

# LIFE, FOOD AND FARMING AT ROYALBURN

Pages 5-7

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# FROM THE EDITOR

WITH Claire Inkson – OPINION



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# From our paddocks to yours

There's something wonderfully imperfect about a rural Christmas.

It never unfolds with the polished ease of a magazine spread — and that's precisely what makes it special. While the rest of the country might be worrying about table settings or matching serviettes, our version tends to be a bit messy, a bit loud and very kiwi.

It's kids racing around on motorbikes, the smell of sunscreen and silage mingling in the heat, dogs circling the ham with tactical precision, and someone remembering mid-morning that a gate still needs fixing before the nor'wester gets up.

Lunch is served when the jobs are done — or at least paused — and somehow it all works out.

It has been a big year for rural families. The weather has been unpredictable, the workloads have been relentless, and the emotional load many people carry has been heavier than most will ever admit out loud.

Yet across the South Island, I've seen the same thing repeated: neighbours showing up, communities stepping in, people doing what needs to be done without fuss or fanfare. Rural New Zealand has always thrived on collaboration, shared effort, and a quiet understanding that none of us is an island.

But Christmas has a way of magnifying both joy and absence. While many households will be full, loud, and overflowing with the usual rural energy, others will feel the ache of

someone missing — a chair at the table that once was filled. Whether that loss is recent or long-carried, whether it's a family member, a friend, or simply someone who no longer walks the same track with you, that empty space is real.

If that's part of your story this year, please know you're not alone. Rural life is built on connection, and there are people, neighbours, and organisations — including the Rural Support Trust — ready to offer a listening ear, a cuppa, or a hand when the days feel heavy.

I hope Christmas brings you connection, joy and space for rest. The warmth of shared meals. Kids running through sprinklers, paddocks humming with summer life, or the sweet relief of sitting under the shade of a tree with not much to do for a moment. I hope you feel a sense of pride that as Kiwis sit down for Christmas dinner, you contributed even in some small way to the food on their plates. These small, fleeting moments are the ones that anchor us every day, not just in the festive season.

As we wrap up 2025, I want to say thank you for welcoming the Rural Guardian into your homes, sheds, and daily routines. Thank you for reading, for sharing your stories, and for supporting a publication that is proud of our country's farmers and firmly grounded in the heart of New Zealand. It's a privilege to tell your stories, and one I don't take lightly.

From my family to yours, I wish you a safe, restful Christmas and a fresh, optimistic start to 2026.



Be part of our growing rural community — follow @ruralguardian on Instagram and Facebook for more real-life stories, farm inspiration, lifestyle features and what's coming up in the next issue.

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Geoff Haywood, Project Manager

Photo: Supplied.

## ACL proves culture and compliance build stronger foundations

**ACL has built a strong reputation as a workplace where people feel supported, respected, and encouraged to grow.**

Conversations with team leaders Jane Jolly and Aaron Cairns reveal a company that places equal value on its people, its customers, and its community.

Culture is often the first thing visitors notice.

Staff speak proudly about the positive atmosphere and the strong sense of teamwork that guides the business each day.

This culture has been shaped carefully over time, with a focus on safety, quality, and development.

A major part of ACL's success comes from earning three internationally recognised ISO standards for quality, environmental care, and health and safety.

These standards require clear procedures, strong systems, and a commitment to doing the job right.

"For customers, it means ACL consistently delivers work that meets strict global expectations and New Zealand requirements," Aaron said.

Safety sits at the heart of the company.

ACL has held its health and safety certification for almost a decade, supported by detailed training for all team members.

Our staff learn how to operate safely at heights, in confined spaces, and with specialised equipment.

"These skills help ensure every person on site is protected and confident in the work they do," says Aaron.

Environmental care is also a priority.

ACL runs recycling programs, reuses materials where possible, and manages waste responsibly.

The company offers sustainable product options, helping customers choose services that support a cleaner future.

These efforts strengthen ACL's position when competing for large projects, where environmental standards are increasingly important.

For clients, the benefit is clear.

The team arrive with the right training, the right tools, and the knowledge to follow proven procedures.

When improvements are needed, ACL reviews its processes and looks for smarter, safer ways to work.

The company aims to keep moving forward, not simply

repeat old methods.

Staff well-being is supported through programs such as WorkWell, which gathers feedback directly from employees.

"Even in a tight labour market, these initiatives have helped ACL keep experienced staff and attract new talent."

New workers join a two-year Sitemates program that checks in regularly to ensure they are supported and confident.

Team members also receive access to physiotherapy, a yearly well-being grant, and help with doctor visits.

With strong values, clear pathways for growth, and a commitment to excellence, ACL continues to set a high standard for both customers and staff.

"The more engaged people are, the more they enjoy coming to work — and that shows in everything we do,"

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# Funding fuels Hurunui ag-tech start-up

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Amua, a Canterbury start-up based on a farm near Waiau in the Hurunui district is developing world-first wearable technology for cows that could change how farmers manage nitrogen on farm.

For Amua co-founder and chief executive Roger Johnson, a North Canterbury farmer, the idea grew from a desire to find a practical, farmer-led solution.

"We're a bunch of farmers working on this for other farmers. The whole idea is to use what we've already got on farm, turning a natural resource into something that grows more pasture and saves money on fertiliser."

Amua has secured \$1.2 million in seed funding from AgriZeroNZ to accelerate the development of its smart device, designed to repurpose nitrogen in cow urine as fertiliser.

By dispersing concentrated urine patches across the paddock, the device has the potential to deliver the same pasture growth as synthetic fertiliser, while dramatically reducing environmental impacts.

Modelling by AgResearch suggests reductions in nitrous oxide emissions of up to 95 percent and nitrate leaching by 93 percent.

Johnson says it makes little sense for New Zealand to rely so heavily on imported nitrogen when a rich natural source already exists within farm systems.

"About 70 percent of nitrogen used in New Zealand is imported, yet we're sitting on an incredible nitrogen resource right here on our own farms."

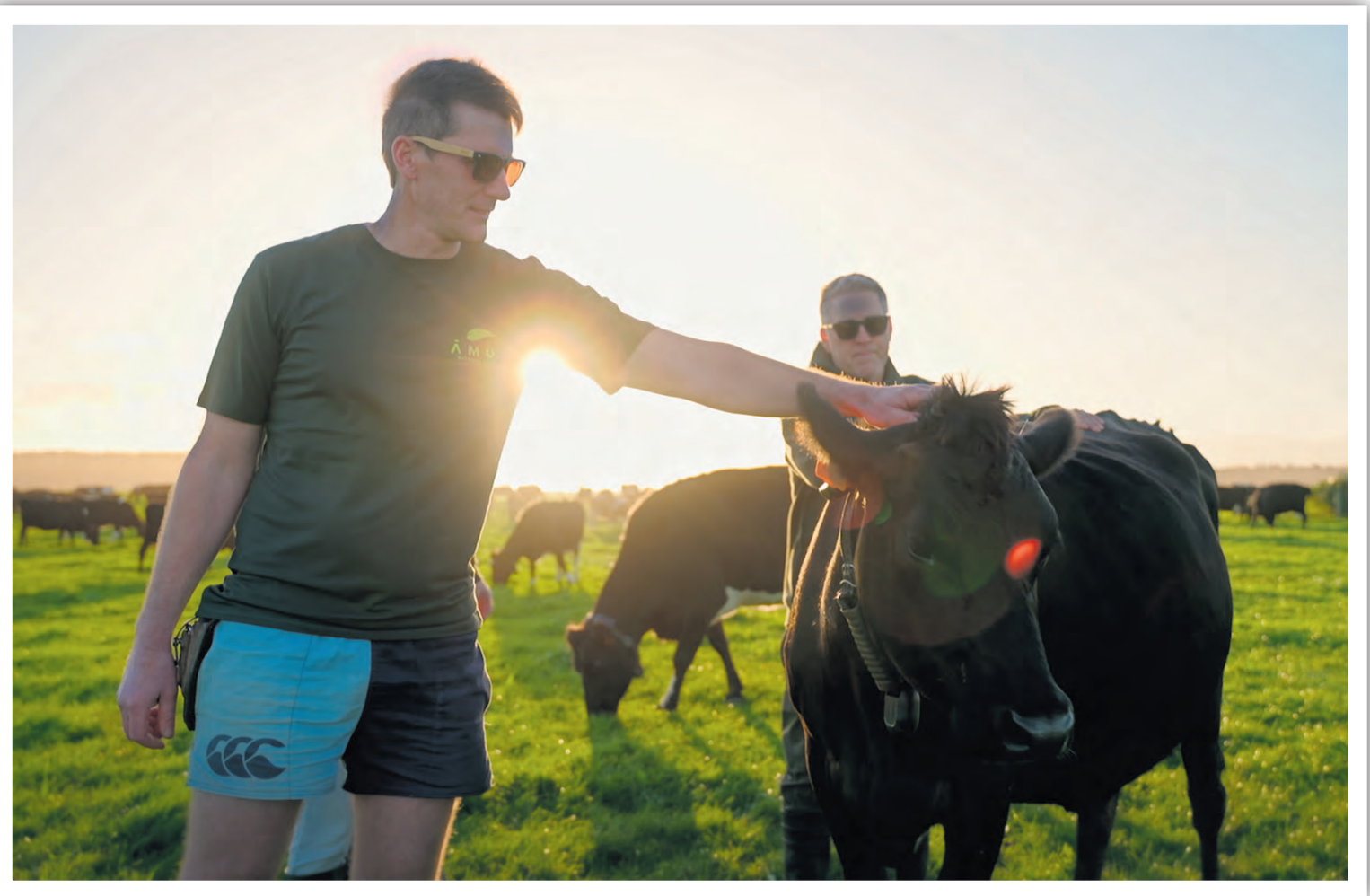
"This isn't about methane. It's a simple, practical solution to help farmers cut costs and reduce nitrogen loss at the same time."

While details remain under wraps until patents are finalised, Johnson says more than two years of research support the technology's potential.

"We've made some big claims on our website, but they're real and backed by more than two years of research. It's exciting, but we just have to be careful until the patent process is complete."

The \$1.2 million investment from AgriZeroNZ is part of a seed-funding round to move the project toward a minimum viable product (a basic but functional prototype) and pilot farm trials in 2026.

AgriZeroNZ chief executive Wayne McNee says Amua



North Canterbury farmer Roger Johnson says it makes little sense for New Zealand to rely so heavily on imported nitrogen when a rich natural source already exists within farm systems. PHOTOS SUPPLIED

By dispersing concentrated urine patches across the paddock, the device has the potential to deliver the same pasture growth as synthetic fertiliser while dramatically reducing environmental impacts.



AgriZero chief executive Wayne McKee describes Amua as a 'brilliant example of Kiwi ingenuity'.

represents a fresh approach to tackling a longstanding challenge.

"Amua is a brilliant example of Kiwi ingenuity to tackle a common challenge on-farm and potentially deliver a range of environmental and economic benefits," he said.

