

MAY 2023 ISSUE #27

The Gisborne Herald

FROM THE LAND



INSIDE ISSUE #27



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Breaking barriers with fences

Fencing has provided Eliza Maher with so much more than a practical skill. “If I can build a fence, I can do anything,” says the 25-year-old from Mahia. She grew up around fencing, helping her dad Bruce and sometimes accompanied by mum Julie, so it was an easy pivot when her big OE was delayed due to Covid-19. From the age of nine, she would head out with Bruce to work in the family business. “It was always more fun than hard work,” she says. “I would mark posts and carry the spade to earn my pocket money.”



Eliza Maher figures fencing has set her up for success in the future, equipping her with skills and resilience that are transferable across any situation. Photo supplied

As dad’s right-hand worker she has put up kilometres of fence lines. “It was a really cool way to spend time with Dad at work and learn from him.” For her, there is nothing quite like driving a stretch of road with your handiwork on show for all to see. “It is hugely rewarding. When we lived in Taihape we did a lot of work on the Parapara roads between Raetihi and Whanganui. While it was 10-15 years ago, I can still point out the fences we did along a 40km stretch of road. It is a really cool memory and physical reminder.”

One of the biggest challenges of the job is the weather. “Being in Hawke’s Bay and on the East Coast you would assume it would be sunny and dry. But in the past few years all the major weather events have really made being able to go out and put in a full week’s work quite difficult. It has certainly meant sacrificing more than the occasional weekend to finish a job.” The cyclones of 2023 hit just as she and her dad were about to head out and repair the damage from last year. “It’s been heartbreaking to see what a sustained amount of rain can do, and now, there is so much to be done out there.” Eliza would love to see more women in the fencing industry. When she grew up in Taihape the perception was that rural women usually became nurses or teachers. “When you look at the farming sector, it is so much more with fencing, earthworks and more to be done. So to see more women in each part would be amazing. I always felt I wouldn’t be a teacher or a nurse, but the lack of wider female representation in rural sectors meant that as a young girl I didn’t realise there were these options.” She was chuffed to see other female fencers at an industry day and applauds the efforts of the cadet schemes that are bringing more young women into farming. “Fencing is a great profession and the need is huge at the moment. I like how they are

introducing courses at EIT and creating study pathways. Those programmes are a good place to start, then go work with a fencer. Put out feelers and see who needs a hand . . . try it. It certainly isn’t a job for everyone, but I love it.” Eliza headed to uni, graduating with an arts degree with a double major in anthropology and film, television and media studies. Her original plan was to take a gap year after uni, but it turned into three. Now, finally, she is about to get on a plane and put her UK work visa to good use . . . and it doesn’t include fencing at this stage. “Doing it all alongside the family is what makes it special. That’s really been the basis for my love of fencing. To try to carry that on somewhere new just wouldn’t be the same,” says Eliza. “I have an interest in archiving and history so it would be amazing to explore that and maybe work in a museum. I am so excited to be nearly on my way.” But packed neatly in her tool box is the experience she brings from her years of fencing. “Even though I am leaving it, that experience and what it has given me for the future is something I am grateful for. It makes you a good teammate. You are fit and strong, and it gives you confidence. If I can build a fence I can go do anything. Once you have put yourself through that — and it is not always easy — it gives you the fortitude to go on and do any task.”



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The Wi Pere horticulture team and trustees take their guardianship of the land seriously, and their efforts have been recognised as one of three finalists in the prestigious Ahuwhenua Trophy – Excellence in Maori Horticulture awards. All photos by alphapix.nz

Guardians of the whenua

There’s more than just growing top crops going on at the Wi Pere Trust. The finalists in the Ahuwhenua Trophy — Excellence in Māori Horticulture are equally about their people, future generations and kaitiakitanga. It’s the guardianship and protection of the environment that governs how the long-lived Māori corporation runs its operations. General manager Wayne Hall says the team are absolutely chuffed to be named as finalists in the prestigious competition — especially given the farming arm of the trust last year won the Ahuwhenua Trophy for sheep and beef.

“No pressure,” says Wayne with a laugh. The farming and horticulture arms are run separately, but complement each other. Wayne says the nod to the horticulture team certainly underlines they are doing some good things with their land. “We are a diverse operation that covers a lot of crops and are proud to represent the region. It’s good to test ourselves and see how we stack up against other growers.” The horticulture arm of the Wi Pere Trust comprises 79 hectares of permanent fruit, including 26ha of the lucrative gold kiwifruit — 11ha of which is organic, 4ha of

persimmons, 15ha of citrus, 4ha of blueberries and 30ha of early maturing varieties of apples. The growing is done over three separate orchards — Toroa Orchard at Waerenga-a-Hika, Tangihanga Orchard at Waituhi, and Manutuke Orchard at Manutuke. Everything they grow is tilted to as high returns as possible. The apples are generally early maturing which suits the Gisborne region. The blueberries are also relatively early in the season, and the citrus, which are mostly new navel orange varieties, are also higher value. The gold kiwifruit is the star of the

operation and has allowed the Trust to generate strong cash flows to assist with the rest of their developments. “The real push for us is to focus on export crops that are higher in value than domestic,” says Wayne. The rokit apples — a smaller snack-sized apple — is garnering a growing demand and has real value in Asia. The gold kiwifruit is generally destined for Japan, but some also heads to Asia, Europe and the United States. “We exited a lot of low value crops to move into the higher value crops after a strategic reset in 2010.”

