairy Trainee of the Year award in 2023.

"I learnt a lot through preparing for the awards because the judges consider so many different elements. It helps you find weaknesses and the judges' detailed feedback is really helpful. I entered for the learning and it was a nice surprise to be recognised."

Recognising the importance of growing capable and confident

## Farm facts: 2025/26 season

**Location:** New Plymouth, Taranaki  
**Role:** Pasture, forage and herd manager  
**Herd size:** 370 cows  
**System:** 3  
**Effective area:** 137ha (34ha is lease land)  
**Pasture harvested:** 13t/ha  
**Crops grown:** 6ha of turnips  
**Imported feed tonnage:** 200t PKE, 200t Proliq  
**MS production:** 165,000kg MS, 446kg MS/cow

farmers, DairyNZ is an industry partner of the awards and Dairy Training sponsors the 11 regional dairy manager people and leadership awards.

Miriam encourages others wanting to develop their skills and career to give all learning opportunities a go.

"Sometimes there are gaps in what you know, but you don't realise they're there until you challenge yourself to learn."

"Completing any kind of course is a good investment because it gives you knowledge and confidence. Things are always changing with farming, so it's good to look at what courses come up because they can help make sure you're doing the best you can."

# New Dairy Training courses on offer

Designed with dairy farmers, for dairy farmers, our NZQA-approved short courses are free, practical and can work around your schedule. Led by dairy experts, they allow you to build skills and grow your confidence and career.

### Animal Health and Stockmanship Fundamentals

Level 3

Designed for entry-level dairy farmers and farm assistants, this course provides foundational knowledge for safe livestock handling and the skills to identify, report and assist in the treatment of common health issues in dairy cows.

### Pasture and Feeding Fundamentals

Level 3

This course is for entry-level dairy farmers, farm assistants and herd managers and offers strong foundations in pasture and feeding, with practical pasture assessment and allocation skills, and key principles you can use every day on the farm.

### BizStart

Level 5

This course is for farm managers who are wanting to upskill or move into self-employment. The course focuses on building the foundations of a successful dairy agribusiness, choosing the best business structure, managing tax and understanding operational and business compliance obligations, and more.

Explore the full range of Dairy Training courses at [dairytraining.co.nz](https://dairytraining.co.nz)



## DairyTraining

Dairynz

## Find the right training for your dairy career

Start with the basics or grow into leadership or farm business management. Whatever your role on-farm, there's something for you.

Free Short Courses

Current courses  
Courses coming soon

|                                                   | 16-20 year olds | Farm Assistant | Herd Manager | Assistant Manager 2IC | Farm Manager | CM/VOSM | HOSM | Equity Partner | Owner |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------|------|----------------|-------|
| NextGen Dairy Farmers Programme Level 2           | NEW             |                |              |                       |              |         |      |                |       |
| Animal Health & Stockmanship Fundamentals Level 3 |                 | NEW            |              |                       |              |         |      |                |       |
| Milking Process Fundamentals Level 3              |                 | NEW            |              |                       |              |         |      |                |       |
| Pasture and Feeding Fundamentals Level 3          |                 | NEW            |              |                       |              |         |      |                |       |
| Emerging Leadership Level 4                       |                 |                | NEW          |                       |              |         |      |                |       |
| Improving Dairy Farm Workplace Efficiency Level 5 |                 |                |              | NEW                   |              |         |      |                |       |
| Feed for Profit Level 5                           |                 |                |              | NEW                   |              |         |      |                |       |
| Business by the Numbers Level 5                   |                 |                |              |                       | NEW          |         |      |                |       |
| Contract Milking Level 5                          |                 |                |              |                       | NEW          |         |      |                |       |
| Managing Your Dairy Farm Footprint Level 5        |                 |                |              |                       | NEW          |         |      |                |       |
| Farm Environmental Planning Level 5               |                 |                |              |                       | NEW          |         |      |                |       |
| BizStart Level 5                                  |                 |                |              |                       | NEW          |         |      |                |       |
| BizGrow Level 5                                   |                 |                |              |                       |              | NEW     |      |                |       |

CalvingSmart Workshop

MilkSmart Workshop

- Pre-calving workshops to prepare for calving season.
- Learn how small changes improve milking performance.

## Tataiwhetu pepeha

Ko Taīarahia te Maunga,  
Ko Te Taumata te Pa o Tūhoe-Pōtiki,  
Ko Ōhinemataroa te Awa,  
Ko Tauarau te Pa,  
Ko Rongokarae te Tipuna Whare,  
Ko Ngāti Rongo te Hapu,  
Ko Ngāi Tūhoe te Iwi,  
Ko Mataatua te Waka.

*Tataiwhetu Trust has two organic dairy farms in the Ruatoki Valley.*

# How this Māori trust built an award-winning organic farming operation for its people

**Tataiwhetu Trust saw its people leave the land as it was being leased out to others. This is the inspiring story of how they took back control of the land and went on to win the Ahuwhenua Trophy in 2021.**

Transforming a number of small family-owned land holdings into a viable, sustainable farming business for future generations is no simple feat. It is one made even harder when there are multiple shareholders, and challenges to capital and skills at the outset.

But Tataiwhetu Trust of Ruatoki Valley in eastern Bay of Plenty is a tribute to what vision and leadership can carve out for today's shareholders, as it also puts a stake in the ground for future generations to benefit from.

Tataiwhetu shareholders' efforts to consolidate their land holdings in the 1970s and '80s has its origins in the efforts of revered Māori leader Sir Apirana Ngata. He worked tirelessly to roll back the increasing fragmentation of Māori land under the Native Land Court rulings, pushing to consolidate them into viable, commercial farming operations.

For Tataiwhetu this involved consolidating nine blocks of land held by six families into the original 97ha property.

"Back then, we were seeing people leave the land while we also leased land out, when we could have had our own farm there," says board member Hiria Wallace.

She recalls as a young girl hearing the excited buzz around her home, learning her family were "getting a farm".

"It really came from all the owners of the land wanting to have more

control, to have a resource for future generations to benefit from."

Led by long-time Tataiwhetu Trust chair, late farmer and businessman Paki Nikora, the trust quickly moved to establish a conventional dairy unit, then opted to pivot to organic dairy farming.

"I remember Paki and other shareholders expressing the view they wanted our land and whenua to be at the heart of the farming operation," says Hiria.

Organic farming offered a way to balance environmental goals with a value-driven business model.

The three-year transition process started in 2015, with the trust receiving its Fonterra Organic certification in 2019.