"Methane gets a lot of attention in the emissions landscape, but cutting back nitrous oxide can also play an important role in lowering

our overall emissions and meeting the targets set by some of our biggest export customers."

Economic Growth Minister Nicola Willis also praised the innovation, calling it an example of grassroots ingenuity at work.

"This is Kiwi innovation at its best: smart technology designed on the farm, for the farm, turning waste into a valuable fertiliser

and maintaining New Zealand's leadership in low-emissions pasture-based farming," Willis said.

Johnson says the focus remains on delivering a practical, cost-effective tool for farmers.

"What we're doing has to be a win for farm revenue. If we're asking farmers to change how they've managed nitrogen for decades, it needs to be a no

brainer, more pasture for less cost.

Johnson says the technology is about practical innovation, not theory.

"This is just Kiwi farmers helping Kiwi farmers."

"We'll be able to share more detail once further patents are published next year, and then we can really show people what this technology can do."

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# BAYLEYS CANTERBURY AUCTION SUCCESS STORY

## Kyle Park Dairy Farm – A Record Rural Result

Kyle Park presented a compelling opportunity to acquire a large-scale, well-established 394-hectare dairy farm in a prime Canterbury location. Converted to dairy in 2016 following a long history of intensive arable and vegetable production, the property now operates as an A2 herd under Synlait's 'Lead with Pride Gold Elite' programme, reflecting its high standards of management and sustainability.

### FARM OPERATION AND PERFORMANCE

The farm consistently milks 1,350 cows, achieving a strong annual production average of 625,640kgMS. Environmental risks are managed through a comprehensive set of standard operating procedures, ensuring both compliance and ease of management.

Kyle Park's design supports operational efficiency, with a network of all-weather lanes, including newly capped sections and regular pivot track maintenance, allowing seamless stock movement across the property.

Reliable, cost-effective water is a key feature, with the primary supply drawn from low-cost bore water, supplemented by additional supply through the Acton Irrigation Scheme. This dual-source system ensures consistent pasture growth and reliable feed supply throughout the year.

### INFRASTRUCTURE AND ASSETS

Infrastructure across the farm is of an exceptionally high standard, featuring:

- An 80-bail rotary dairy shed fitted with Waikato plant and automatic cup removers.
- Protrack system, circular yard with auto wash, and an automatic drafting gate for efficient herd management.
- Well-maintained support facilities and housing designed for a large-scale operation.

### FINANCIAL AND OPERATIONAL STRENGTH

Kyle Park has consistently demonstrated strong profitability, sitting in a "sweet spot" for performance based on its stocking rate, production levels, and supplementary feed inputs. The farm's efficient systems and quality infrastructure support sustainable returns and operational resilience.

### MARKETING CAMPAIGN

A widespread and high-impact marketing campaign was executed through Bayleys' nationwide Country portfolio, complemented by a targeted media release and strategic placements across multiple publications including The Christchurch Press, Selwyn Times, Farmers Weekly and the Ashburton Courier.

The campaign was further enhanced by a rural mailbox drop, social media advertising, and professional photography, video, and reels to engage a broad audience of potential buyers.

### MARKET ENGAGEMENT

Interest in Kyle Park was significant, reflected in the well-attended on-farm open day, which drew over

20 agribusiness bankers and rural professionals. The combination of professional presentation, comprehensive marketing reach, and the property's outstanding attributes ensured Kyle Park attracted genuine buyer engagement from across the country.

### AUCTION SUCCESS

This campaign culminated in the successful sale of Kyle Park under the hammer on Thursday 6 November, at Bayleys House on Deans Avenue. The auction room was packed with an engaged crowd of interested buyers and curious onlookers.

Bidding opened at \$24,000,000 and, guided by the auctioneer and clear instructions from five active parties, quickly climbed to \$30,000,000, at which point the property was called "on the market."

Momentum continued to build and with 44 further bids placed, the hammer finally fell at \$34,400,000. In total, 70 bids were placed to get Kyle Park sold.

The exceptional result of \$87,241 per hectare underscored the strength of demand for premium Canterbury dairy assets and highlighted the effectiveness of Bayleys' comprehensive marketing strategy and skilled auction process.

The Bayleys team have several unsuccessful parties who are in a cash unconditional position – if you are looking to divest, please get in touch with any of our agents.

The Bayleys Canterbury rural and lifestyle team. Feel free to get in touch.



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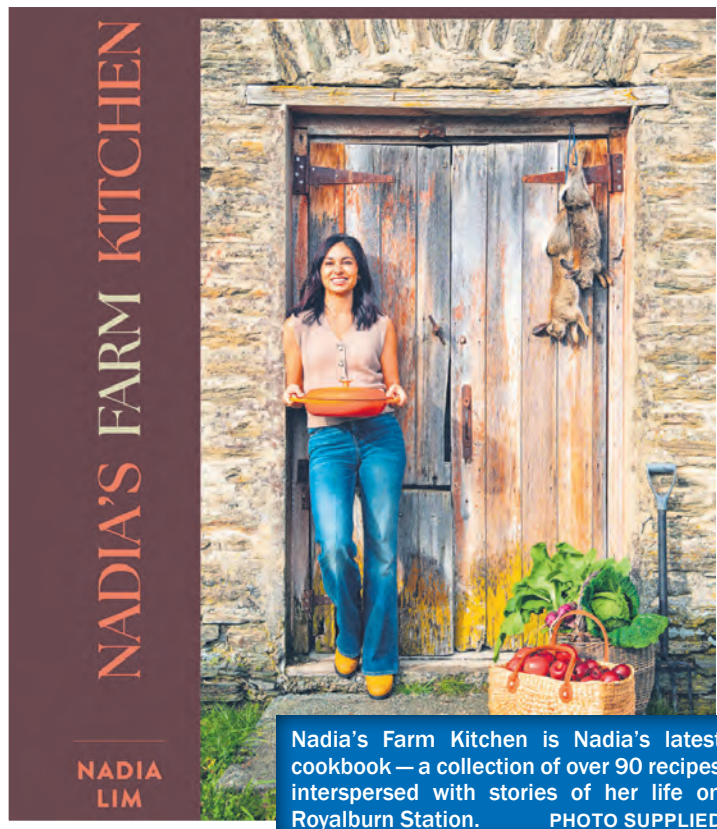
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# Nadia Lim: The Real Story of Life on the Land



Nadia's Farm Kitchen is Nadia's latest cookbook — a collection of over 90 recipes interspersed with stories of her life on Royalburn Station. PHOTO SUPPLIED



**Claire Inkson**  
RURAL EDITOR

“Farming is like being a slave to the most beautiful master,” says Nadia Lim. “It consumes you. It’s your home, your workplace, your life. But it’s so beautiful, and it teaches you so many lessons.”

At Royalburn Station, perched high above Arrowtown on the Crown Range, Lim’s days move with the rhythm of the land — and the happy chaos of three young boys. It’s a long way from the TV studios and My Food Bag boardroom, where New Zealand first came to know her.

Now, alongside her husband Carlos Bagrie, Lim is raising not just crops and animals but a new conversation about transparency, connection, and pride in where our food comes from — a journey

documented in the popular television series *Nadia’s Farm* and its paddock-to-plate spin-off, *Nadia’s Farm Kitchen*.

That latest small-screen success has led to a new cookbook, *Nadia’s Farm Kitchen*. Recipes are created from the soil up, driven by what she, Bagrie and their team harvest, forage and raise on Royalburn, and by the deep satisfaction of producing food with integrity.

“All these recipes are very seasonally driven. It’s what we harvest, produce, grow, and raise on the farm, and how we cook with it. And where we live, in Central Otago, you have to eat seasonally, because unlike in the city, everything’s not at your fingertips.”

For Lim, it’s about showing what really happens beyond the farm gate and why telling those stories truthfully and without polish matters so much. The book is part recipe collection, part love letter to rural life, and part honest look at what farming really involves, with each chapter of recipes following the four seasons, sprinkled with stories of life on the farm.

“What makes the book very

different is that whilst it’s got over 90 recipes in it, it’s also got a whole bunch of farming stories about our learnings from our farming journey.”

## Telling the good farming story

If *Nadia’s Farm* has one mission, it’s to show the real heart of farming: the pride, the complexity and the people behind every plate of food.

In the same vein as the iconic long-running series *Country Calendar*, Lim and Bagrie have achieved the seemingly impossible: creating a television programme that resonates with both those working the land and their urban counterparts. Their take is much more personal — relatable, honest, and inviting viewers to become invested in the story, bringing the highs and lows of life on the land into Kiwis’ living rooms each week.

Lim believes the story of New Zealand farming has too often been told by those outside the farm gate. It’s time, she says, for farmers to take it back.

*Continued on page 6.*

## WIN 1 OF 8 COPIES OF NADIA’S FARM KITCHEN

Christmas is just around the corner, and we’re celebrating by giving Rural Guardian readers the chance to win one of eight copies of Nadia Lim’s brand-new cookbook, **Nadia’s Farm Kitchen**. Beautifully written and full of seasonal, down-to-earth recipes, it’s a perfect addition to any rural kitchen — or a great gift to tuck under the tree.

To enter, simply head to the **Rural Guardian Facebook page** and follow the instructions on the giveaway post. Good luck, and happy Christmas cooking.

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Nadia Lim her black labrador Winston.

PHOTOS SUPPLIED



If Nadia's Farm has one mission, it's to show the real heart of farming: the pride, the complexity and the people behind every plate of food.

**Continued from page 5.**

"When the truth needs to be told, you have to be bold and brave — come out swinging and speak up."

Through her series, books, and farm tours, Lim has become a bridge between producers and consumers — a role she describes as both a responsibility and a privilege.

"The story has to be told right, and the information has to be right. We don't preach. We don't say there's a right or wrong way. We give all the information and reasons why, and then it's up to the eater to decide."

That willingness to show every side of farming at Royalburn includes meat production and the farm's own micro-abattoir — the kind of raw subject that it is tempting to brush under the rug, but Lim says those are the stories

that need to be told most of all.

"If you hide it, that's what makes it taboo," Lim says. "If you're going to eat meat, you should know. It's not something to be hidden."

Lim believes the future of farming depends on those stories being told clearly, compassionately, and often.

"We need to take consumers on the journey with us," she says. "If you leave bits of information out, those gaps will be made up for you. And that information may be incorrect."

That means farmers, who typically like to keep their heads down, have to step out of their tractor cabs and into the spotlight.

"People often think, 'No one's going to be interested in what we're doing,' or that talking about success is showing off. But think about it from the public or the eater's point of view. They want

to know; they actually want that information. So, it's not about you, it's about them. Let them have the information because that's what they want. They deserve to know. If we don't tell our stories, someone else will fill in the gaps, and they might get it wrong."