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And it is paying dividends.

The roller-coaster few years of Covid-19 and bad weather haven't left Wi Pere unscathed, but Wayne says a committed crew meant work could continue and clean-ups were actioned quickly.

"The rokit apples and blueberries were significantly damaged with flooding and silt, but we have managed to restore some of the areas. There remains a lot of silt in the farming basin which is all connected and Cyclone Gabrielle really did have a major effect on our farming operations."

A quick-actioned plan enabled them to salvage a lot of the young apple trees and blueberry plants.

It's planning and drive like that, that has enabled the Trust to give far more permanent job security for their workers.

"It is an awesome place to work," says Wayne. "Our tikanga side is very strong for us. We have a fantastic team right across both the horticulture and farming operations. Nothing is a stand-alone in this operation . . . everything has to connect. We have a strong and genuine connection with the land and it is proudly spoken about."

Sustainability is key and last year Wi Pere Horticulture developed their fresh water farm plan which ensures the streams and waterways that run through the two operations are cared for and everyone understands the risks to the valuable resource.

"Our environmental goal is to nurture the Wi Pere legacy for current and future generations with the overarching philosophy of kaitiakitanga," says Wayne.

There are a number of environmental policies and practices in place that support their commitment to sustainability and the environment.

Wayne has eight full-time staff, many of whom have been with the Trust for years, and casual workers are hired as required during the year.

Orchard manager Eddie Collins has been there 11 years and is a key part of the operation.

"He has helped develop a strong team of people through mentoring," says Wayne. "He has a fantastic nature with his workers."

Not everyone who works for the Trust whakapapa to Wi Pere, but Wayne says they try to employ as many whānau as they can.

The Trust was created in 1899 by their tipuna Wi Pere to protect their remaining whānau lands from a mortgagee sale at a time when the whenua was heavily in debt.

The Member of Parliament for Eastern Māori, Wi Pere was known as a champion for the retention of Māori land, to be controlled and developed by the people. He also formed Mangatu Incorporation — the first Māori incorporation — through the 1893 Mangatu Empowering Act. Today, 124 years later, the Trust continues to thrive under the stewardship of his mokopuna.

The Wi Pere land will never be sold, and those working on it today know they are guardians for their future generations.

The Trust provides continual support to Te Rongopai Marae through help and financial support for significant renovation projects and grant applications, including a major upgrade of both the whare kai and whare tupuna. There is ongoing investment in education, scholarships, and whānau leadership. Wi Pere Horticulture actively engages with Wi Pere Trust whānau through horticultural field days that are exclusive to shareholders, and often align with its annual general meetings.

The Ahuwhenua Trophy is the most prestigious award for Māori agriculture and was originally launched in 1933 by visionary leader Sir Apirana Ngata and the Governor General Lord Bledisloe. Over the years it has had a number of changes, but holding strong is the mana the trophy carries. The winner will be announced at the Awards Dinner on Friday, June 9, in Tauranga. Wi Pere is up against Ngā Tukairangi Trust and MIL – Whiritoa Orchards for the overall prize.



Wi Pere horticulture general manager Wayne Hall (right) works with orchard manager Eddie Collins in one of the orchards.



Paul Waihape checks the gold kiwifruit.



Jennifer Waihape at work in the Wi Pere citrus nursery.



James Torrie in front of the blueberry crop.

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Police from outside the area helping locals clear the silt from the pathways.
Photo by Sue Wilson

‘Repair, rebuild and revitalise’

Regions across Aotearoa New Zealand could probably learn a thing or two from Wairoa . . . especially when it comes to rolling up the sleeves and mucking in. Cyclone Gabrielle decimated Wairoa’s much-loved A&P Showgrounds. Water and silt ripped through the buildings, destroying two and wrecking all the internal and boundary fences, leaving the grounds unusable. There is hundreds of thousands of dollars damage.

The Society has a long and very proud history. It was formed in 1899 and while initially the County Ram Fair and Show was held next to the Frasertown Domain, it was soon moved closed to the town and the railway. In 2025, the Society will celebrate its 125th anniversary. Across an impressive history, there have only been three years when the annual show hasn’t been held — twice during WW2 and in 2022 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Time has marched on through many generations but the spirit of what brought together small rural communities like Wairoa, remains the same.

The annual January show is a favourite with many. Horses, ponies and riders from all over the country head to the event as much for the competition as the fun on the side. The river becomes a popular swimming hole, and there’s always plenty of fat to chew around the many truck ramps and BBQs.

It’s a big gathering for the wider Wairoa community, and the largest family entertainment event in the district.

The show has become the goal for the hundreds who have pitched in to help restore the grounds. The aim is to ‘repair, rebuild and revitalise’ the grounds to make them more resilient and fit-for-purpose for future generations.

Working bees have attracted people from all over the region – some are volunteer committee members, but others have just seen a place that needs a hand, even if their own properties are also in dire need of a clean-up. The sheer numbers have impressed the neighbouring regions who have asked organisers just what the secret is to getting so many along to help.

The risk of volunteer burnout is high but the push continues to have the grounds ready for the 2024 show. But there is another problem — while the Society has insurance, the reinstatement of the grounds and silt removal

are not covered. Since the cyclone, the Society has raised \$60,000 to replace the external fencing and repair the main gates to ensure the grounds are secure. More fundraising is in the pipeline and grants are being applied for to help pay for earth-moving contractors to come in with their big machinery and remove the silt before winter sets in.