Long-time employee and now farm manager Desma Feakins has seen the move from the conventional 184ha dairy unit to organic, and she does not sugar coat the challenges they faced.

"It was a hard process back then to convert to organic. There were not a lot of resources around to call on for advice. You were pretty much on your own."

She contrasts this with the agencies available today, saying there is exceptional support available from DairyNZ and Fonterra's organic farming advisors.

*Farming organically aligns with the trust's values of having whenua at the heart of the business.*

## Farm facts:

**Location:** Ruatoki, eastern Bay of Plenty

**Structure:** Ahu Whenua Trust

**Effective area:** Two organic farm operations: 184ha and 60ha

**Herd size:** 390 cows and 158 cows

**System:** 3

**Production:** Total across 249ha milking platform: 155,353kg MS, plus 68ha support block

In hindsight, she says, the “cold turkey” move to transition land and livestock would be done in stages and more gradually today.

“We transitioned land and livestock both at the same time from scratch. Knowing what we know now, we would probably have done each separately, over a longer period.”

The shift reduced cow numbers from 600 to 450 at the time. The farm also began carrying all replacement stock and producing its own hay and silage to reduce reliance on hard-to-source certified organic supplementary feed.

She also points to the value of ensuring things like wooden tanalised fence posts are all in place prior to conversion, and any problematic weeds requiring spraying out are dealt with.

“But the appeal of moving how we did at the time was because the payout was looking so good for organic milk.”

The transition gained national recognition in 2021 when the trust won the Ahuwhenua Trophy for excellence in Māori dairy farming. Desma says the awards evening will always be one of the most memorable moments of her life.

Hiria says the award process made them look at every aspect of the operation.



Whānau explore the riparian margin planted by the late Matua Paki Nikora.

**“We transitioned land and livestock both at the same time from scratch. Knowing what we know now, we would probably have done each separately, over a longer period.”**

“When we signed up for the award, we really had no idea about the work involved. We were given a template to fill out and it covered details on every part of our operation,” she says.

DairyNZ plays an active role in sponsoring the Ahuwhenua Trophy, while also supporting entities considering entering the competition.

Kaiārahi Ahuwhenua Brooke Sinclair says people may feel hesitant or whakamā when thinking about entering the awards.

“The criteria can seem a bit daunting, but we can support people to gather the business information they need, including the three years of DairyBase data to show where they currently sit.”

She says this process can help people decide if the timing is right to enter this year, or if they’d like to take more time to make improvements and enter in the future.

“We’ve had a lot of interest in this year’s competition. The Ahuwhenua Trophy isn’t about comparing entities; it looks at each entry and how they’re supporting their people and land.”

Hiria and chair Ngatai Hurkmans say entering ultimately sharpened

the trust’s operations, formalising processes, and compelling them to look harder at where the business was and where it could go.

Ngatai points to the purchase of the trust’s second farm in the district coinciding with the Ahuwhenua award.

“The owner, who was also farming organically, was leaving after 80 years of family ownership, and came to us with an offer.”

Today that 60ha farm is milking 158 cows, run by a farm manager. Both farms allow the trust to help foster the next generation of farmers, with Desma giving local students from Te Wharekura o Ruatoki the chance to learn and develop dairy farming skills on-farm.

Desma says with six years of experience in organics, handling annual audits and reporting is simpler and less stressful.

Mastitis and somatic cell management is often the biggest headache for organic farmers, one Desma says they have come to manage better over time.

A homeopathic tonic is supplied through the water lines to help manage it, and they are consistently keeping the herd’s bulk somatic cell count (SCC) under Fonterra’s 400,000 cells/mL limit.

The farm’s riverside boundary location is also proving its worth in helping to provide a buffer from the risk of conventional spray and contamination.

Fertiliser use focuses on a new formulation that incorporates AgriSea’s seaweed-based mix blended at a local Te Teko plant with lime, organic boron and sulphur.

Pastures are more diverse under the organic system, with multiple species including red clover, plantain, cocksfoot, fescue and chicory in particular ensuring good pasture persistence over dry periods.

“We work on leaving residuals higher and this seems to have worked well, helping shade the soil in summer. We never seem as brown as neighbouring farms over drier periods.”

A future-focused tree-planting project will begin shortly to provide shelter, shade, fodder, medicinal properties and further drought mitigation. With the future front of mind, Tataiwhetu farms are doing more than producing organic milk. They’re creating pathways for local rangatahi to connect with farming and the whenua, carrying forward the vision first set in motion decades ago.



From left, Tataiwhetu Trust chair Ngatai Hurkmans, Brooke Sinclair from DairyNZ, and farm managers Desma Feakins and Whare Teepa.

For information on entering the Ahuwhenua awards, see page 5.

# What separates the best-performing dairy farms in a high-cost era?

The 2024-25 season was one of the most profitable in a decade, but in a high-cost era, the best farms stand out for what they can control.

The 2024-25 season was strong for most dairy farmers, the latest DairyNZ Economic Survey shows. Average operating profit for owner-operator farms rose 70% to \$4,849/ha, driven by a \$10.02/kg MS payout received and milksolids production of 1,219 kg/ha, up 39 kg/ha on the previous season. Returns were the strongest in a decade, and many farmers used the extra cash to reduce debt and rebuild equity.

### The gap between the top-performing farms and the rest is widening

Beneath the strong average, the survey shows a wide and widening gap between higher- and lower-performing farms. Farms in the top 25% for operating profit made about \$4,886/ha more than those in the bottom 25% (\$6,919/ha against \$2,033/ha). Over the past decade, this gap has tended to widen in high-payout years, as stronger milksolids prices magnify differences in farm performance.

The difference was not the payout. Every quartile received a similar milk price, close to \$10/kg MS. What set the top farms apart was efficiency: highly productive farms were better at turning inputs into milksolids, while

keeping a tight grip on production costs. They carried more cows per hectare, produced more milksolids per cow and per hectare, and kept operating expenses per kilogram of milksolids well below the rest.

### A higher cost base – and the fixed costs are the sticky ones

That cost discipline matters even more as overheads keep climbing. Farm costs can be split into two groups.

**Variable costs** per hectare for the average owner-operated farm mostly move with market conditions. These include fuel, fertiliser, feed, freight and interest. Some eased in 2024-25: interest fell 17% and freight 11%, while fuel rose 2%. Fertiliser also rose 2% on the previous season but fell to its lowest share of farm working expenses in a decade. Feed, the largest single cost, was the exception, rising 15%.