Lim believes there is, in some instances, a "black and white" narrative around agriculture, with farmers painted as "good" or "bad" based on their sector or farming system. Educating consumers that every farm is different and that practices are often driven by the unique land and climate in which farmers operate is key.

"Farming isn't black and white," she says. "It can be dangerous to put farmers into boxes like organic, conventional or regenerative. Our philosophy is we wouldn't sell anything we wouldn't eat ourselves."

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"We like to be spray-free, and our climate allows that, but other farmers may not have that option. No land is the same. Sometimes it's good to have all those things in your toolbox and use them at the right time. There's usually a reason things are done a certain way."

That openness runs through everything they do at Royalburn. They host open-gate tours and corporate visits, often tied to charity fundraisers, inviting the public to see exactly how their food is grown.

"I love seeing people learn," Lim says. "It lights me up when someone goes, 'Ah, I get it.' Farming's not something you can understand from a distance. You have to see it."

### The hardest and best job

For all its rewards, life on the land also tests you in ways few other jobs can. Farming, she admits, isn't for the faint-hearted.

"You always win some, you lose some," she says. "It's different to any other industry we've been in. It's less predictable, more out of your control, and the return on investment isn't great."

It's a love-hate relationship with the land that many farmers can relate to.

"Sometimes we feel like we're such slaves to it because we cannot leave the farm. And it consumes you because it's 365 days a year, and it's ongoing. It's not a project thing where you just do something and then you can leave it and move on. It's a living, breathing organism."

Lim says that despite the challenges, the couple never considered turning their backs on rural life.

"So many of our friends and

people in business that we know think we are crazy. Why are you doing this? Why are you handcuffing yourself to this huge mortgage and working so hard? Because other people who don't have that love for the land, it just doesn't make sense to them. But there are people out there who will get it. I don't feel like we could ever sell it."

The farming community, she says, makes it all worth it.

"We're so grateful. Everyone's been incredibly supportive and generous. Carlos can call farmers all over the country for advice, and they do the same with us. We've had nothing but encouragement."

She dedicated the book to the farmers of New Zealand, opening with one of her favourite quotes: "If you're lucky, you might only need a lawyer or a doctor once a year, but every day, three times a day, you need a farmer."

### The lighter side of farm life

Farming might be serious business, but at Royalburn, there's always room for a bit of fun. When the couple planted a paddock of sunflowers by the roadside, they didn't expect what happened next.

"Every time we grow sunflowers, hundreds of people stop to take photos," Lim laughs. "A surprising number of them take semi-nude photos in the paddock. It's definitely become a thing."

Rather than get frustrated, she turned it into something positive. Lim organised the *Nude Sunflower Calendar*, featuring 13 brave locals posing among the blooms, with proceeds going to 13 different charities — from the Cancer Society to volunteer

firefighters and disability support organisations.

"It started as a bit of a laugh, but it's raised money for causes close to people's hearts," she says. "That's the beauty of it — something light-hearted that also does good."

### Who would Nadia invite to her dinner table?

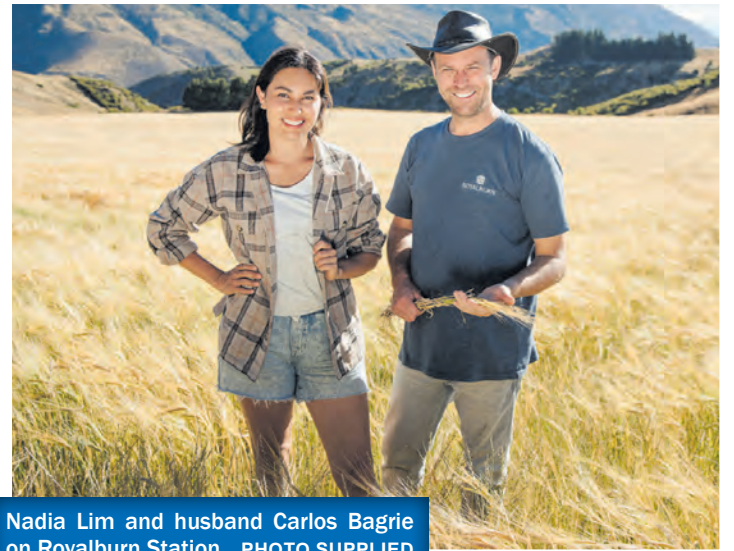
When asked who she'd most like to share a meal with, Lim pauses. "Jamie Oliver," she says with a smile. "He was my big inspiration when I was young. I started watching him when I was about twelve and decided that's what I wanted to do — write cookbooks. I'm lucky that I'm one of those people who knew what I wanted to do from a very young age."

But if she could invite anyone, living or gone, the answer comes more softly. "My dad. He never got to see what we've built here or meet his grandchildren. I would do anything to be able to see my dad again."

### Christmas at Royalburn

By December, the pace at Royalburn eases just enough for Lim to savour her favourite time of year. These days, she keeps Christmas simple, swapping elaborate menus for shared effort and good company.

"I order My Food Bag's Christmas menu because it's easy. Once you've done it, it's very hard to go back," she says. "It's so different from, say, 14 years ago. I used to do everything, and I used to be exhausted from it. It would be this massive three or four-day planning, often weeks in advance. And then I'd have to go to all these different shops to get all the different ingredients. And



Nadia Lim and husband Carlos Bagrie on Royalburn Station. PHOTO SUPPLIED

then there would be queues in the supermarket, and sometimes things would run out, and then I'd have to come up with a substitute, and then I'd have to cook the whole meal myself."

Now, instead of being stuck in the kitchen, she delegates recipes and ingredients to guests, leaving her to cook only a few dishes herself and enjoy the family festivities.

"So now I just order My Food Bag, and I do my add-ons, like in the book."

Her Christmas table always includes a few family traditions: her Aunt Pippa's trifle, "which has an entire bottle of dry sherry in it", and, of course, lamb from the farm.

There's also a ritual of chopping down one of the wilding pines that creep over their land — and even that has a deeper meaning.

"People talk about retiring land from livestock to help the environment," she says. "But on

our property, the livestock keep the wilding pines down. Next door, where the land's been retired, thousands of wildings have to be sprayed. There is so much chemical used. It's one of the stories I tell people: You can't just say getting rid of livestock is good for the environment. There's no right or wrong. You've got to see the whole picture."

Then there is her annual tiramisu, leftovers of which she enjoys every year for Boxing Day breakfast.

"It's one of those things you have to try before you die, with a coffee sitting in the garden. It's amazing."

**Nadia's Farm Kitchen by Nadia Lim, published by Nude Food Inc, RRP \$55.00. Available at all good bookstores or from [www.nadialim.com](http://www.nadialim.com).**

**The Nude Sunflower Charity Calendar will be available to order via [nudesunflowercalendar.co.nz](http://nudesunflowercalendar.co.nz)**

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As we head into the festive season, I want to take a moment to reflect on the year that's been and share my heartfelt thanks to all our farmers and rural communities across New Zealand. This year hasn't been without its challenges, but your hard work, resilience, and ingenuity have kept our primary sector strong and thriving. You are the backbone of our economy and the heart of so many communities, and I'm incredibly proud of what you've achieved.

From dealing with unpredictable weather to navigating global market changes, you've shown the grit and determination that makes New Zealand agriculture world-class. What you do isn't just about producing food and fibre — it's about supporting families, sustaining rural towns, and creating opportunities for the next generation.

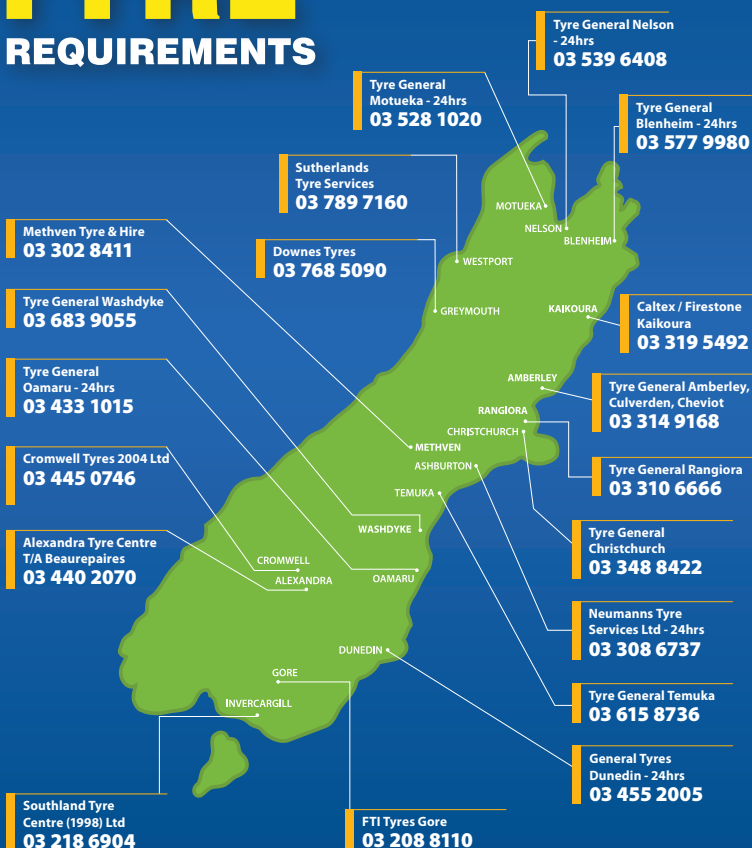
As summer rolls in and harvest begins, I hope you can take some time to relax, recharge, and enjoy the company of loved ones. These moments matter, especially after a year of long days and hard work. Looking ahead to 2026, the Government is committed to standing alongside you — investing in resilience, backing sustainable farming practices, and opening new trade doors so your sector can keep leading on the global stage.

Thank you for everything you do for New Zealand. Wishing you a safe, joyful Christmas and a New Year full of good weather, successful harvests, and plenty of time to enjoy the beauty of our rural landscapes.

**Hon Nicola Grigg MP**  
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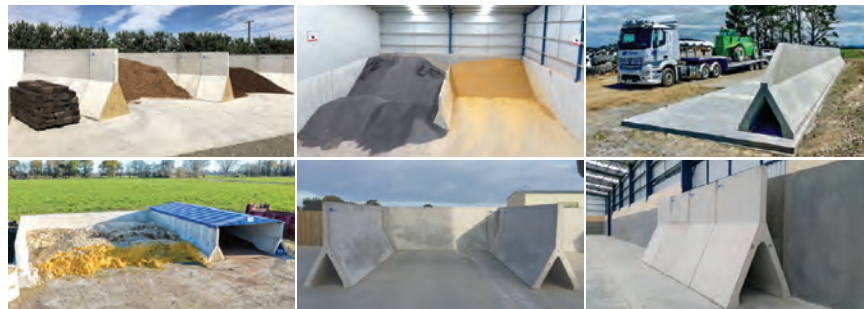
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**Young Farmers are the future of New Zealand agriculture, so each issue we shine a spotlight on a Young Farmers Club member. Today we chat to Mackenzie Young Farmers Club member Ella Thomas.**

**1** What is the name of your club, and how long have you been a member?

I'm part of the Mackenzie Young Farmers Club and have been a member for almost two years now.