The shearing shed, pavilion, equestrian shed and Pony Club buildings have all been stripped and cleaned. But there is still so much to be done — the driveway needs to be repaired and re-metalled, the trade area surface needs to be repaired, power poles removed, the main power supply to the grounds replaced, the rodeo arena fixed, and the 314 equestrian yards rebuilt. The list goes on and it is a massive task by anyone’s standards.

Society vice president Raewyn Foot says the efforts by so many to help get the showgrounds back on its feet have been humbling. “We are so, so grateful for all the help,” she says. “Some may have an association with the grounds through their families, but others are randoms who have just seen it on Facebook and come along to pitch in.”

She jokes that the legendary venison sandwiches may also be the drawcard.

The biggest challenge says Raewyn, is the silt.

“Even when you get it out of the building it doesn’t go away. It is absolutely everywhere and the volume that needs to be moved is huge.”

She extended a massive thank you to her committee and the volunteers. There were some who had been amazing in their efforts.

“They just say ‘come on, let’s just get on with it’,” says Raewyn. “These are practical people who get in and get things done.”

She’s hopeful they will make the January deadline.

“Our community has always been able to look forward to the Show. People come from everywhere for it. The horse competitors seem to really like it and they treat it like a holiday. They tend to their horses, have fun and swim in the river.”

They’re not the only ones. Comedian Te Radar has been back a couple of times and loves to talk about it to anyone who will listen.

It’s things as simple as that that make the difference at this much-anticipated event — the people, old-school type grounds lined with trees, a nearby river to swim in, and plenty of fun.

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An aerial view of the water flowing through the Wairoa Showgrounds.

Photo by Wairoa Helicopters



Muddy Wairoa A&P Society committee members . . . (from left) Sonya Swann, Laura Hooper and Alice Wilson.
Photo by Sue Wilson



Volunteers turned out in their droves to help with the massive clean-up job at the Wairoa Showgrounds.
Photo by Sue Wilson

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Connecting farms to classrooms



Ormond farmers Rob and Marie Burke were part of the pilot programme for Farmer Time with Marie later becoming the national coordinator. Photo by Louise Savage



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Marie Burke has a dream to see Farmer Time as a regular part of children’s education across the land and she is constantly moving closer to making that a reality.

She’s thriving as the national coordinator for the programme that connects farmers with year 1-8 students, bringing everyday farming to life for youngsters who may have never gone rural.

Year 2022 was the pilot for the programme that originated in the UK and now it’s really starting to gain traction in a country where farmers are celebrated for keeping the wheels turning. By the end of last year Marie had 47 teachers involved and had introduced more than 1000 city children to the world of farming. This year those numbers have grown by over 50 percent.

“It’s been a great start,” she says. “For the pilot programme in the first term (of 2022) we paired eight teachers with eight farmers just to see how it would fit into the New Zealand setting and it was spot on.”

Marie, who farms at Ormond with husband Rob, says the challenge is that so many youngsters no longer have a connection to a farm, or get to see how their food is grown.

“It used to be that the city cousins would come out to the country in the holidays and help out, but I don’t think that happens so much anymore. As our cities grow bigger there are more and more young people not having this early experience (on the land). Farmer Time brings the countryside to life.”

Marie’s repertoire of farmers is expanding and she even has mushroom and avocado growers and a sheep milking farmer, alongside her beef, dairy, sheep, deer and goat producers.

She’s on the search for a beekeeper who is keen to be a part of the programme.

Farms can be of all shapes and sizes. “It doesn’t matter how big or small the property is, or what they grow,” says Marie, who is contracted by Beef + Lamb New Zealand to manage the programme which is partially funded by MPI.

“The smaller lifestyle properties are great to match with our younger classes who love meeting pet farm animals and learning how they are cared for.”

Farmers who grow for the Farmers’ Markets are ideal to match with a city class as students get to learn the full paddock-to-plate story — where the produce comes from and how it is grown, packaged and sold.

She figures the secret of the success of Farmer Time is the simplicity of the programme coupled with the flexibility for both farmer and teacher to design the whole programme to fit the need.

“And it’s free!” It’s an art to fit the right farmer with the right class.

“Some of the teachers I am matching up don’t have any farming background or knowledge and love learning alongside their class. Those who do have a rural background jump at the chance of introducing the world of farming to their students.”

Marie is quick to point out the programme is suitable for those with different dietary and food preferences.

“I have Farmer Time teachers and students who are vegetarian and vegan, so a key part of my role is finding the right match for every class. Fruit and vegetable farmers like LeaderBrand can be a great pairing in these

cases. The programme often dovetails into other programmes being run studies being done like Garden to Table, Enviroschools and Healthy School Lunches. “Teaching these days uses a lot of inquiry learning which is driven by the children and their interest in a subject.”

Science and social studies topics like sustainability, ecosystems and interactions with the environment and living things can all be covered in Farmer Time sessions, along with topics like technology, maths, health and physical education.

“All areas of the New Zealand school curriculum can be brought to life through involvement in the programme and I encourage teachers to give it a go.”

Teachers sign up for a term or a whole year — the latter is the preference for Marie as she says it gives students a chance to see the seasons through a farming year.

“It allows time for the relationship between the farmer and class to develop,” says Marie.