**Fixed costs (overheads)** such as rates, insurance and administration behave differently. Rates rose about 16%, insurance 7% and administration 12%,

“**Making the most of favourable conditions helps farm businesses stay stable and adaptable when margins inevitably come under pressure again.**”

### Top 25% vs bottom 25% owner-operators in 2024-25

Same milk price, different result: a \$4,866/ha operating profit gap driven by efficiency and cost control.

| Farm performance                               | Top 25% | Bottom 25% |
|------------------------------------------------|---------|------------|
| Operating profit per ha<br>+\$4,866            | \$6,919 | \$2,033    |
| Milksolids per ha<br>+76%                      | 1,471kg | 834kg      |
| Milksolids per cow<br>+29%                     | 497kg   | 362kg      |
| Operating expenses per kg MS<br>26% lower cost | \$6.09  | \$8.31     |
| Payout received per kg MS<br>The same          | \$9.99  | \$10.02    |

Source: DairyNZ Economic Survey 2024-25

each reaching a decade high. These costs persist in good years and bad, and they have stayed high even as general inflation fell below 3%.

The catch is that overheads add nothing to milksolids output and do not fall when income softens or production slips. They quietly erode margins. In a strong payout year that pressure is easier to absorb; in a low-payout season it becomes far more visible.

### What it means for the season ahead

The 2025-26 season is shaping up to be another strong one for the dairy sector, with a milksolids payout around \$10.15/kg MS and production forecast at decade-record levels, about 4.3% above the previous season. Fonterra farmers have also received a tax-free capital return from the divestment of the Mainland Group consumer brands.

The outlook for 2026-27 is cautiously positive. Fonterra's opening forecast payout is \$9.75/kg MS, with a range of \$8.00 to \$11.00, alongside steady production. However, the breakeven milk price is expected to rise to about \$8.79/kg MS, driven by higher interest rates, rising on-farm costs and ongoing global volatility affecting the cost and availability of key inputs such as fertiliser, feed and fuel.

Favourable conditions have lifted incomes across the sector, but they have also underlined the value of efficiency and strong management. Recent good seasons give farmers a chance to build buffers, manage debt and invest in productivity improvements that support more resilient performance.

Read the full economic survey report of New Zealand dairy farmers for the 2024-25 season at [dairynz.co.nz/economic-survey](https://dairynz.co.nz/economic-survey)

## 2024-25 season at a glance: owner-operator averages

Milksolids payout  
**\$10.02**  
per kg MS



Operating profit  
**\$4,849**  
per ha (+70%)



Return on equity  
**20.9%**  
decade high



Source: DairyNZ Economic Survey 2024-25

### Meet the experts:

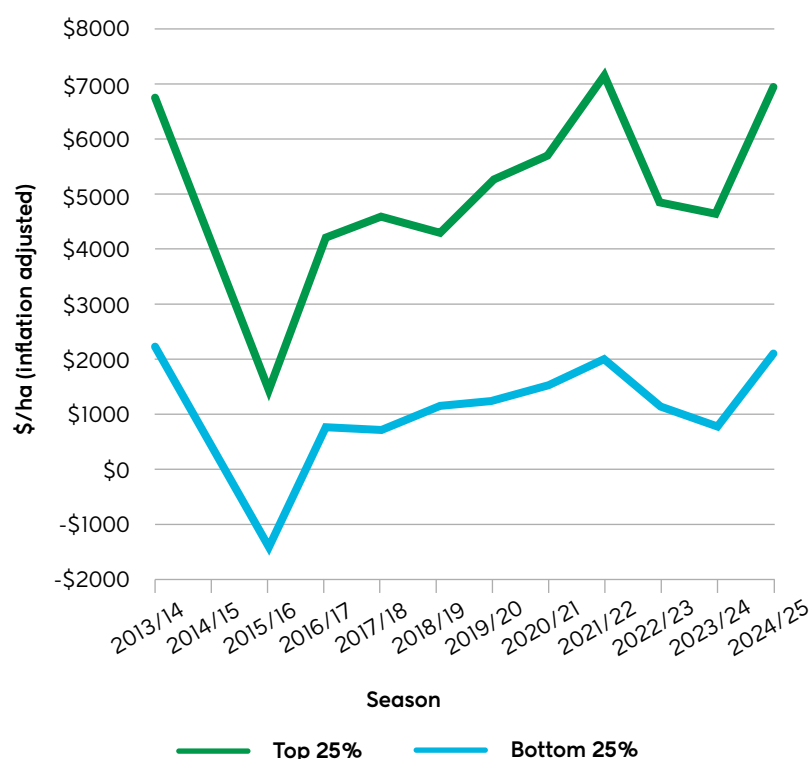


**Dr Mubashir Qasim**  
DairyNZ senior economist



**Dr David Silva-Villacorta**  
DairyNZ senior economist

Average operating profit for owner-operator farms in the top and bottom quartiles over the past 12 seasons



Source: DairyNZ Economic Survey 2024-25

# What will it take for freshwater policy to work?

**Freshwater rules need to be science-based, practical and built to last. DairyNZ is pushing for an approach that provides farmers with certainty, recognises local catchments, and supports progress.**

Freshwater policy has been rewritten many times since 2010. That points to a simple reality: managing water quality is complex, and changes made to freshwater policy need to reflect that complexity.

Regulation has a role to play in water quality management. It can set expectations, provide a backstop and help keep everyone moving in the right direction. But to work well in practice, freshwater policy needs to recognise and encourage positive actions happening on the ground.

It must also be practical, cost effective, enduring and flexible enough to reflect the diversity of New Zealand farms and catchments.

Farmers need confidence that investments made today – in infrastructure, farm systems and environmental improvements – will deliver returns in the future. That matters even more in an election year, when policy uncertainty makes long-term planning harder.

## Science-based and practical

Freshwater policy needs to reflect both good science and real conditions. The relationship between land use and water quality is complex and it can take time for on-farm changes to show up in water monitoring, with soil types, rainfall, groundwater and existing land use all influencing outcomes.

“

***Farmers need confidence that investments made today – in infrastructure, farm systems and environmental improvements – will deliver returns in the future.***

Targets and limits are useful tools, but they work best alongside practical judgement and an understanding of local catchments. A focus on outcomes – alongside proven actions – gives farmers flexibility while still delivering progress. Success, ultimately, is about healthier waterways and thriving communities, not just meeting a number.