**2** What has been the highlight for you of joining Young Farmers? What are the benefits and experiences that you feel have helped you most?

Definitely the people. When I first moved to the area, I didn't know anyone, and now it feels like I know everyone. The friendships, connections, and opportunities that have come from being part of Young Farmers have been huge. It's such a great community to be involved in, and it really makes you feel part of something bigger.

**3** How did you become involved in agriculture?

I grew up in the city, but during high school, I started spending weekends with boarding school friends on their family farms. I loved it so much that after I finished school, I went to work on a high-country station myself, and that's what really set me on this path.

**4** What is your job now? Tell us about your role, and what your journey has been like so far.

I now work in tourism in Tekapo but still live on-farm, so I'm still involved in day-to-day farming life. Most of my friends, my partner, and even the wider circle I spend time with are all part of the farming community. It's such a strong, supportive culture, and I honestly can't imagine not being part of it now.

**5** What do you think the future of farming will look like, and what would you like to see happening in New Zealand agriculture going forward?

I think we'll see more integration between farming and tourism, with more farms opening their doors to visitors. Many already offer farm stays, horse treks, and guided tours that let people really experience rural life. There's so much value in giving people the chance to connect and see a different lifestyle. I'd love to see more collaboration like that; it's such a great way to bridge the gap between rural and



urban communities.

**6** What are your future plans?

My goal is to travel and work across ag-based tourism businesses, learning how different operations work around the world. I think that mix of agriculture and hospitality is where a lot of opportunities are heading, and I want to be part of that.

**7** Who has been your biggest inspiration in agriculture, and why?

It's hard to pick just one person, it's really been the people I've met along the way. From managers to friends I've worked alongside, so many have inspired me with their work ethic, knowledge, and passion for the land. It's that community of people that keeps me motivated and proud to be involved in the industry.

**Nomination** — Ella is working tirelessly to pull together our bark up event this year. Her enthusiasm is contagious and she has managed to pull together an awesome team to help put the event on. She offers to help and support all team members at every opportunity. Without her organisational skills and ability to encourage everyone to work together, we would be lost.

We really appreciate all she is doing for the club, not just for the bark up but in general. Her dedication to the MYF club is unwavering and we are a better club because of it.



HUGH JACKSON, WINNER OF FMG YOUNG FARMER OF THE YEAR 2025.

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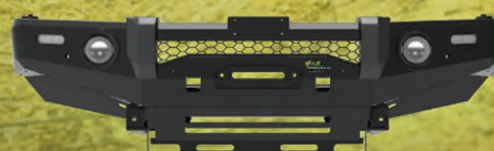


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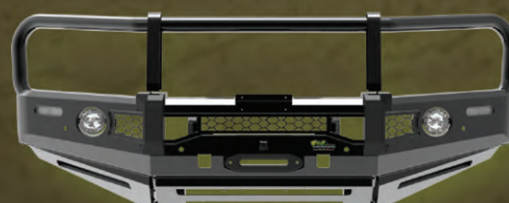
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# Blessings to count as 2025 draws to a close

**WAYNE LANGFORD**  
FEDERATED FARMERS NZ PRESIDENT

**A**s the year winds down, it's worth taking stock of what's gone right for New Zealand farmers.

Strong returns for our meat and dairy show the world wants quality protein — produced with good grass-fed practices, high animal welfare standards, and environmental care.

With those boosted export prices, farmers have been able to re-invest in their businesses, retire debt and maybe take on an extra team member or two — all good news for the New Zealand economy.

I do acknowledge that returns haven't been so rosy for our arable farmers. It remains a mission of Federated Farmers and allied partners to wake up more consumers — and processors — to the quality grains and cereals grown on our shores, and to support 'local'.

Federated Farmers' advocacy efforts on behalf of our food producers and rural communities have paid big dividends this year.

After helping to secure a Parliamentary inquiry into banking, we pushed for measures that will increase competition in lending to the agricultural sector. We also notched up a win with proposals to relax overly conservative bank capital restrictions. This will cut \$9000 a year off an average farm mortgage of \$4.5 million.

If farmers and other agricultural borrowers are paying less in interest, they have more money to invest in environmental protection

and production, helping achieve the nation's goal of doubling primary export revenue.

The Government has also been responsive to our campaigns to cut RMA red tape delays and costs, to rein in the blanketing of productive farmland in carbon-only pines, and to set methane emission reduction targets based on science, not ideology.

Little wonder that surveys show a marked upswing in farmer confidence.

If the Government is in a mood to deliver other 'presents' in time for Christmas, I'd suggest they focus on fixing the consent crisis affecting farmers up and down the country. We've just launched a petition calling on the Government to have all existing resource consents roll over until our resource management laws are overhauled.

Another 'gift' to farmers — and the country — would be committing more funding to fight the wilding pine scourge.

Bringing in the changes we've been seeking — and were promised — to make KiwiSaver fairer for those New Zealanders in service tenancies would be very welcome too.

On behalf of Federated Farmers, I want to wish all New Zealanders a merry and safe Christmas.

A special shout-out to those South Island farming and other families hit hard in the October storms. Best wishes for your recovery efforts — reach out to us and Rural Support if you're feeling overwhelmed. You'll find fellow Kiwis ready to help.



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Alan Jones (left) and brother Robert took over the business in 2003. PHOTO SUPPLIED

# Hands-on beats hands-off

**In Marlborough, second-generation grower Alan Jones has built Garlico into a diversified operation spanning garlic, shallots, onion seed, honey and contracting, all while keeping the ethos simple: quality first, low debt, and a hands-on approach that adjusts with the soil under the tyres.**



**Claire Inkson**  
RURAL EDITOR

## Garlico's story begins with family

Alan Jones and his brother Robert stepped in when their

father, Peter, and cousin Tony Tripe moved to sell the pioneering Marlborough garlic business in 2003.

"Dad and his cousin Tony Tripe were selling the business in 2003," Alan says. "Robert and I already had a company called Thymebank, growing lettuces and herbs. When Dad decided to retire, we stepped in and took it on."

Fast forward to 2025, and the business has scaled and adapted to match the changing market, input costs and demand.

Leasing has pushed land costs

higher, so the brothers focused on lifting yield per square metre and matching equipment to the job.

"We're growing more per square metre now. Leasing land has become expensive, so our planting techniques and harvesters have adapted," Alan says.

## Garlic remains the core

Garlico grows Pesto and Printanor varieties which are dried and treated on-site, but the business now includes shallots, onion seed, Old Road Honey, and a contracting arm.

While the Marlborough climate suits garlic, Alan says growing the crop is a tricky business.

"You can't play catch-up with garlic. Weed control and rust management are critical," he says. "Retailers want good-sized bulbs, so you must avoid stress at every stage. It's very hands-on."

Harvest comes in January, when the crop is mechanically lifted, binned and pushed straight onto forced-air dryers, a step Alan says is essential both for flavour development and weather protection.

Most of the product is sold domestically via wholesalers, as they don't have the scale to meet export demand.

"We don't have the land base to scale that right now. Quality is our

focus."

The business has diversified gradually, adding complementary crops with similar markets and processes to utilise existing machinery. Shallots slot naturally into the same markets as garlic, while onion seed leverages the same bins and dryers.

## Honey, grapes and machinery

A need for bees to pollinate crops has led to a new income stream: honey.

"Onion seed needs bees, and hive hire kept getting dearer, so we invested in our own hives," Alan says.

"Most honey goes to wholesalers, but we also jar and sell under Old Road Honey on our website."

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Garlic is sold wholesale to the domestic market. PHOTO SUPPLIED

Being in the heart of Marlborough grape country provided the opportunity for contract vineyard development work, which has seen investment in larger-scale machinery.

The slowdown in grapes has softened demand, but the machinery still pays its way on their own leased blocks.

And because the brothers run the gear themselves, they can respond instantly to what they feel beneath the wheels.

"When you're in the seat, you notice changing soil conditions and adjust the machine on the spot. That's vital."

## Popcorn and new opportunities

A new, unexpected crop has recently been added to the mix: popcorn.

A 30-tonne trial has become 200 tonnes, backed by careful handling and a continuous-flow dryer to hit the moisture sweet spot.

"Like scratching a balloon, a scored kernel won't pop," Alan says. "There's a science to it, but it's working."

## Strong community ties

In between the farm work, community remains an important focus for the brothers.

Alan has volunteered with the Marlborough A&P Show for 40 years.

"Shows matter, the history, stock

on parade, a day off farm, talking to other farmers. It's community glue."

Robert is equally invested in local rugby, and his son plays for Tasman Mako.

Family involvement continues through the next generation too, with Alan's daughter Emma working in the garlic operation.

## Advice for the next generation

Alan's advice for young farmers? Get your hands dirty, be open to change and keep your debt in check.

"Watch debt and buy the best dirt you can irrigate, not the most acres of poor soil. Hands-on beats hands-off. Some people spend too much time in the business and not enough on it. You need to keep looking for better techniques and kit and be on the first rung of the ladder when markets change."

## Looking ahead

As for Garlico's future? "Steady as she goes. We will keep doing what we do well."

And dinner at Alan's place won't be complete without the hero crop, treated with respect:

"Keep it simple: crushed garlic warmed gently with butter and herbs, then onto a steak. Don't overcook the garlic. Throw it in the pan as the meat comes out and just warm it through."

The business has diversified to include garlic, shallots and onion seed.



The business has diversified to include honey after the need for bees to pollinate crops.



Garlic remains at the core of Garlico's business.



Alan Jones says hands-on beats hands off when it comes to running a successful farming operation.



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## Holly Sandoe

### WHERE AND WHAT ARE YOU FARMING?

I'm a self-employed casual shepherd based in Fairlie working on a range of farms, from High Country to low-land cream country, working with sheep and beef. No day is the same, it's a pretty sweet gig if you ask me!

### WHAT YEAR, MAKE, AND MODEL IS YOUR TRUSTY UTE?

My trusty battler is a mighty fine 2007 Toyota Hilux

### WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE FEATURE (OR QUIRK) ABOUT YOUR UTE?

Due to past modifications to the motor, the Lux needed a 3 inch exhaust fitted so basically wherever I go now people know it's me! It's also like a cat with 9 lives, it just won't die – thankfully, haha.

### WHAT SONG IS ALWAYS ON YOUR PLAYLIST WHEN YOU'RE BEHIND THE WHEEL?

Heck, I love anything with a good beat but if I really had to boil it down, I'm a die-hard rock girl. The Cult - Fire Woman, Ozzy Osbourne, Dorothy, Velvet Revolver, Black Stone Cherry, the list goes on. I usually provide the backing vocals!