There’s a bigger picture at play as to why this programme is so important. Not only does it teach students where their food comes from, but it opens their minds to the opportunities in the agricultural and horticultural industries, giving them new career options to consider.

Word of mouth is bringing in plenty of new participants for Marie.

“This is a job I just love. I am a teacher and a farmer and now work with both groups right across New Zealand — from Whangarei to the very bottom of the South Island.”

The feedback has been “overwhelmingly positive”.

“That certainly makes it easier for me. The kids just love it and we now have kids living in cities with no prior experience of farm life saying they want to be a farmer or a vet.”

Farmer Time sessions are done through Zoom or Microsoft Teams connections, and generally run up to half an hour once a fortnight.

“Thanks to Covid people have become quite used to connecting with one another online.”

While that technology component can be a little daunting for some farmers, Marie says it is super easy. A big part of her job is getting everyone started and providing that all-important support.

“Farmers enjoy it because the programme is a great opportunity to show farming as it really is. It feels good to be sharing our positive farming stories with the next generation and getting that energy and enthusiasm in return,” she says.

There are a number of local farmers involved with Farmer Time and unsurprisingly, Marie and Rob were part of the pilot — before she got the coordinator’s job.

“I could immediately see the merits and knew I would love to be involved with rolling it out across the country.”

New Zealand was the fifth country to pick up on the UK initiative and has support from programme founder Tom Martin and his team. “There was an international symposium last year where our farmers could jump on and get tips and input from other farmers across the world,” says Marie.

“Farmer Time is set to make a significant contribution to education and I am delighted to be involved.” For more information, head to www.farmertime.co.nz



Marie Burke loves that she can combine her passions of teaching and farming in her role with Farmer Time. Photo by The Black Balloon



The Farmer Time programme is steadily gaining traction with city schools across Aotearoa New Zealand, connecting more children with the land. Photo by Louise Savage

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It's the simplest of things in life that can have some of the biggest impacts. Just ask Wairoa's rural community who attended the Backyard BBQs in the wake of the cyclones and other weather that ravaged the region this year.

The initiative came on the back of the successful Wairoa Rural Round Up evening and was being driven by the Wairoa Community Development Trust with the support of Ministry for Primary Industries along with other sponsors and agencies.

A very dedicated team travelled east to west and north to south of Wairoa, checking in with the rural communities, sharing a snarler and a good old chinwag.

As light-hearted as it sounds, there was a far more serious undertone to the gatherings, explains organiser Sue Wilson. "It is a challenging time for farmers and rural folk," she says.

"Many are tired and feel forgotten so the Trust wanted to create something in each district where the community were able to catch up with neighbours and mates without travelling into town."

They came in their droves. "Our focus has been to create opportunities for rural communities to connect with each other face to face and just highlight the support and resources available to them," says Sue.

Coming together like that is healing. Chatting with others who have experienced similar difficulties reduces the sense of isolation and often provides those pearls

of wisdom that come from live experiences. Di Roadley is Hawke's Bay Regional councillor for Wairoa and says many farmers continue to struggle to navigate the burden of managing their business and wellbeing of their whānau, staff and community while still dealing with the damage caused by the weather events.

"Farmers and rural communities are bruised from the impacts of Cyclone Gabrielle," says Di. "This event is really just an extreme event within an extraordinary period of adverse weather events."

"While there are many agencies who have rallied to provide support, there is still considerable uncertainty around what shape this support should be. It is an all-too-common challenge of 'what do farmers need, when and how do we deliver that to them', without adding to their time-poor days."

Di saw the win-win BBQs as a chance for farmers to share their views and concerns which would in turn provide guidance on how she would shape her considerations and decisions on their behalf.

"This opportunity provided a really strong sense of how farmers and rural communities are managing behind the farm gate and I am grateful for the mechanisms available to me to support our uniquely Wairoa needs."

The Rural Support Trust has only been in Wairoa for a short period of time, so the BBQs were a chance to provide information about the services offered to communities.

Backyard BBQs help to connect communities



Making sure there is plenty of connection within the rural community through Backyard BBQs at the Panekiri event (from left) . . . Fenton Wilson, Hawke's Bay Regional Council councillor Di Roadley, Sue Wilson, Kylie Brown, and Sonya and Allan Newton. Picture supplied



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With an incredible amount of rain over the last year it's not surprising there have been cases of Leptospirosis in farm animals, as well as working dogs.

Leptospirosis is caused by the bacteria *Leptospira interrogans* that occurs throughout New Zealand and the world. There are over 150 serovars of *L. interrogans*, of which six are found in NZ and a 2012 study found Lepto positive animals on 97 percent of sheep and beef farms and 76 percent of deer farms.

Leptospirosis can infect most mammals including sheep, cattle, deer, goats and dogs. It is one of New Zealand's most important diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans by being in an infected area. It can have serious consequences, including damaging the kidneys, and as such, it should have a place in every on-farm health and safety policy.

In cattle, Lepto can cause severe disease. Clinical signs can include; loss of appetite, abortion, stillborn or weak calves, mastitis, and possible future issues with infertility.

In sheep, if an outbreak occurs in lambing hoggets, some lambs will be found dead and others will be lethargic and not eating. They may have red-coloured urine that often stains the wool on the hocks and crutch area and may also have pale, muddy-coloured or yellow mucus membranes due to jaundice. It can also cause abortion in ewes.