## Backing what works on-farm

Freshwater quality gains are made on the ground. Industry is leading the way with approximately 84% of dairy farms already operating under comprehensive dairy company Farm Environment Plans.

Across the country, dairy farmers have fenced waterways, planted riparian margins and taken steps that are restoring wetlands, improving effluent systems and refining nutrient management. These actions are proven and continue to build momentum even though the pace and scale of improvements can vary among catchments.

## Farmers and communities leading the way

Farmers and communities need to be part of shaping solutions, and policy works best when it supports practical improvements and recognises the work already underway.



*From left: DairyNZ senior regional policy advisor Shaun Hazelton, Minister for Biosecurity and Food Safety and Associate Minister of Agriculture Andrew Hoggard, and DairyNZ general manager of policy and government relations Roger Lincoln at Fieldays 2026.*

Catchment groups and other peer networks are good examples. They bring farmers, communities and others together to focus on shared goals and coordinated progress. They recognise that improvements come from collective effort across a catchment – not just individual farms working in isolation. With the right support and accountability, these local approaches result in real, measurable gains.

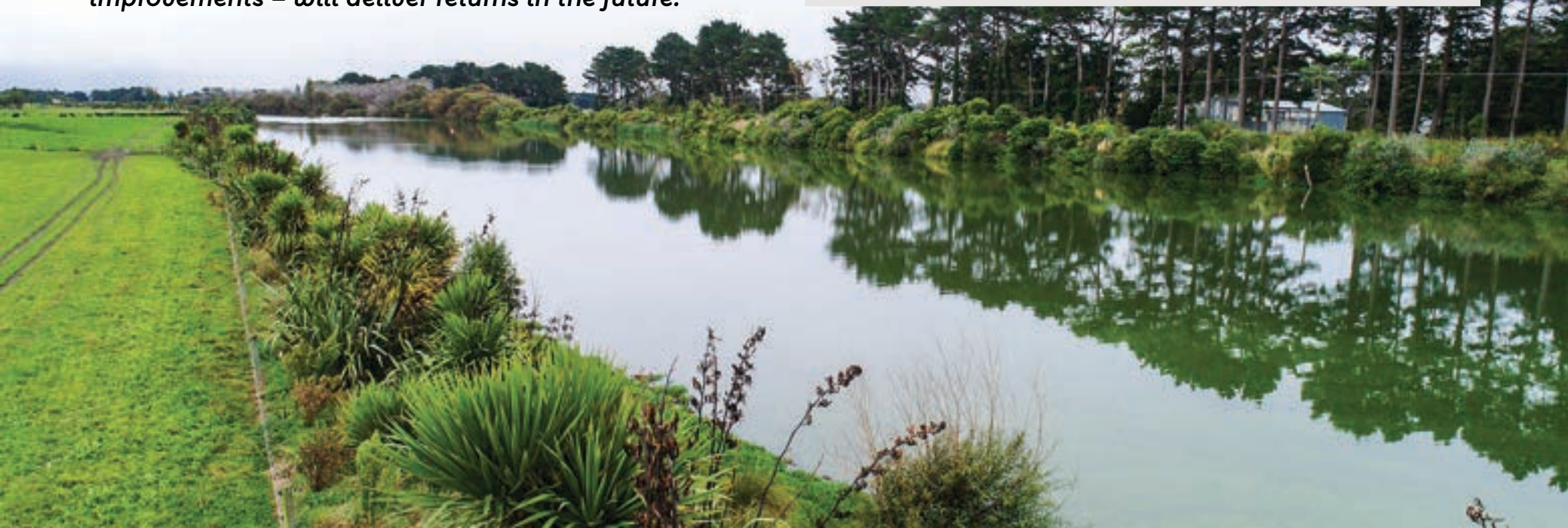
There is opportunity to build on the progress already made. By focusing on stable settings, good science, practical action and farmer leadership, freshwater policy can deliver for both the environment and farm businesses.

That's the direction DairyNZ will continue to push for – enduring, sensible, science-based policy and rules that work on farms and support farmers to keep improving.

## Waikato Regional Council Plan Change 1 developments

Waikato Regional Council's Plan Change 1 sets new rules to improve water quality in the Waikato and Waipā catchments and has been 13 years in the making. The Environment Court released its final decision in June 2026 and the council was required to update the plan wording by July 21 2026 to reflect the court's decision. The plan will only become operative once the remaining steps are complete, including any appeals and final drafting. Alongside this, major Resource Management Act reforms are underway. These changes may have implications for Plan Change 1, but the timing and extent are still uncertain. DairyNZ will continue to work on this process as it progresses, pushing for practical, science-based rules that work on-farm and recognise the progress farmers have already made.

For more information visit [dairynz.co.nz/plan-change-1](https://dairynz.co.nz/plan-change-1)



# Testing more resilient pastures on-farm

Farms across the upper North Island are trialling different pasture mixes as part of a research programme that aims to build greater resilience into farming systems.

As farmers look for pasture species better suited to increasingly variable weather conditions, DairyNZ is leading one of the country's biggest research programmes to address a gap identified by farmers: long-term pasture persistence and productivity.