### WHAT'S YOUR ULTIMATE ROAD-TRIP SNACK WHEN YOU'RE OUT ON THE FARM OR HEADING TO TOWN?

Hmm good question, I'm not much of a snacker on the road but I do love a good Gold Rush ice cream on travels.

### WHAT'S ALWAYS ROLLING AROUND IN THE BACK SEAT OR TRAY?

Everything. If you can think it, chances are I've got it. Dogbox is usually loaded up with all of the dogs, dry box has all the mechanical and animal health bits and the backseat generally has my 4 year old son, farm wardrobe, work belt and collars and often bags of feed for the animals at home. It's my mobile office!



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## FarmTRX Launches in New Zealand: Affordable Yield Mapping for Existing Combines

Vantage New Zealand has launched FarmTRX, a new retro-fit yield monitoring system, giving farmers and contractors the ability to add modern data-driven functionality to their existing machinery. The system promises simplicity, affordability, and reliable results—three features often missing in traditional yield mapping solutions.

Last harvest, Vantage trialled a demo system with a local customer, and the feedback was clear: FarmTRX is easy to install, straightforward to operate, and produces consistent, actionable data. “From calibration to harvest, the system just worked,” says the team. “No complex setup, no frustration, just results you can trust.”

The retro-fit nature of FarmTRX is particularly significant for New Zealand farmers. With machinery prices rising and replacement cycles extending, more growers are looking to get the most out of what they already own. FarmTRX can be fitted to most combines, old or new, meaning operators can collect detailed yield data without the cost of a new machine.

The system captures yield and moisture information across the paddock and generates automatic maps that can inform decisions about

inputs, rotations, and management practices. Its affordability makes it accessible to smaller farms and contractors who may have previously avoided yield mapping due to cost or complexity.

FarmTRX also reflects a wider trend in New Zealand agriculture: the move toward practical, bolt-on technology solutions. Retro-fit systems like this allow farmers to modernise in incremental, cost-effective ways, extending the life and usefulness of their machinery while capturing the benefits of precision agriculture.

Vantage NZ will support FarmTRX installations nationally, offering guidance and service to ensure operators get accurate, reliable results. The company believes the combination of ease, affordability, and real-world functionality will make it a popular choice this season.

For many growers, FarmTRX isn't just another piece of technology—it's a practical, approachable way to bring modern yield insights to older machinery, make smarter decisions in the paddock, and get more from every hectare. With its New Zealand launch, FarmTRX could be a game-changer for operators looking for high-tech results without high-tech costs.

# A Hands-on approach

CLAIRE INKSON

Many Year 12 and 13 students are beginning to map out their futures - but for those eyeing a career in agriculture, what does preparing for the industry actually look like?

According to Tom Maxwell, Senior Lecturer at Lincoln University, the ag sector is hungry for capable, skilled graduates — particularly for roles such as rural bankers, agronomists, area sales managers and extension workers.

“We have been pretty good at keeping up with what the industry needs whether that student is going to become a farm manager, stock manager, stock agent, soil rep or rural banker,” he says.

That connection between education and industry needs is something Lincoln has honed over time, with some of its degrees including up to 31 weeks of on-farm learning.

“Lincoln's strength for a long time has been linking on-farm practice with theory,”

Maxwell says.

“We deliver a system that is very multifaceted and integrated. It's not just about one aspect of animals, farm management, pest control or plants. It's understanding the vital components of a farm system.”

That blend of knowledge and hands-on experience is exactly what employers are looking for.

“Corporates like Silver Fern Farms and Fonterra require graduates who understand the scientific method and know where to get up-to-date science that separates the wheat from the chaff with regards to what information is available on the internet,” Maxwell explains.

“They want graduates who can talk to farmers, speak their language, be relevant and not waste time when they go on farm.”

Technology is becoming part of the everyday toolkit in agriculture, with artificial intelligence (AI) and automation entering the mix, but Maxwell says that won't replace boots on the ground.



Lincoln University senior lecturer Tom Maxwell says agricultural tertiary education has changed and adapted to what the world requires of New Zealand, rather than what New Zealand needs to do to keep supplying the world. PHOTO SUPPLIED

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## THINKING AG? START HERE

If you're in Year 11, 12 or 13 and thinking about studying agriculture, now's the time to lay the groundwork.

- Pick relevant subjects: Science and maths are key - especially biology. Geography (both physical and human) will give you an edge when it comes to understanding climate, soils and land use.
- Sharpen your skills: Universities like Lincoln want students who can think critically, communicate clearly, and link science with real-world problems. Learn to write reports, interpret data, and ask good questions.
- Get practical: Even unpaid work counts. Help on a farm, in a milking shed or market garden.
- Build strong study habits: Time management, note-taking, and self-discipline now will pay off later when juggling lectures, labs and assignments.
- Do your homework: Visit [lincoln.ac.nz](http://lincoln.ac.nz), attend open days, and enrol early to secure your place.
- If your school doesn't offer ag courses, explore STAR and gateway agricultural courses.



"There is some suggestion that AI will make things like rotational grazing easier and much more automated, but I'm sceptical because there are so many variables that happen on farm," he says.

"Technology and artificial intelligence may make the day job easier, but as soon as you rely on it, you are giving up that critical eye. Good stockmanship comes from spending time with animals, knowing how they move and what the soil type is on that part of the farm."

He also points out that the mental load of a tech-heavy world is something students and future graduates will need to manage.

"Graduates will need to have the ability to balance their daily life with the demand that comes from using devices and AI and just taking a break," he says.

"Knowing your mental health and fostering a really good team culture in a farm or company that services a farm are going to become even more important."

So, how can students best prepare while still at school?

Maxwell says it starts with smart subject choices.

"Science and maths are helpful prerequisites, and biology is key," he says.

"It puts you in good stead if you have a strong appreciation of biology, and you have an idea about geography — the climate and soils — and human geography."

But academic learning isn't everything.

Getting your boots dirty still matters.

"Even if it's unpaid, try and get some experience in a packing shed, or milking some cows."



Lincoln University senior lecturer Tom Maxwell says practical on-farm learning is a core component of Lincoln University course structure. PHOTOS SUPPLIED

"It all helps."

Lincoln's graduate profile reflects this philosophy.

Students are shaped into what Maxwell describes as "generalised specialists" — individuals who understand complex agricultural systems and can apply their knowledge in practical situations.

"We want students to be able to synthesise information and write a clear report on a particular topic," he says.

"We want them to be able to talk about soil management in Canterbury but also know that soils in Waikato and Southland are different, and how that affects what you can do on-farm."

And while land use is changing, and technology might influence the tools, the fundamentals remain the same.

"Dairy, sheep and beef are going to be the mainstay for a long, long time. We want to make sure people are aware of the different types of farms, and why they vary," Maxwell says.

"Education has changed too and adapted to what the world requires of New Zealand, rather than what New Zealand needs to do to keep supplying the world. We have adapted, but it's still that same strong science and research that drives and underpins New Zealand's farming systems."



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# Shedding sheep reduce workload

Central Southland farmers Grant and Lauren Kean are investing heavily in hardy, strong sheep genetics to meet the needs of their environment. In 2011, while working under well-renowned Coopworth breeder Kerry Dunlop, Grant became involved in the development of a shedding sheep that could naturally thrive without the use of chemicals and with minimal human intervention.

The base of the project began by sourcing Wiltshire rams to breed the wool off Dunlop's flock of Coopworth-Texels, which had been fully recorded since the 1960s.

"Top shedding genetics back then were difficult to source".

Although there were some good examples of farmers breeding shedding sheep successfully on a commercial scale, navigating through that initial period was challenging, Grant says. "We were really just learning about shedding sheep, and there weren't many resources available, so it was about trying to avoid making too many wrong turns".

Fifteen years later, Grant and Lauren are the sole owners of the Enfield flock and have moved it to their family farm, which runs 2,000 breeding ewes, including 450 fully SIL recorded ewes that form the operation's "engine room". "The stud flock's job is to do it tough so we can identify the thrivers to use in our commercial flock".

Since removing wool, Grant estimates that they have, in turn, reduced their workload by close to 50%. Overall production has

remained relatively stable, with either small gains or losses in certain aspects. "We've tried really hard to capture all those good traits that our base breed provided and then add to them where we can," Grant says. While he would like to see some improvement in lambs' 100-day weaning weights, this is somewhat negated by improved carcass with lambs yielding up to 1.5kg heavier on the hooks.

One observation since switching to shedding sheep is a noticeable increase in lamb survival, a highly desirable trait in their environment. The last two lambings, he says, have been brutal on newborn lambs in Southland.

Survival rates have been really pleasing and "a bit of a surprising consequence of moving to shedders". One of the biggest concerns Grant hears from other

farmers considering the transition is the assumption that shedding sheep can be susceptible to inclement weather. "If anything, it seems to be the opposite." While he would like some official research to be done to confirm, he observes a slightly thicker skin, which may be beneficial.

In recent years, the Enfield stud has been selling rams to other commercial farmers from

Southland to Northland. This responsibility has inspired a strong focus to find improved genetics. Four International shedding breeds (Exlana, Easycare, Australian White and Nudie) were imported and trialled for five years. Two failed and were culled. Meanwhile, the other two, which have thrived beyond expectation, will now be slowly and carefully integrated into their composite shedding flock.



Grant and Lauren Kean.



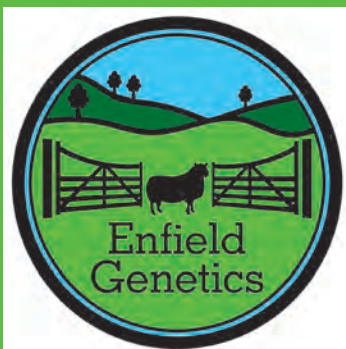
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# Breeding for growth, grit and good constitution at Moeraki Downs

CLAIRE INKSON

Just a few minutes inland from the Moeraki Boulders on the North Otago coast, third-generation farmer Neville Caldwell runs a Coopworth-based ram breeding operation, where constitution and performance outweigh eye appeal.

Caldwell established his stud about 15 years ago after attending the Gore Stud Sale and deciding he wanted more control over the quality of rams he was working with.

"I thought, if I'm going to pay good money for rams, I may as well start breeding my own," he says.

The stud now includes around 300 ewes, with Coopworths making up the foundation flock.

Caldwell also produces Coopdale (Perendale x Coopworth) and Texel-cross rams to suit a range of farming systems. The stud consistently scans around 200 percent, and selection is guided by recorded performance data.

## Breeding priorities: growth, meat and resilience

Caldwell selects for growth rate, meat yield and constitution. Fertility is considered a given.

"If a ewe has a single two years in a row, she goes," he says. "They have to produce twins. Fertility is



The stud now includes around 300 ewes, with Coopworths making up the foundation flock. PHOTOS SUPPLIED

not an issue here."

Texel blood provides added muscling, while Coopdale progeny are popular with clients seeking hybrid vigour and toughness. Caldwell says one of his Coopworth rams tested in the top one percent nationally for growth, reflecting a strong focus on carcass traits in recent years.