Animals that recover from Leptospirosis continue to excrete Leptospire in the urine for a long period of time. Research shows sheep can excrete Leptospire in their urine for up to 11 months.

Leptospire survive in cool, wet conditions.

Areas where there are stagnant water and contaminated effluent are the major sources of infection in the environment.

Infection in humans is relatively common in agricultural workers, rural veterinarians, abattoir workers and forestry workers. Infection typically occurs by contamination with infected urine (urine splashes into the eye, nose and mouth) and abortion or placental material entering through the skin. The consumption of raw milk, from a cow within the acute phase of infection can also pose a risk of infection.

In 90 percent of cases, severe flu-like symptoms are encountered with the immune system usually mounting an effective response. In 10 percent of cases, clinical signs are similar, but without medical intervention liver and kidney failure can occur.

To prevent an outbreak on your farm, discuss your vaccination programme with your veterinarian, ensure your rodent control is maintained, keep pigs away from cattle/sheep and fence off or drain any contaminated/ stagnant water supplies.



by Dr Andrew Cribb, East Coast Farm Vets

Leptospirosis can infect most mammals including sheep, cattle, deer, goats and dogs. Picture supplied

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These gold kiwifruit are healthy and producing impressive results under Respond creator Dugald Hamilton’s new regime. Photo supplied

Combating ‘crisis beneath our feet’

What for a while with Respond creator Dugald Hamilton and you learn very quickly that he is driven to ensure the world becomes a better place for future generations.

It’s all about the impact excessive amounts of chemicals have had on the soil, greatly reducing the living power of the compound that is in some way related to all we consume. He calls it the crisis beneath our feet.

It has taken him decades but he has figured a way to use fungi and bacteria to not only grow

better plants, but to also revitalise the soil.

“If chemicals were removed from production platforms and replaced with live fungi and bacteria it would quickly replace every negative with an organic solution,” he says.

The end goal for him is better pasture, a better end product — whatever that may be, and a better future.

“Replacing chemicals with fungi and bacteria reduces costs, improves food nutrition and automatically enables farmers and producers to better manage environmental concerns.

With climate market changes, people are being encouraged to intensify production and through the current model there are some accumulative bad practices that are getting worse.”

He’s talking about the reliance on artificial and chemical fertilisers.

“Some of those chemicals used in an intensive way are causing environmental problems, which in turn become human problems, like nitrate levels in the water is probably the worst thing affecting New Zealand at the moment.”

He’s travelling the length and breadth of New

Zealand doing trials with everything from dairy farms to kiwifruit.

“The last four years of trials are showing better yield year on year. We have all been blown away by the results,” says Dugald.

“Soil biology multiplies with age so it is great to get yield data to show that in a curve.”

One of those he is working alongside is the MIL Māori Investment owned organic Zespri gold kiwifruit orchard Whiritoa in Te Teko who are one of three finalists in the Ahuwhenua Trophy excellence in Māori horticulture awards.

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Authorised by Dana Kirkpatrick, 87 Kirkpatrick Rd, Gisborne.

“At Te Teko, our soil tests show up to 88kg of approximate release of nitrogen by soil bio mass per hectare per month, using a Solvita and Henry Brinton Respiration Test,” says Dugald.

At the heart of it all is nitrogen. “Nitrogen is crucial to soil-based production and income. It increases plant performance growth and ultimately yield. Our atmosphere is very rich in nitrogen so it is very easy to use bacteria to alter and transfer that into plant available nitrogen in the soil.”

He says that soil life can grow or replace a lot of its own nutrients on a consistent basis in cropping, horticulture, pastoral and forestry, unlocks a huge potential for growers and a large reduction in pending compliance costs.

One of the biggest challenges he faces is that growers believe that synthetic chemical fertilisers have to be applied repeatedly.

“Unlearning is of the same importance as learning because to unlearn something is to be conscious of what we have learnt and our ability to change it,” says Dugald.

Trial results have been revealing for some growers.

“Showing farmers who have been on their same piece of land for many years that by changing the way they grow in those areas we can bring those soils back has been great.”

One of the biggest surprises came on a dairy farm trial block where the fungus travelled between two treated sites in an unexpected time frame.

“The fungus crossed 10-metre buffer zones around the two trials in less than six weeks. None of us expected that. It means our soils that have been depleted by natural soil fungus over years of intensive farming can be rehabilitated in just weeks.

“That is very encouraging for farmers.”

Farmers get a gumboot view of what can be achieved when they see treated and untreated areas side by side on their farms.

At one Central Hawke’s Bay dairy farm, cows that are grazing in paddocks that have been treated with the fungus and bacteria are producing up to two litres more milk a day.

“When you have 600 cows producing more than two litres extra a day, that’s 1200 litres a day extra with no fertiliser costs.

“Because we are talking about a live product, over time it multiplies so grows exponentially. We are not spreading a chemical granule that dissolves, we are installing a living network that multiplies.”

With such positive feedback, he feels a corner has been turned.

“The feedback is huge, with every single one (of them) wanting to do more. So, we are now navigating scale and what that looks like,” he says.

The more industries they work with, the more people come knocking on the door — including some from offshore.

He is working closely with iwi in Taupō who are keen to move away from the use of chemical fertilisers into a more environmentally friendly space.

“They view their land holdings as (being) ‘forever’ and make decisions (with that view in mind). It is inspirational to work alongside that sort of mindset, where their strategies and management is light years ahead of many.”