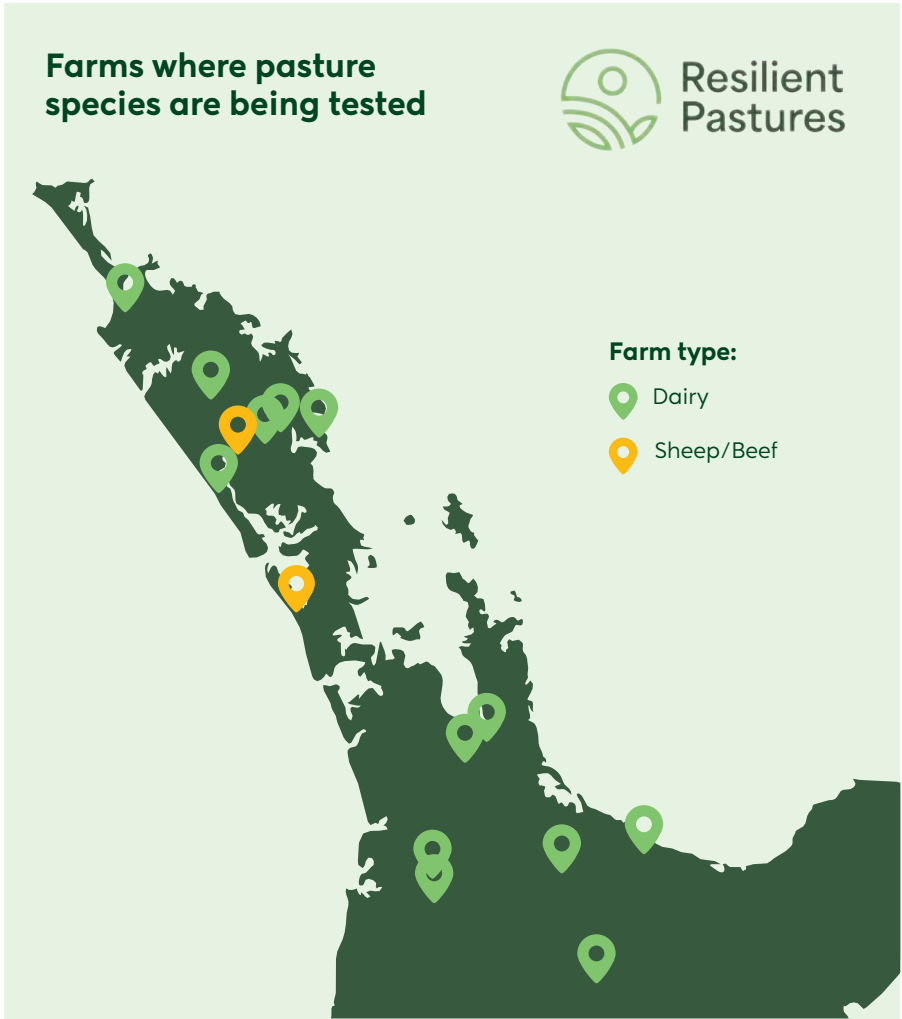
As part of the Resilient Pastures programme, farmers have made it clear they need better information on how alternative pasture species perform on-farm, and what establishment and management practices make these alternative species successful, DairyNZ senior scientist Dr Elena Minnee says.

During its first year, the programme has built a network of 15 farms across Waikato, Bay of Plenty and Northland (see map), where farmers are testing a range of pasture species under commercial farm conditions.

The 15 network farmers have all planted three to five different species mixes and are monitoring and recording pasture growth.

"There has been an incredibly positive response to the Resilient Pastures programme," Elena says.

Some of the network farmers have asked for more research on improved establishment and management guidelines for modern cultivars in current climates.



"The strength of this programme is that it's designed to stay responsive to what farmers are telling us they need," Elena says. "But it's also about connecting with farmers who've been testing different approaches and having success."

In response, DairyNZ has initiated a trial at Scott Farm which will examine how different grazing management affects the persistence, productivity and quality of tall fescue pastures.

"It's about examining the benefits and any trade-offs in terms of long-term pasture production and persistence," Elena says.

"This grazing trial is informed by the practices top farmers are already using so we can quantify the benefit but also understand the underlying biological mechanisms."

Another season of variable weather events has only emphasised the importance for more resilient pastures

to cope with periods of drought or high-rainfall events.

Network farmer Murray Jagger has been successfully growing tall fescue and cocksfoot-based pastures on his farm at Whangārei Heads in Northland for many years and says management is critical to getting the best results.

"Farmers have to unlearn what they've been taught around managing traditional ryegrass pastures and relearn how to manage these species," he says.

"If you treat them like a ryegrass pasture, you can run into trouble. Once you understand their growth pattern and manage them differently, they can perform really well."

The programme is key to gathering more data and knowledge around these alternative pastures, and eventually the industry can get more investment into breeding other pasture species, Murray says.

"It's a really critical piece of work. It's great there's been value seen in doing this programme to demonstrate that these alternative, more resilient pastures are actually not just additions to seed mixes, but a very valuable replacement to what we've been struggling with in ryegrass production."

The second year of the programme will focus on increasing farmer engagement through discussion groups, expanding data collection across the network farms, and continuing to identify practical solutions that can help farmers build more resilient pasture systems for variable climate conditions.



## Supporting climate-adapted, sustainable pastoral farming and rural communities.

The Resilient Pastures programme is a seven-year initiative led by DairyNZ with MPI and Beef + Lamb New Zealand, focused on improving pasture performance and persistence on dairy, sheep and beef farms in the upper North Island.

### What does the programme involve?



Climate



Forage options



Optimised farm systems



Adoption



**Shape what comes next.**  
Tell us what you want to see from Resilient Pastures and register your interest in upcoming events.



# Unlocking new dairy-beef opportunities

**Farmers will benefit from improved genetics, better systems, stronger coordination across the supply chain, and clearer market pathways.**

Further research into extended lactation systems and mating strategies aims to give dairy farmers more options to increase the proportion of calves suited to beef production.

That's the focus for DairyNZ's team involved in the Dairy Beef Opportunities initiative, working with Beef + Lamb NZ, the Meat Industry Association, dairy companies and the government to strengthen integration between dairy and beef systems with an aim to grow the economic return from non-replacement dairy calves.

The four-year initiative, launched this year, is built around three pillars focused on genetics, farm systems, and market developments, aiming to improve calf suitability for beef production and create higher-value products.

Programme lead Dr Jenny Jago says the project brings together the "jigsaw" of the dairy and beef sectors to focus on cross-sector communication, support, development and collaboration.

"We need to work out how to scale the potential of dairy-beef for the sector to succeed. More-informed farmers, a secure calf-rearing sector, and market-led engagement will all be important."

Getting quality non-replacement calves that are bred well, fed well and grown well and having this reflected in their value are the project's broad overall objectives.

Beef + Lamb NZ's genetic strategy and operations manager, Jim Inglis, oversees pillar one. He says improved genetics and better sire options for farmers are key focuses. The calf-rearing sector is another.

"We have had a very strong response

and interest from across the dairy and finishing sector. We have aligned with calf rearers around New Zealand to better inform us on what they need, and issues they face that need resolving."

Better integration of the dairy-beef index with across-breed data, is just one area he sees boosting farmer choices on sire genetics that can be matched with meat processor needs.

DairyNZ's senior scientist Paul Edwards is leading pillar two, and says extended lactation research and mating plans are his team's focus.

Research is already underway into 24-month extended lactation, where the herd is split in half for calving every year, flattening the calving 'peak'.

"While this system won't be for everyone, it can have a large impact – about a 60% reduction in non-replacement calves – while simultaneously giving more flexibility for beef options."

Mating plans are also in the spotlight, identifying combinations of semen products and types that increase the genetic gain of the herd and the number of calves attractive to dairy-beef rearing.