## Sheep must thrive in real conditions

Rams are expected to perform under natural conditions. Caldwell does not feed them grain or shelter them.

"I've been to ram sales where the rams turn up covered and full of grain," he says. "Mine have to handle what North Otago throws at them — droughts, storms, whatever. If they fade in those conditions, they are gone."

He has not drenched his stud ewes for about 20 years.

"They've got to do it themselves. Lambs get a couple of drenches when they're young, but after that, they have to stand on their own four feet."

## Data-driven but commonsense driven too

The stud uses EID tagging, SIL reporting, and eye-muscle and IMF scanning to track genetic progress.

Wool weights are also recorded, with ewes typically cutting six to seven kilograms of wool.

Caldwell acknowledges wool returns remain challenging but believes recording remains an important part of stud performance.

## Farmer feedback plays a key role

"One farmer told me his Coopworth-cross lambs outweighed his Pole Dorset-cross lambs," he says. "Another said it was the cleanest ram he had ever had — no dags on the lambs. That sort of feedback is good to hear."

## Family roots and future genetics

Moeraki Downs has been in Caldwell's family for three generations. His son Nathan, who manages a farm in the Mackenzie Country, is involved in genetic direction, and his daughter teaches agriculture at a high school in Auckland.

New genetics are regularly introduced through selected rams sourced from across the country. Caldwell and Nathan have travelled through the North Island visiting respected Coopworth studs

and often returned home with new sires.

## A practical approach to ram selection

Caldwell does not hold a formal ram sale.

Instead, repeat clients visit the farm and select rams when it fits their lambing calendar. His Coopdales remain popular in South Canterbury and Otago, while interest in Texel-cross rams is growing, particularly from Southland.

When asked what makes a good ram, his answer is straightforward.

"It has to have good constitution and survive our conditions. I've seen rams with good figures, but when you look at them, they're not the sort of sheep I want to be looking at in my paddock every day. It has to look right and hold up in our conditions."

## Advice for young farmers

Caldwell encourages younger farmers not to be afraid of trial and progress.

"Give it a crack. Don't be scared to try different things. And whatever you do, make sure you enjoy it."

That belief in practical, steady improvement has shaped the stud.

For Caldwell, good rams are those that grow fast, handle tough conditions and keep performing year after year.



New genetics are regularly introduced through selected rams sourced from across the country.



Moeraki Downs has been in Neville Caldwell's family for three generations.



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# Taking the Wheel: From Passenger princesses to queens of the road



The day was run with the support of the North Canterbury Four Wheel Drive Club, whose members volunteered as coaches.  
PHOTOS BRAEDYN WARD FROM VELOCITY PHOTOGRAPHY



Participants rotated through six training stations, covering topics such as managing tyre pressures, vehicle recovery, using personal locator beacons, and hill starts on uneven ground.



Twenty women took part in the training day.



The training day was structured around giving women the confidence to take their 4wd safely off road.

CLAIRE INKSON

When Darfield's Emma Burke heard someone mention the term "passenger princess," she didn't laugh it off.

Instead, it sparked an idea that would see women from across Canterbury stepping up, taking control, and learning practical skills behind the wheel.

"The words passenger princess were used, and I went 'what?'" Emma said. "Our boys are very involved with the North Canterbury Four Wheel Drive Club, and there'd been an incident while they were out having an adventure. The driver became unwell, and his passenger wasn't confident in getting the vehicle home. That's when I thought, we really need to do something about this."

That idea became Take the Wheel, a women's 4WD training day held at Springfield on October 19, which drew 20 women and 10 spectators.

The day was run with the support of the North Canterbury Four Wheel Drive Club, whose members volunteered as coaches.

"It was all women behind the wheel," Emma said. "The coaches were all the blokes from the club, and they were brilliant. They took everyone right back to basics and made sure there was no pressure or judgement."

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Participants rotated through six training stations, covering topics such as managing tyre pressures, vehicle recovery, using personal locator beacons, and hill starts on uneven ground.

"Some of the women didn't even know what PSI meant," Emma said. "By the end of it they were using gauges, adjusting tyre pressures, and understanding how much rubber they had on the road at different settings."

The final station, river crossings on the Kowai River, was the clear favourite.

"The river was shallow enough to be safe but wide enough to have fun in," she said. "We even had a biggest splash competition. I was lucky enough to get a ride through the water myself. It was just awesome to see the smiles."

## Feeding the crew

Food was an important part of the day, thanks to the Darfield Glenroy Branch of Rural Women NZ, where Emma serves on the committee.

"The 4WD Club agreed to help on the condition they were well fed," Emma said. "The branch ladies put on an amazing morning tea spread, and we definitely surpassed expectations."

Lunch was a community effort, with buns donated by Darfield Bakery, lamb from Tim Sowman at Annavale Station, and cooking gear provided by Nicky Geddes of Verve Real Food Catering.

"The lunch went down a real treat," Emma said. "We had to move back to our place to get out of the wind because no one wants silt in their sandwiches."

## A fundraiser for a cause

The event raised more than



There was a wide range of vehicles at the training day from Jeep Wranglers to Ford Rangers.



The final station, river crossings on the Kowai River, was the clear favourite.



A competition for the "biggest splash" added to the fun of the event.



The scratchie raffle was won by Loganne in her "two-tonne orange road cone" Ford Ranger Ute.



The event not only helped women with confidence behind the wheel, but raised \$2000 for the Westpac Rescue Helicopter.



Following the success of the 4WD day, Emma is already planning a Hands-On Rural Skills Day for early 2026, featuring trailer-backing with different vehicles, changing tyres, setting up and fault-finding electric fences, and possibly beginner chainsaw sessions.

\$2000 for the Westpac Rescue Helicopter, with another \$2000 expected once the raffle for a Thermomix TM6, donated by Libby Gray of Shared Territory, is complete.

The scratchie raffle was won by Loganne in her "two-tonne orange road cone" ute, and the Lotto bonus draw prize was also donated to the cause.

"We've been blown away by people's generosity," Emma said. "All proceeds are going to the Westpac Rescue Helicopter, and that feels really good."

The event was also supported by a long list of local businesses,

including Trafco Hire Centre, Hillside Farm, and national brands such as FMG, Harraways Oats, Thirsty Acres, and J & P Watkins Cherries.

"The feedback was amazing," Emma said. "People said they learned new skills and felt empowered. There was no criticism and no silly questions. Everyone was just encouraging each other. That's what I wanted it to be."

## Building skills and connection

The idea for Take the Wheel

grew from Emma's participation in Rural Women NZ's Leadership Development Programme with Number 8 HR, which challenged participants to create a project that gave back to their communities.

"It was about honouring the past and embracing the future," Emma said. "For me, it was about bringing rural women together, whether they grew up on farms or moved here more recently. Not everyone's had the same opportunities to learn those hands-on skills, and this was a way to build confidence and connection."

Following the success of the 4WD day, Emma is already

planning a Hands-On Rural Skills Day for early 2026, featuring trailer-backing with different vehicles, changing tyres, setting up and fault-finding electric fences, and possibly beginner chainsaw sessions. "There's a real appetite for it," she said. "We'll keep the same supportive format. Learn, laugh, and give it a go."

From taking the wheel to learning new rural skills, Emma's vision is simple: empower women to feel capable, confident and connected. "Sometimes confidence comes from just giving it a go," she said. "That's what it's all about."

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# My Christmas Wishlist

EVA HARRIS

My social media is overflowing with Elf-on-the-Shelf antics, Silver Bells echoing through every mall, and the supermarket looks like Santa threw up. Christmas is definitely on its way.

With the holiday season comes the annual rush: "Let's get this done before Christmas!" and "Before you head off for the holidays, could you just... [insert task that could probably wait until January]." Even governments aren't immune, scrambling to release documents for public consultation before the year ends — hoping, perhaps, that everyone's too busy with festivities to respond. Democracy in action!

As the late nights pile up, reviewing endless documents and racing to meet deadlines, I find myself wishing Santa could swoop in and sort out all our problems. But what would success even look like if we could just wave a magic wand?

For me, I see farmers standing tall, proud of the food they produce, and a country buzzing with excitement to share our best with the world. Our systems are set up to enable our farmers to get on with things. Communities would be lively, young people would

return home, seeing a bright future here. Clean water would flow from my well, my kids would splash in the Selwyn River, and native birds would sing in every garden.

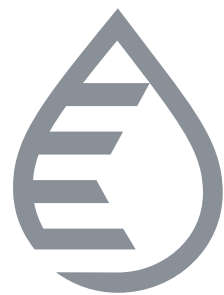
But do we really need Santa? Or is it up to us to shape the future we want? As tempting as it is to wish away our challenges, it's our choices and habits that move us closer (or further) from our dreams. As we enter 2026, we can reflect on our actions and make the choices needed to create the future we want for our children and grandchildren. What better gift could we give them?

So, here's wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, along with my own Christmas wishlist!

*On the twelfth day of Christmas,  
my true love gave to me...*

*Twelve Consents Granted  
Eleven Sampling Wells  
Ten Big Wigs Shaking  
Nine Ladies Shopping  
Eight Cows a Milking  
Seven Kids a Swimming  
Six Bushes Growing  
Five Clean Streams  
Four Native Birds  
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*Eva Harris  
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# Catchment groups make compliance easier

MEGAN FITZGERALD

The Hekeao Hinds Hill Country catchment group have been collecting water quality data, carrying out eDNA (environmental data testing), and planting more natives through the catchment group. On top of this data collection, they are also expanding their knowledge of environmental management and where to make strategic investments to have the greatest environmental impact.

In our growing compliance driven world, having this data and knowledge on-hand is reducing costs and saving time for our catchment group members.

Farm environmental plans (FEP) are a requirement in Mid Canterbury for any farming enterprise of a commercial scale. Some entities such as major irrigation schemes administer FEPs, however if you are not part of one of these entities, you bear the cost of collecting and complying with the requirements yourself.

By being a member of the catchment group, farmers are able to use the data collected to sit alongside their FEP's. In addition, they are expanding their knowledge of the environment, not only on their farm but also



On top of water quality data collection, landowners are also expanding their knowledge of environmental management and where to make strategic investments to have the greatest environmental impact. PHOTO SUPPLIED

neighboring properties. Catchment members can confidently speak to auditors about what they have done, are doing, and plan to do when it comes to managing their environmental impact.

In a future with Freshwater Farm Plans (FWFP) where compliance shifts to a catchment context, having a connection to what is

happening surrounding you will be key for success. FWFP are currently being developed alongside the RMA reform and are expected to be in place soon (Ministry for the Environment, Freshwater Farm Plans).