Locally, they have been working with tomato and sweetcorn crops as well as native tree trials where over a 12-month period they have seen a 38 percent increase in manuka growth.

Dugald has patents in Australia, the United States and Russia as well as in New Zealand.

“It’s quite startling that there is no one else in the world doing the same thing as we are with live culture,” he says.

He is in talks with offshore industries and is thankful that some of his trial partners in New Zealand are internationally connected.

“Every plant or tree has its own specific requirement of soil biology and what Respond does is match blueberry plants with blueberry preference of biology, pine trees with pine tree biology and so on.

“That is where our real speciality lies in matching trees and plants with their perfect biology. It has taken me 30 years to be able to find all this out. There is no text book or road map, but it is a real common-sense-based approach.”

New machinery has also been developed, including a new pasture drill, which plants both the seed and biology in the ground at the same time, reducing the costs and increasing area covered in the same time frame.

Dugald says the driving philosophy is to change the way things are grown.

“Our aim is higher nutrient production with lower environment contamination which helps with water quality and grower prosperity, and at a time when weather is playing a larger role. Change can become a positive tool.

“We aren’t trying to get people to grow things completely differently but if they stop using fertilisers and start concentrating on soil quality and soil health, then that living part of their farm is going to work for them rather than against them.”



Farmers who have been on the same piece of land for many years are finding that by changing the way they grow in those areas, the soil quality can be improved. Photo supplied



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Helping grow the country

No one exercises until they have a heart attack

by St John Craner

Denial is a coping mechanism: “If I ignore it, it might go away.” The signs are there to tell you something. Yet most people never take action until they are forced to take action. Newton’s law of motion explains this human behaviour perfectly: If it’s not health, it might be a loss of a different kind like divorce or death. Only when they are faced with an undeniable reality are they forced to take notice and face what Jim Collins (author of Good to Great) calls “brutal realities”. Worse with heart attack victims is the fact that 42 percent of patients post-surgery never commit to a healthier lifestyle. It reminds me of that quote: “If you don’t make time for health, you’ll have to make time for illness.” Only when they are told they won’t see their grandkids do they actually do something about it. A suggestion like that only works because it taps deeper into their true motivation. Only when it matters and becomes more meaningful do they take action like taking time out and off farm, drinking less, making sleep a priority or changing diet. When it comes to your farming business, the same warning signals might be there but you may be choosing to ignore them right now

because you don’t like what you see. No burning platforms but a slow demise or downward spiral that doesn’t alert the senses in the same way. Maybe you’ve just lost one of your best farm managers or milkers. Maybe your animals are not producing at the rates they used to. Maybe your cropping isn’t giving you the yields you’d usually expect. When something feels off, it usually means it’s off. Take the time to stop and reflect on things by asking yourself: ■ What can you learn from this? ■ What actions can you take to avoid the same situation happening again? ■ Have I committed to the discipline of pre-briefing and de-briefing with my farming team? ■ What do I need to stop/start/continue? ■ What’s my ‘stop doing’ list? (not my ‘to do’ list) ■ What’s vital and necessary and what’s “nice to have” and discretionary? We learn more from our losses than our wins because they have always said “success is a lousy teacher”. Losing teaches us so much more if we’re willing to be brave and look deep inside. We can learn a lot from life. We have to be gracious and be thankful for

the learning, even if we don’t feel it at the time because we might be hurting. That reflection in the mirror can be very hard. I can tell you this has taken me years to work out for myself both personally and professionally — what truly drives me, who and what matters to me most, and what I need to be for my family and the clients and communities I serve. Feedback is a gift we can choose to take or not. When we do take it on board it usually makes us better people and better businesses.

- So what signals are you seeing?**
- Are you or your farming team low on energy or burnt out?
 - Are you experiencing increased or continual turnover in your team?
 - Are you seeing or experiencing more sickness and absenteeism?
 - Are you sensing a growing reluctance and resistance in yourself or your team? If you are, you need to work out what the drivers of disengagement are so they and you can be at their best. Clear the debris in their path first.
 - Maybe you need to spend more time with them working out what their real motivations are and where they want to be as individuals? (solve the root cause, not surface level symptoms).
 - Maybe you need to make yourself more available to mentor and coach your team as

it can be super tough on-farm in all weathers (all important truck time and never-to-be-missed 1:1 performance appraisals). ■ Maybe their confidence is low because their competencies are low? (did you on-board them properly? Are you training them on specific skills based on their experience or tenure? Work out why. What are the root causes? Taking action on such signs sooner rather than later means mild effects versus myocardial infarction (the medical term for heart attack). Like weeds in a garden you need to keep on top of them. See the signs for what they really are before they take over. Don’t ignore them. Do something about them. Doing nothing will mean nothing changes.

St John Craner is the owner and founder of agrarian.co.nz a rural sales and marketing company that serves the NZ agricultural sector.



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‘Look for opportunities in challenges’: accountant

Jen Mildenhall is buzzing. She’s just back from the Primary Sector Conference 2023 and her mind is bubbling with all she has seen and heard there. And she’s excited to share it.

Her passion is palpable, but then again, anyone who knows Jen knows that’s par for the course.

There was never a time Jen didn’t want to find a way to combine her love of farming with numbers. As a youngster growing up in Wairoa on her family farm she would do stock reconciliations on her very carefully compiled sticker collection. As an agri-business associate at BDO Gisborne, however, the numbers are a bit bigger and things are a little more serious.