Ultimately this may deliver a tool for farmers to assess the impact of different mating options on their farm specific goals.

Meat Industry Association science and innovation manager Richard McColl is leading work on new products and value chains.

## Meet the experts:



**Dr Jenny Jago**  
Programme lead



**Jim Inglis**  
Beef + Lamb NZ's genetic strategy and operations manager



**Paul Edwards**  
DairyNZ senior scientist



**Richard McColl**  
Meat Industry Association science and innovation manager

"There are several processing options to explore across the different age points of dairy-beef animals.

"This includes third- and fourth-quarter cuts higher up the value chain, along with using offal and organs. The aim will be to extract as much value as possible from the value chain."

He is hoping to see processors collectively get behind a joint initiative where the opportunities for greater value can be clearly demonstrated to farmers.

"While we are seeing sheep numbers drop in New Zealand, the non-replacement dairy calf surplus represents a real opportunity to reduce the risk the bobby calf issue presents, and the value opportunity.

"The time has never been better."

Listen to Paul, Jim and Richard discuss what Dairy Beef Opportunities mean for farmers on the Talking Dairy podcast [dairynz.co.nz/dbo-podcast](https://dairynz.co.nz/dbo-podcast)

## Keen to be involved?

Register your interest to join a community of practice where farmers, calf rearers and finishers catch up to discuss challenges and solutions. Insights from these groups will be shared more widely through demonstration days and resources at [dairynz.co.nz/dbo-community](https://dairynz.co.nz/dbo-community)

## Dairy Beef Opportunities

### Pillar 1: Maximising efficiency gains via genetics and systems

Increase carrying capacity by increasing feed conversion efficiency.



Lead: B+L NZ

- Improved sires
- Rearing and finishing systems
- Greater integration of farm businesses into a supply chain

### Pillar 2: Increase the proportion of calves suited to beef production

Dairy mating strategies to deliver value for dairy and beef systems.



Lead: DNZ

- Extended lactation systems
- Mating programmes

### Pillar 3: New products and value chains

More calves become viable by new products.



Lead: MIA

- New products (earlier finishing)
- Differentiated to create value
- Processing system

# The hidden cost of chasing extra milk

**A multi-season trial of three systems shows that supplementary feed delivers the best returns when it is used tactically rather than to maximise milk production.**

Homegrown pasture and crops sit at the centre of New Zealand dairy's productivity and global advantage. Yet, over the past two decades, supplementary feed has been playing an increasing role in underpinning milk production.

While supplements help fill feed gaps, profitability depends on how efficiently they are used.

To understand the cost of marginal milk – the milksolids produced from extra supplementary feed – Northland Dairy Development Trust led a multi-year trial, supported by DairyNZ and other partners.

AgFirst project manager Kim Robinson, who co-led the study, says this science can help farmers assess whether their feeding strategy is delivering the returns they expect.

“When supplements are used to increase milk production, costs rise and margins tighten. Not all additional milk produced from supplements is profitable.

“The key drivers of profitable supplement use are milk response and, to a lesser extent, supplement price. Milk responses are maximised when pasture residuals drive the decision to feed supplements rather than propping up daily milk production”.

DairyNZ senior scientist Dr Paul Edwards says the study also helps farmers align their feeding decisions with their farm goals and risk tolerances, which look different for everyone.

“Not everyone seeks profit maximisation. In terms of risk, lower-input farms are more at risk from adverse weather events that affect pasture growth. On the other hand, higher-input farms are more exposed to milk and feed price volatility.”

## Putting different systems to the test

The trial took place at the Northland Agricultural Research Farm over three seasons from 2018 to 2021 and compared three systems: Pasture-only (homegrown silage only, no imported feed), PKE-only (palm kernel expeller only used to fill pasture deficits) and PKE-plus (unrestricted supplement use).

All systems followed the same farm management rules, with pasture



residuals closely monitored and supplement use adjusted to maintain a target of 1600 kilograms of dry matter per hectare (kgDM/ha).

Income, feed use and operating costs were recorded for each farm, including labour, machinery and milking-related costs, to capture the full cost of feeding supplements.

## What does it cost to produce the extra milk?

The research showed that as supplement use increased, non-feed costs also increased and the milksolids response declined. This increased the marginal cost of each additional kilogram of milksolids produced.

It found a tipping point where adding more supplements reduced profit because the extra milk costs more to produce than it earns (the milk price). See trial results table.

The best milksolids response came from the PKE-only system (113kg MS/t DM). This dropped to 92kg MS/t DM



**The true cost of feeding supplements is more than just the purchase price, and must also account for the associated costs to feed it out.**

in the PKE-plus system, which used higher levels of supplement. There was no difference in reproductive performance between the three farm systems.

This research found that for every \$1 spent on supplements, other farm working costs rose by \$0.95 – mainly in extra machinery, labour and milking costs – bringing the total cost close to double. It highlights that the true cost of feeding supplements is more than just the purchase price, and must also account for the associated costs to feed it out.

In the PKE-only system, the marginal cost of production was \$7.68/kg MS, meaning it was profitable across all milk payouts tested.

In contrast, the PKE-plus system had a higher marginal cost of \$9.38/kg MS, meaning it was only more profitable at the higher payout tested (\$9.50/kg MS - after adjusting for inflation this value or higher has only occurred in five of the past 20 years).

In short, moderate supplement use generated the strongest returns, while pushing for maximum production reduced efficiency and increased the cost of every extra kilogram of milksolids.

## How does this apply to other feed types?

While PKE was the main supplement used in this study, the core principles translate across all supplement types. What will differ is how each supplement is utilised on-farm, along with variations in quality and cost.



The key drivers of profitable supplement use are milk response and, to a lesser extent, supplement price.

When supplementary feed pays off

Paul says supplementary feed is most effective when it is used tactically rather than to maximise milk production.

This includes filling a genuine feed deficit and maintaining pasture utilisation to deliver a high milksolids response.

Tools like DairyNZ’s Supplement Price Calculator can help identify these conditions, he adds.

“The results show how making back-of-the-envelope calculations about the return on supplement can be misleading.

“It challenges assumptions that putting more feed into the system when the milk price is good automatically

equals better returns, and reinforces the need to understand the economics behind ‘extra milk’.

“When the full cost of feeding supplements effectively doubles, this can have a major impact on farm profitability.”