Data is not only useful for compliance with council and government, but it is also being

used by our farmers to unlock premiums in the market. One example is the New Zealand Farm Assurance Program (NZFAP). Our farmer members are able to unlock a premium with most red meat processors by showing compliance across industry good practice. It is important to see a real financial difference for our farmers

in a compliance-driven world. Catchment group members are ready to take any opportunity that rewards farmers who understand and can show the steps they are taking to improve their environment.

Mid Canterbury Catchment Collective exists to support the data collection and management for farmers. It provides the tools, such as a nitrogen water tester, stream health assessment tools (SHMAK) as well as training to carry out the assessments.

MCCC is also looking into ways that it can support farmers in telling their story. This creates two really positive outcomes; firstly, that farmers are confident their data is protected and accessible in the ways they deem appropriate. Secondly, if they do wish to use the data, that regulators know the data is collected with integrity through standard operating procedures.

If you are interested in how catchment groups could make compliance easier for your farm, please get in contact with Angela Cushnie, Mid Canterbury Catchment Collective coordinator at [coordinator@mccatchmentcollective.nz](mailto:coordinator@mccatchmentcollective.nz) or phone 0276033457.

**Megan Fitzgerald is facilitator for Hekeao Hinds Hill Country Catchment Group**

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# From Biggar to Gore: A decade of hard work leads to farm ownership for the Ramsays



Having come from a long line of Scottish dairy farmers, dairy farming is in Lynne's blood. PHOTO SUPPLIED



**Claire Inkson**  
RURAL EDITOR

Ten years after stepping off a plane from Scotland, Lynne and Gregor Ramsay are about to pay the deposit on their first New Zealand dairy farm, a 200-cow, 105-hectare property near Gore.

It marks the culmination of a decade of determination, long hours and careful planning for the Southland couple.

Lynne grew up in a long line of Scottish dairy and sheep farmers, while Gregor is a first-generation farmer from a family of teachers and engineers.

He first travelled to New Zealand in 2010 and quickly fell in love with the country. Three and a half years later, after returning home, he came back to Southland.

In that time he had met Lynne, and less than a year later she followed him across the world.

"Our neighbours were so nice to us and took us under their wing," she says. "I found the harder you worked and the better you were to people, the better people were back to you."

The couple began their New Zealand journey in Tuatapere, managing a 250-cow farm. Gregor went on to work for Fonterra as a milk supply manager, while Lynne took a position as a meat inspector at Finegand Freezing Works.

A few years later they began their sharemilking career on the Taieri Plains, just outside Dunedin, initially milking 140 cows for four years before taking on a neighbouring 280-cow, contract-milking job in their fourth season.

When COVID-19 hit, they decided it was time to focus on the farm full-time.

"We'd both been working town jobs as well as farming," Lynne says. "By 2020 we knew it was time to put everything into the business."

In 2023 they moved south to Riverton, taking on a 320-cow 50:50 sharemilking position, half Jerseys and half Friesians, milking twice a day in a 30-a-side shed.

"We keep everything as pure as we can, so we have as few bobby calves as possible," Lynne says. "I want to try and give as many animals a life as I can."

The Ramsays run a straightforward operation, avoiding expensive technology in favour of good stockmanship and practical systems.

"We're very much tail-paint and that's it," Lynne says. "At our scale, collars and sensors just don't stack up on cost."

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Lynne says Southland has given them opportunity and community in equal measure.



With three young children — George (5½), Hamish (4) and Fraser (2½) — Lynne has had to adapt.

“I turned my days into nights so I could get as much done when the kids were asleep,” she says. “During calving, it’s often easier to be up at four in the morning than to juggle it all later in the day.”

The couple take pride in running a lean but productive farm.

“Over the last four years we bought a new tractor, mower and fertiliser spreader,” Lynne says. “They’re the three things we use nearly every day. If they’re not working, that’s downtime and lost efficiency.”

Working with minimal staff — often just a visiting backpacker — means time off is limited. “We make sure to have a proper break once we dry off at the end of May,” Lynne says. “The rest of the year is full-on.”

The new farm near Gore will see

the couple step from sharemilking into full ownership. “We’ve always done small farms and kept costs low,” Lynne says. “At the moment we’re doing over 600 kg milk solids per cow. The strong milk price and good stock values have helped fund this next step.”

Both credit off-farm experience for helping them reach their goal.

Gregor’s time with Fonterra gave him valuable insight into finance and business structure, while Lynne’s work as a meat inspector helped the pair gain residency and build their savings.

“It’s been about having different skills and different baskets to pull from,” she says. “You just keep your head down, keep going and don’t give up.”

She says the biggest challenge has been raising a young family away from relatives.

“We have no family here, so we’ve had to rely on friends. During COVID, all our kids were

under two. There were plenty of days when I had one strapped to my back while we worked.”

Looking back, Lynne says Southland has given them opportunity and community in equal measure.

“It’s a small place — your reputation goes before you. If you work hard and treat people well, doors open.”

Her advice for others hoping to climb the dairy ladder is simple.

“Don’t believe everything you see online. It doesn’t show the sweat and the tears,” she says. “Spend a few months in different regions before you commit to one. And think outside the box — find extra skills or side income to keep things moving.”

For Lynne, the message that matters most is perseverance. “Work hard and lower your expectations,” she says with a laugh. “If you have no expectations you can achieve anything.”

Gregor and Lynne Ramsay with their children George (5½), Hamish (4) and Fraser (2½).

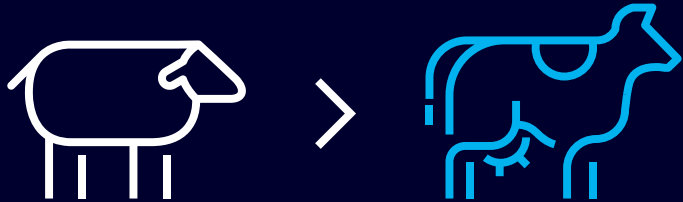


The Ramsays run a straightforward operation, avoiding expensive technology in favour of good stockmanship and practical systems.

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Where we ask a farmer five quick questions about agriculture and what farming means to them. Today we chat to Southland dairy farmer Gregor Ramsay.

## 1 What did your journey into farming look like?

I grew up in a very rural village in Scotland. My mum is a teacher, and my dad was part of his family's engineering business. My older brother and I loved farming however and found jobs on local farms from a very young age. I worked during weekends and holidays on a beautiful little family dairy farm until I was 13 and then started working on a larger scale 500 cow dairy farm where they processed and sold their own milk in bottles across central Scotland. This experience in dairy farming really lit a fire underneath me to pursue a career in the industry. I gained my BSc (HONS) in Agriculture and Business Management before heading to New Zealand on my OE where I worked on dairy farms in Southland. After returning to Scotland, I became very "home sick" for New Zealand and decided that after a few years working as a milk supply manager for a dairy co-operative I needed to move back and pursue my life-long goal of owning my own herd of cows someday. The sharemilking model, underpinned by a very strong co-operative has helped create this huge opportunity for young people to enter the industry and thrive. It's amazing!

## 2 Tell us a little bit about your farming operation.

We are currently in our third season 50-50 sharemilking 320 cows near Riverton. This is our 7th season as sharemilkers. Our herd is an even split of Jerseys and Friesians. The farm is 108ha and is flat to rolling and has shelter belts planted throughout the property. We like to maximise our herds potential by feeding a high-quality blend through the shed and pre-mowing for much of the season to increase dry matter intakes. From this we achieve 600kgMS/cow.

## 3 What challenges have you faced in your farming business, and how have you tackled those challenges?

Our biggest challenge has been the fact we are halfway across the world and don't have family around us for support. But in saying that, we have an amazing group of friends who are also on similar journeys and so we all support each other. Another challenge has been staying disciplined. There are always times along the journey where you feel a lot more comfortable than others and that's usually the first sign to let you know that the time is right to make the next jump before you start deviating from your goal. Easier said than done!

## 4 What has been a major highlight for you in your farming journey?

So many! Watching our very first cows walking off the truck. Running around the South Island picking up items from TradeMe and clearing sales to set up our business. Buying our first ever brand-new tractor. Achieving 600kgMS/cow. This whole journey has been a highlight to be honest. A dream come true!

## 5 What advice would you have for the next generation of farmers?

Perhaps a strange one, but.....take a million pictures. Your journey will be long and winding and it's vitally important that you never forget where it started and what you have achieved over the years. I love looking back at pictures we took years ago. It always brings happiness.



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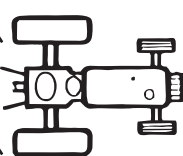
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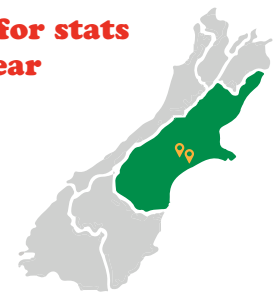
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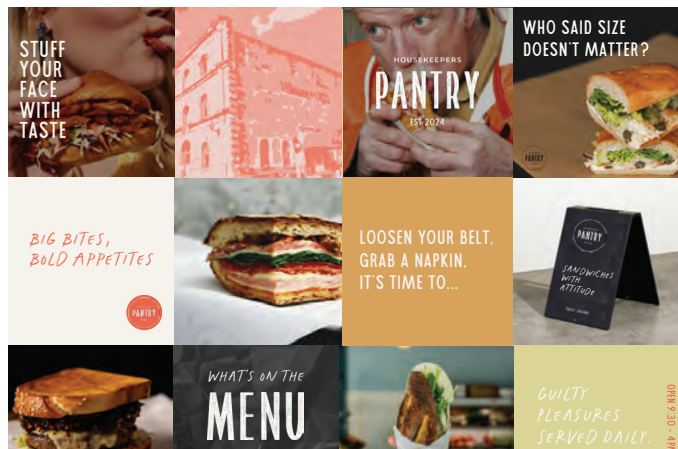
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# Flocking together in Hurunui

**Good dogs, great yarns, and a day out worth leaving the farm for - the Hurunui Flock Tours are back, bringing the district together one paddock at a time.**



**Claire Inkson**  
RURAL EDITOR

Each March, the hills and valleys of Hurunui come alive with the sound of dogs, utes, and good conversation as farmers open their gates for the annual Hurunui Flock Tours.

Formerly known as the Flock Competition, the event has been rebranded to better reflect its true spirit of connection, learning, and celebration.

It brings together farmers from the Amberley, Amuri, Cheviot and Hawarden A&P Districts, showcasing excellence in sheep farming while creating opportunities for all generations to share ideas and inspiration.

"It's not just about competing anymore," says Nicola Johns, Animal Health Sales Representative and Team Leader for North Canterbury Vets, which helps coordinate the event alongside the local A&P Associations.

"We wanted to make it something people could learn from — a chance to get off-farm, have good conversations, and walk away with new ideas to take home."

The Hurunui Flock Tours began as part of the national Ewe Hogget Competition, which ran from 1995 until 2020.

When the national event ended, North Canterbury Vets stepped up to ensure the local tradition continued.