She and husband Shane manage Rangatira Station for the Thomas family, inland from Te Karaka. It’s land she loves, but also land that carries a heavy weight and has taught this young couple more about resilience and partnership than anyone could have prepared them for.

Jen started her accounting journey when her son Lucas was eight weeks old. They were on a different farm then — one that backed onto the Kaweka Ranges.

“I did one paper and thought, ‘wow, how does anyone do more than one at a time?’.”

But the next semester, in true Jen-form, she

tackled two, then three, and two children and nine years later she had her degree.

“You never know what you are capable of,” she says.

Jen finished in the top 5 percent of Massey University and received the top scholar award.

“It was a real honour.”

It’s not the only award she has won, having also received the Ted Delahunty Leadership Award in June 2020.

“That was a big one to win. It gave me the confidence that the industry saw me as a leader. It is amazing when you are acknowledged as a future leader.”

During cyclones Hale and Gabrielle, Rangatira Station was, like many others, hammered. They lost all their flat land, which had a domino effect on their stocking policies.

“All our plans were gone,” she said.

So when Jen sits around a table with her farming clients, she understands how tough it is and the challenges and mental strain they are facing. There is another side to Jen that most of her clients also know — she is resilient. Almost three years ago, Jen and Shane lost their son Lucas in an accident on the farm.

“Losing Lucas has taught me a lot and I use that. I have learnt the hard way in my life,” says Jen. “It is my journey.

“You can look at the challenges ahead which could bring you down or look at the opportunities those challenges bring and be creative about it.”

She is a ‘glass half-full’ person, and her vivacious bubblyness is contagious.

“I am passionate about my work — well, I don’t really see it as work most of the time,” she says. “The buzz I get from helping my clients is no different from when I ride my own horse or go hunting with (11-year-old daughter) Emmy.”

She and Emmy were at the opening hunt of the season, that just happened to be on their station, and made all the more special because it was Emmy’s first.

Jen can’t wait to share the messaging she has brought home from the conference.

“Change is happening,” she says. “With that comes risk, but also opportunity. If we go into it with a positive mindset and jump on that opportunity, we will be streets ahead.”

But there are no rose-coloured glasses when she chats to clients.

“I genuinely get over-invested in my clients’ wellbeing, especially ones who are going through a tough time. I am there for them and I do understand the position.”

She knows to be effective she needs to be able to give clients the confronting news when

needed.

“If I don’t, I am not putting their needs first, which is what accounting is all about. I have to make sure they have all the information — good or bad — otherwise I am not doing my job.”

Jen grew up in Wairoa with her “amazing” parents who bought their 600-hectare property during the Muldoon era.

“They worked hard. They had the farm and dad had a mechanic business to fix motor bikes and cars, that he did at night, and mum would nurse at the hospital as well as working on the farm. We all helped out on the farm.”

The kids would be hung in the covered yards in their jolly jumpers while their parents worked.

“I was obsessed with farming since then. It is kind of an addiction really. I love the fresh air, open spaces and the animals. They aren’t complicated.”

She contemplated farming but felt she would get more bang for her effort in becoming an accountant.

“I knew I could get more achieved.”

That entrenched love of agriculture and understanding of the industry drives her to help her clients in any way she can — little things like helping them understand annual accounts.



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GLASS HALF-FULL ATTITUDE: Accountant Jen Mildenhall in her happy place . . . on a horse, on a farm.
Photo supplied

“My goal is to turn it into language they can absorb and understand because then they will get value from it.

“Helping them has to feel right for me . . . that’s my why,” says Jen, who has been with BDO for six-and-a-half years and was made an associate in January.

She gets some comfort that the cyclones hit on the back of a trifecta of positivity for farmers with a great market, good weather and low interest rates, meaning most were in good nick. But the damage is extensive, and she knows many are struggling as they make decisions around recovery. Post cyclone she is

one of the founders of the Gisborne Tairāwhiti Farm Recovery Fund and BDO Gisborne have been strong advocates of ensuring their clients know where to apply for assistance and just what is available for them.

“If you look at the overall damage to farms, it is overwhelming, but if you take those small steps — track by track, you can get there.”

That’s how Jen operates — step by step. She lives in the moment with her husband Shane, who she calls her inspiration, her beloved daughters Emmy and 18-month-old Kenzie, without forgetting her journey and those who have made it.

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Turihaua Station’s Paul and Sarah Williams recently won the Beef + Lamb New Zealand Livestock Farm Award and the East Coast Farming for the Future Award at the regional Balance Farm Environment Awards.

Award-winning farmers Paul and Sarah Williams are farming for today with a keen eye to the future to ensure the cherished land at Turihaua is in the best possible shape for future generations.

With three of their own children, they know only too well the importance of getting kids off screens and connected with nature. Turihaua has been in the Williams family since 1897, nurtured for five generations. They recently won both the Beef + Lamb New Zealand Livestock Farming Award and the East Coast Farming for the Future Award at the regional Ballance Farm Environment Awards.

Its successful Angus stud is the oldest of its kind in Australasia and spans 1066ha — 961ha effective — and also includes sheep breeding and lamb finishing.

At the heart of all Sarah and Paul do, is putting the environment first knowing a good foundation is built on healthy soil.

The family are generous in sharing their knowledge and land, and have a close relationship with Wainui Beach School.