Find out more about this research, as well as tools and resources, at [dairynz.co.nz/marginal-milk](https://dairynz.co.nz/marginal-milk)

Meet the experts:



Kim Robinson  
AgFirst project manager



Paul Edwards  
DairyNZ senior scientist

The project was funded by the Ministry for Primary Industries’ Sustainable Farming Fund and Sustainable Food and Fibre Futures fund, DairyNZ and the Hine Rangi Trust. The project was co-managed by Kim Robinson and Chris Boom of AgFirst.

Trial results

|                                            |             | Trial systems |          |          |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------|---------------|----------|----------|
|                                            |             | Pasture only  | PKE only | PKE plus |
| Stocking rate                              | (cows/ha)   | 2.7           | 3.1      | 3.1      |
| Milksolids yield                           | (kgMS/ha)   | 916           | 1209     | 1328     |
|                                            | (kgMS/cow)  | 342           | 389      | 426      |
| Farm working expenses                      | (\$/kgMS)   | \$6.70        | \$6.85   | \$7.02   |
| Operating expenses                         | (\$/kgMS)   | \$7.05        | \$7.20   | \$7.39   |
| Supplement purchased                       | (tDM/ha)    |               | 2.59     | 3.88     |
|                                            | (kgDM/cow)  |               | 837      | 1253     |
| Marginal milk                              | (kgMS/ha)   |               | 293      | 119*     |
| Milksolids response                        | (kgMS/tDM)  |               | 113      | 92*      |
| Marginal cost for extra milk               | (\$/kgMS)   |               | \$7.68   | \$9.38*  |
| Operating profit at different milk payouts | \$8.50/kgMS | \$1,821       | \$2,131  | \$2,032  |
|                                            | \$9.00/kgMS | \$2,279       | \$2,735  | \$2,696  |
|                                            | \$9.50/kgMS | \$2,737       | \$3,339  | \$3,360  |

Data source: revised from Kay et al. (2022).

\*Margin on and response to additional feed from PKE-only farm to PKE-plus farm. Prices from the 2018–2021 results have been adjusted for inflation to reflect 2024 values. Green cells represent the highest operating profit for each milk payout. Supplement prices used in the analysis (including cartage) were: PKE at \$380 per tonne, dried distillers grain (DDG) at \$638 per tonne, baleage at \$90 per bale, and soya bean hulls at \$458 per tonne. Milksolids production on the PKE-only system was compared with the pasture-only system and PKE-plus to the PKE-only system to calculate the milksolids responses. The marginal cost of producing extra milksolids was then calculated by dividing the difference in operating expenses between the pasture-only and PKE-only systems and PKE-plus and PKE-only systems by the milksolids responses. Operating expenses include depreciation. Profit calculations include livestock revenue.

How to get the most value from supplementary feed:



Maintain target pasture residuals and quality.



Factor in hidden costs like labour, machinery and feed wastage.



Be prepared to reduce supplement feeding when pasture residuals rise.



Use tools like DairyNZ’s Supplement Price Calculator to assess your marginal milk costs.





# Why ponds need wetlands

Myth

A duck pond is just as effective as a constructed wetland for reducing nitrogen loss.



Busted

Ponds can be a great addition to a dairy farm. They create habitat, trap sediment and phosphorus, and often attract ducks, making them a valued place to spend time with mates during open season. They also look good and may remove small amounts of nitrogen.

But if your goal is reducing nitrogen loss, a traditional open-water pond isn't specifically designed to deliver that outcome.

Why ponds don't work on their own

Nitrogen removal in wetlands happens through a natural process called denitrification. This relies on bacteria that need specific conditions: shallow water, wetland plants, organic matter and slow water movement.

Deep, open-water ponds don't provide those conditions. Water tends to move through too quickly and lacks the dense vegetation needed for effective nitrogen processing.

Constructed wetlands are designed specifically to reduce nitrogen and typically need:

- 70% emergent vegetation to support biological activity.
- Shallow water (300–400 mm) for plants to grow and thrive.
- A shape that allows water to move around the wetland, not through it

**Ponds can improve the performance and life span of a constructed wetland when placed at the start of the system.**

- (a width three to 10 times the length, with 'fingers' or peninsulas).
- The right size: 1–5% of the contributing catchment area.

Together, these features increase water residence time, which is critical for nitrogen removal.

How a pond fits into a wetland

Ponds are built differently and their deeper open water is ideal for trapping sediment and phosphorus, creating bird and fish habitat and increasing biodiversity.

While ponds remove relatively little nitrogen on their own, they can improve the performance and life span of a constructed wetland when placed at the start of the system.

Start with a goal, then build a solution

If you're considering a pond, wetland or a combination of both, start by asking yourself: 'What am I trying to achieve?'

There's no wrong answer, but having clarity helps.

- Options might include:
- Nitrogen reduction

- Capture sediment and phosphorus
- Improve biodiversity
- Duck habitat and recreation
- A mix of all of the above

Key design considerations

- A pond needs to be large and deep enough to allow sediment and phosphorus to settle.
- Good flow control so water moves slowly through the pond and into the wetland.
- Planting native wetland species in the main wetland area is critical for denitrification and further nutrient removal.
- The system works best when the wetland is at least 1-5% of the catchment area.

For more practical design tips, check out constructed wetland guidelines at [dairynz.co.nz/wetland-guide](http://dairynz.co.nz/wetland-guide)

Meet the expert:

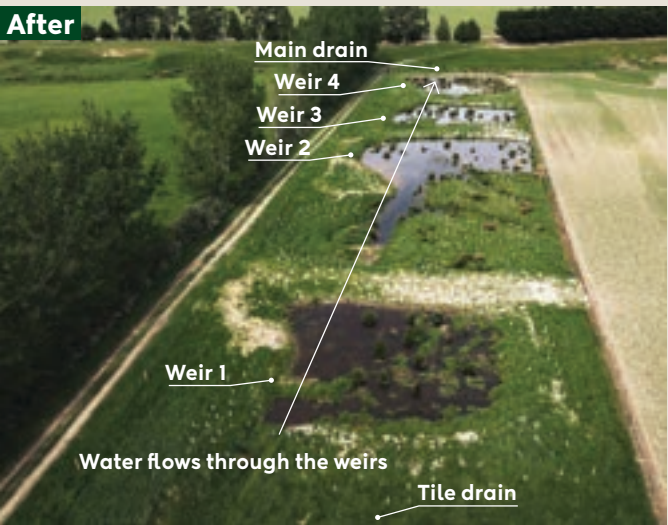
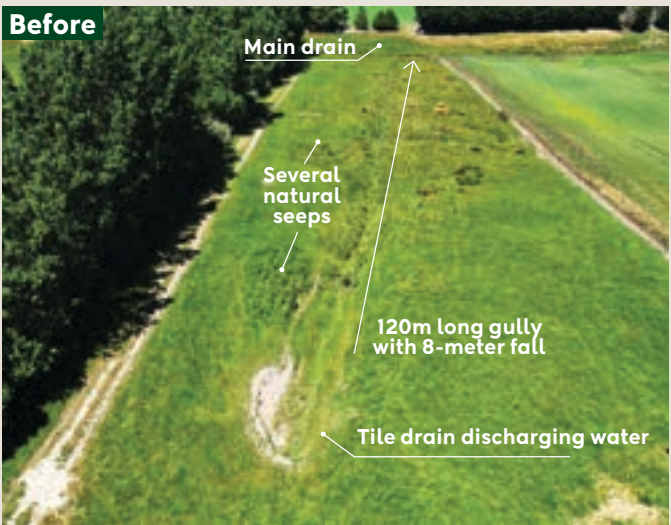


**Justin Kitto**  
DairyNZ environment team manager

## Wetland development case study

Careful design and ecological planting turned this unproductive gully into a high-value terraced wetland. Environmental DNA sampling from the main drain at the base of the gully identified more than 800 unique species living in and around the water, including an endangered native fish. The digger operator worked carefully around the existing natural plants, lifting and replanting them on the wetland floor. By using what was already growing, this helped to keep costs down and supported native regeneration.

Read more about this project and others at [dairynz.co.nz/wetland-development](http://dairynz.co.nz/wetland-development)



# 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.



David Croft points out the in-stream nitrogen-monitoring site on his farm in Culverden, north Canterbury.



Exercise Farm Gate in Taranaki was an MPI-led exercise simulating the first 72 hours of a foot and mouth disease outbreak.

Regional area manager for Northern Taranaki Kirsty Sharp facilitated a field day at Chris and Melsje Tippett's farm. They are 50:50 sharemilkers, milking full season once a day. The day's focus was on milking frequency and was supported by 3-in-2 farmers Karen and Daryl Johnson.



Plantain partner farmers, DairyNZ, Environment Canterbury and Morven Glenavy Ikawai Irrigation collaborate to reduce N leaching in Waikāhā, Canterbury.



Paul Kuriger farms on the edge of Te Papa-Kura-o-Taranaki (formerly Egmont National Park). He's done extensive pest trapping, riparian planting and stock exclusion to expand habitat for blue duck/whio.



Our team enjoyed connecting with everyone at Fieldays, where we showed how our science and research are being turned into practical on-farm solutions that make a real difference. We were based in the Rural Advocacy Hub and MPI Science for Farmers, and had a Dairy Training site to show people what courses are available to develop their skills, training and knowledge.

# Support that makes a difference

**Tough times – whether it’s a weather event, financial hardship or a breakdown in a relationship – can put a lot of strain on other elements of life. Our partnership with the Rural Support Trust means local support is just a phone call away.**

Juggling increased workloads, particularly around calving, can be demanding alongside dealing with everything else on-farm: herd and pasture management, overseeing staff, business administration and home life.

Building and maintaining strong relationships, both personal and at work, is one area that can pay dividends during busy times. If relationships are strong, they can be a great source of support.

DairyNZ senior people specialist Jane Muir says tough times can exaggerate relationship challenges.

“This shows the importance of getting things right: clear communication, expectations and understanding between an employer and employee, or farm owner and share or contract milker, and having those critical things documented.”

The Rural Support Trust has more than 300 people working across 14 regions, all with strong connections to rural communities and local farming challenges. This is what makes the partnership so valuable, says Jane.

“We know the Rural Support Trust is incredibly good at supporting farmers in tough times. Our partnership, backed by farmer levy funding, is

about enabling the trust to continue that good work.

“Their local team understands first-hand the pressures that can mount up. Their network and training can help with a wide range of situations.”

With employment-related issues being a major reason for calls for help, part of DairyNZ’s funding of the trust goes towards the delivery of the Rural Employee Support Hub, a one-stop shop of employment information and wellbeing support for those working on farms.

People often seek support around their mental health and through natural disasters, too.

DairyNZ key accounts manager Tony Finch says during adverse events, DairyNZ works alongside the trust and other industry organisations through Regional Advisory Groups (RAGs) to prepare for, respond to and assist with the recovery from emergencies. DairyNZ’s role is to provide on-the-ground intelligence updates and support where necessary to the RAGs throughout each event.

“**Asking for help is a sign of strength.**”

“If support is needed during the response and recovery, we work closely with partners to identify farmers who may be struggling and require farm systems assistance, helping them return to business as usual as quickly as possible.”

The Rural Support Trust’s national chair, Michelle Ruddell, says a good way to prepare for high-pressure



*The Rural Support Trust’s team is part of the community, so they understand the local challenges, conditions and needs.*

periods is to ensure everyone is well trained, prepared and rested. She says quieter periods also provide a valuable opportunity to build team spirit and nurture healthy relationships.

Jane says that while every farm is unique, many on-farm challenges are shared. She encourages anyone experiencing tough times to contact the Rural Support Trust so they can be connected with support that can make a tangible difference.

“I’d really like all people on farms in New Zealand to know that there is someone to reach out to and that asking for help is a sign of strength.”

Listen to Jane and Michelle discuss the common pressures they’re seeing across dairy communities as well as practical insights to help ease the load

and reset for the season ahead, on the Talking Dairy podcast [dairynz.co.nz/podcast-123](https://dairynz.co.nz/podcast-123)

### How the Rural Support Trust can help:

- Health and wellbeing
- Financial pressure
- Employment support
- Animal welfare
- Biosecurity

### Call your local trust

0800 787 254  
8am-6pm

### Call Rural Employee Support Hub

0800 694 121  
Monday to Friday  
9am-5pm

**Standing with farmers through tough times.**

**When life throws curveballs - weather events, financial pressure, or personal struggles, Rural Support Trust is there to help. And so are we.**

DairyNZ partners with Rural Support Trust to stretch your levy further by funding essential mental health and wellbeing support, and providing farm systems expertise during adverse weather events to help you respond and recover.

We’re not just sponsors. We’re on the ground when it counts, working alongside Rural Support Trust to make sure you, your team, and your family get the support you need.

See how your levy is working harder through partnerships at

[dairynz.co.nz/partnerships](https://dairynz.co.nz/partnerships)