Two of their boys — Max and Patch — attend the school, while Charlie is at the nearby Paikea Kindergarten. Both schools have a strong environmental focus which continues to drive Max, Patch and Charlie’s interest in all things science.

“As a family the farm is our playground,” says Sarah. “We go eeling, hunting and exploring, and recognise how fortunate we are to be farming this coastal paradise, with a strong desire to share it with the wider community.”

Soil was the focus of term one for Wainui Beach School. With the support from the House of Science, the under-seven Wai Syndicate headed en masse to Turihaua to get mud on their boots and dig their fingers into the soil.

“The kids were buzzing as they fossicked in the leaf litter in our QE2 reserve, learnt about the poplar and willow plantings that were literally holding our hills up along with the natives supporting our gullies and recently planted streamside to stabilise the banks,” says Sarah.

Paul led the youngsters through a visual soil assessment, discussing worm counts, sniffing the soil, and looking at diversity of plant species in the pasture.

“We were blown away by the knowledge and curiosity of the children about the soil,” said Sarah.

“The five and six-year-olds are learning concepts that were first introduced to me in soil science papers at Otago University. If we can get kids out on the land coupled



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with the EnviroSchools and science learning at primary schools, then the future of our Tairāwhiti environment is in safe hands.”

Wainui Beach School’s EnviroSchools lead teacher Jodie Saunders says the value of her students getting out onto Turihaua and living and breathing farm life cannot be underestimated.

“There is so much to be gained from our tamariki going to our local farms,” says Jodie. “We want our tamariki to connect with our community, especially in the areas where great things are being done to enhance and protect our environment.”

The main focus for the farm trip was whenua.

“We had been conducting a school-wide inquiry into soil — why it is important, what makes good soil and how do human actions impact the soil. Going up to the farm gave the kids hands on, practical insights into the soil and the soil cycle.”

Visiting the QE2 reserve let the students see first-hand how the forest floor and decomposers that live there, cycle dead and decaying material into soil, which then nourishes the trees and so the cycle continues.

Jodie said the students had been fascinated

by the worms and other life they found in the rotting logs and leaf litter in the bush. Seeing the native planting that had been done over the past few years along waterways running out to the sea gave them all an opportunity to reflect on how the land is connected to the ocean.

“It is just fantastic getting the kids out in the fresh air, connecting with each other, papatuanuku and the whenua.”

That connection is a key component of farming for Sarah and Paul.

“The importance of getting out in nature for mental health and connection to the land is important for adults and children alike,” says Sarah. “Multiple times when the children were bouncing about, Jodie asked them to shut their eyes and focus on the sounds. This mindfulness practice out on the farm really cemented our ‘why’ for Turihaua for its environment direction and the importance to connect it to the wider community.”

Turihaua is run under a biological farming programme with a strong focus on sequestering carbon into the soil. Over the years 26,000 natives have been planted on riparian margins, and reservoirs to provide corridors for birds with pest control and bush restoration the next step as members of the Whāngārā Community

Catchment Group. Nothing is done in isolation.

Wainui Beach School principal Nolian Andrew was hugely grateful for the opportunity the Williams whānau had given her students over the past seven years.

“It has been so successful and interesting for all,” she said. “We appreciate that it is time-consuming to set up everything for our visits and are grateful to the whānau for enabling this to continue.”

Teachers had seen high levels of interest and engagement from Wainui tamariki.

“The knowledge and understanding of the need to protect the land by planting and trapping has grown.”

Sarah says the combination of the property and business is magical.

“It is the heart and soul of our family’s past, present and future,” she says. “It is truly a Garden of Eden. We are so grateful to be farming this piece of paradise beside the ocean and to have taken on the cow herd of Turihaua Angus that was so well managed by (Paul’s parents) Hamish and Angela. We hope to continue this legacy and love of cattle tied in with environmental stewardship for our three boys and many generations to come.”



School children get to dig their fingers into the soil, breathe in the rural air and count worms during their regular visits to Turihaua Station.



The Williams family have farmed Turihaua since 1897 and the current generations love nothing more than getting out in nature going eeling, swimming, hunting and exploring around the coastal farm. Photos supplied



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WHAT'S COMING UP

June 2023

- 2 Matawhero Sheep Sale
- 7 Mokairau Hereford Bull Sale
- 7 Wilencote Hereford Bull Sale
- 9 Matawhero Sheep Sale
- 10 Matawhero Saturday Auction
- 14-17 Mystery Creek Fieldays
- 16 Matawhero Sheep Sale
- 20 Matawhero Cattle Sale
- 23 Matawhero Sheep Sale
- 26 Kaharau Angus Bull Sale
- 26 Tangihau Angus Bull Sale
- 27 Whangara Angus Bull Sale
- 27 Turihaua Angus Bull Sale
- 28 Turiroa Angus Bull Sale Wairoa
- 28 Kenhardt Angus Bull Sale Nuhaka
- 30 Matawhero Sheep Sale

July 2023

- 4 Matawhero Cattle Sale
- 7 Matawhero Sheep Sale
- 21 Matawhero Sheep Sale
- 28 Matawhero Sheep Sale

August 2023

- 1 Matawhero Cattle Sale
- 4 Matawhero Sheep Sale
- 11 Matawhero Sheep Sale
- 12 Matawhero Saturday Auction
- 18 Matawhero Sheep Sale
- 25 Matawhero Sheep Sale



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