"There were times when interest had dipped," Johns says. "If we hadn't kept it going, it probably would have died out completely. But it's too valuable for that — it brings people together, especially in tough seasons when morale can be low."

The shift from "competition" to "tours" has opened the event to a wider group of participants and changed the tone of the day.

Farmers are encouraged to view it as a field day, open to anyone

interested, not just entrants.

"You don't have to enter to come along," Johns says. "Anyone can join in, and there's no fee. The more that come, the better. It's a great day out, and you always take something home from it."

Each of the four Hurunui A&P districts hosts its own district day, where exhibitors present their hogget and two-tooth flocks for judging.

The top flocks from each area then go on to the Champion of Champions Day, which sees eight farms visited in one day, followed by a community prizegiving and dinner, often at a local pub such as the Greta Valley Tavern.

"When we turn up at a farm, the farmer gives a bit of a spiel — they'll talk about flock numbers, their goals, the season they've had," Johns explains. "You get great discussions happening. Someone will hear how another farmer does something and think, 'I could try that.' It's educational as much as it is social."

The Tours attract a mix of long-time farmers, young managers, and new entrants to the industry.

North Canterbury Vets actively encourage participation from the next generation, including Growing Future Farmers students and new staff learning the ropes.

"We really want to see the younger generation and farm managers stepping up," Johns says. "It's about giving them confidence to take ownership, to share their knowledge, and to see themselves as future leaders."

In some cases, the Tours highlight the strength of family farming traditions.

"Last year we had three generations on one farm. Moments like that remind us why this event matters."

For Johns and her team, the Flock Tours are about far more than ribbons or trophies. "We're passionate about seeing our farmers succeed in what they're trying to achieve," she says. "It's about animal health, productivity, and helping farmers do what they do best. These days are a way for us to give back — to celebrate what's good about our community."

That community spirit is contagious.



The McLean Partnership who represented Amuri in the Champion of Champions. (L-R) Ben McLean, Don McLean, Stuart McLean and Annie McLean. PHOTOS SUPPLIED



2025 Champions from Amberley A&P Associations John Kotlowski (l) and Craig Thomlinson.



Nicola Johns, Animal Health Sales Representative and Team Leader for North Canterbury Vets says the flock tours are about more than competition — it's a chance to get off-farm, have good conversations, and walk away with new ideas to take home. PHOTO CLAIRE INKSON

From retired farmers jumping into a shared van for the day to neighbours catching up over paddock gates, the Tours have become a highlight of the Hurunui farming calendar. "It's a celebration of what we achieve together — as a district, as families, and as an industry," Johns says.

"You always learn something new, and you always leave feeling proud."

The 2026 Hurunui Flock Tours will take place in late March, with dates to be confirmed in the coming weeks.

Farmers interested in entering or joining the Tours can find

updates and details on the North Canterbury Vets website or via the Hurunui Flock Tours Facebook page.

"Come along. You don't need an invite. Bring your team, your neighbours, or just yourself. It's one of those days that reminds you why you love farming."

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Written by Emma Warmerdam, Technician for Verity NZ based in Methven.



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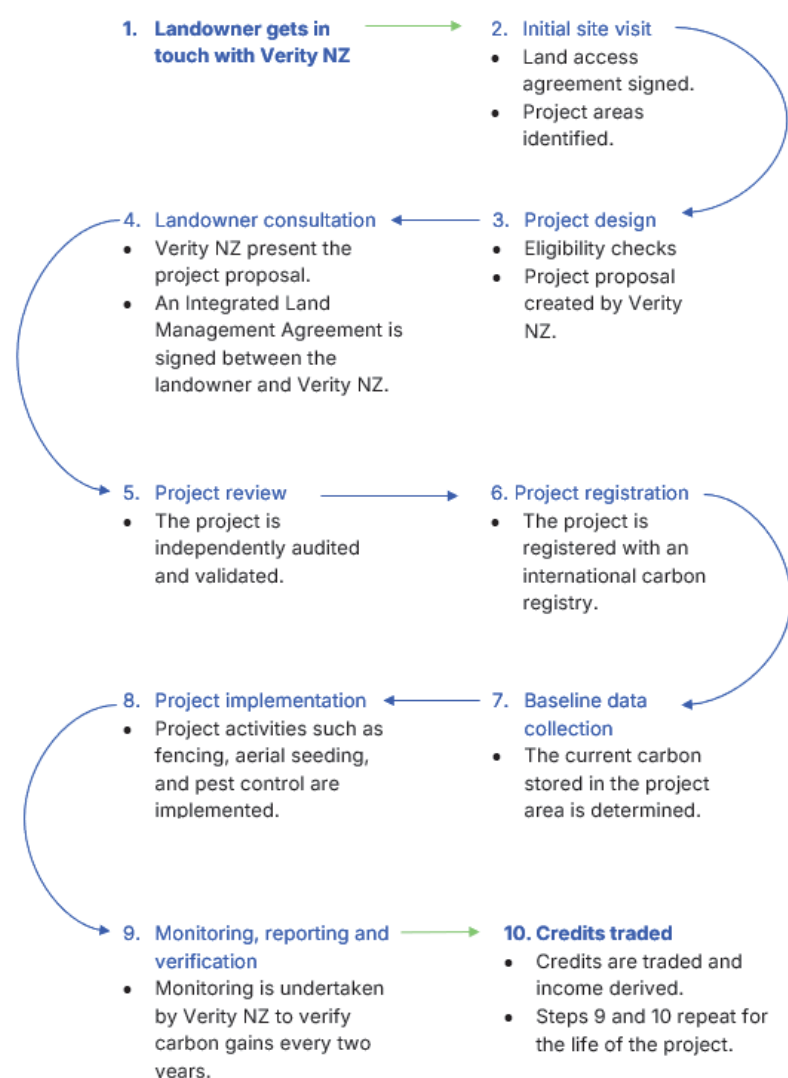
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## ENGLAND

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by John Cooney

**N**ext time you're in London, once you've eyeballed Trafalgar Square, Buckingham Palace and Big Ben, you've gotta get out in the country. Why? Because there's more to Ye Olde England than just the City of London ...

I mean, not far along the M4 are some of the sweetest, loveliest corners you can find in this "green and pleasant land". And when you wander off the

beaten track (*as we're gonna do in June/July 2026*) you're soon oohing-and-aahing at fairytale villages, thatch-roofed cottages, flower-smothered gardens, leafy woodland lanes, pubs with weird names, cathedrals with pointy roofs, medieval castles and knights in shining armour.

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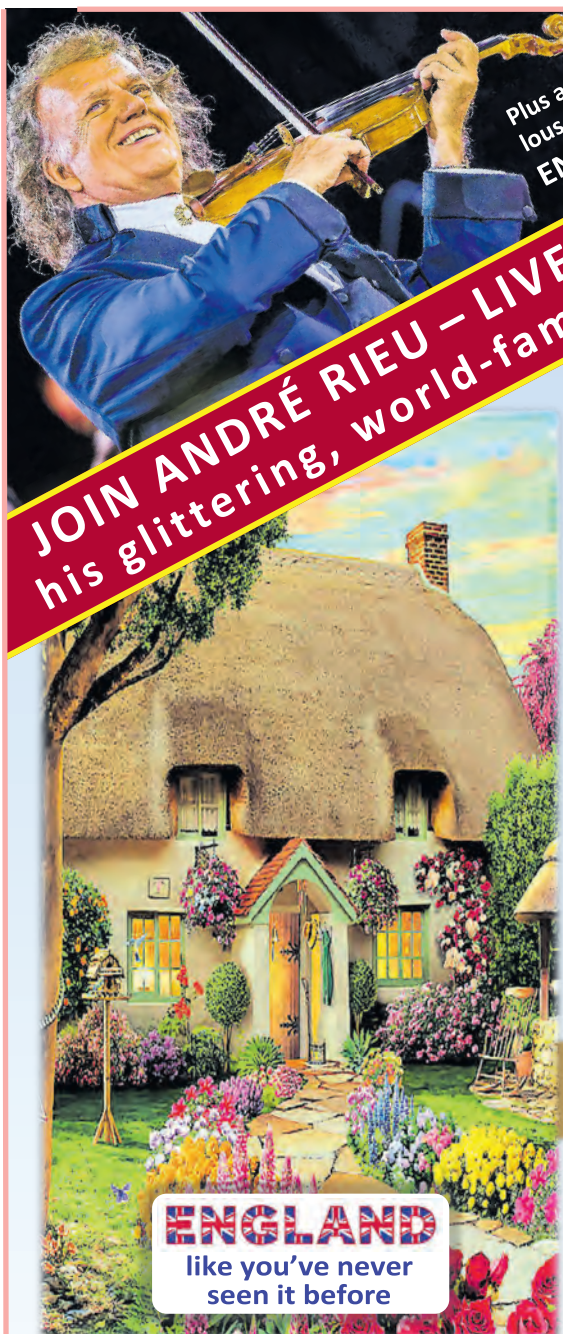
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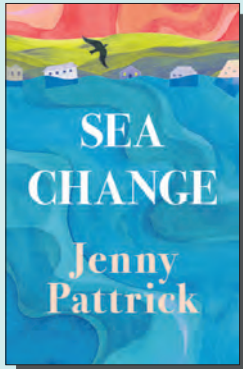
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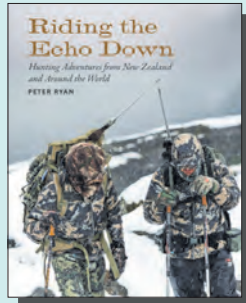
# HOLIDAY READING GUIDE

We've pulled together a mix of books we think our rural readers will really enjoy this summer. There's New Zealand storytelling, real farming grit, a bit of adventure, plenty of inspiration — and even something straight from the farm kitchen. From Nadia Lim's warm and personal new cookbook to fiction, hunting tales and true farming histories, these titles make great holiday reads or thoughtful Christmas gifts for the book lovers in your life.



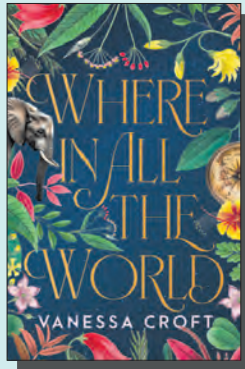
## SEA CHANGE

by Jenny Patrick  
RRP \$37.99  
A tsunami has devastated a small Kapiti Coast community. The government mandates managed retreat — a decision manipulated by a powerful businessman with his own agenda. This riveting and charming story of survival celebrates tenacity, self-sufficiency, and a fierce love of home, even against dire odds.



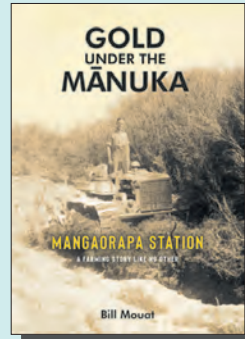
## RIDING THE ECHO DOWN:

Hunting Adventures from New Zealand and Around the World by Peter Ryan  
RRP \$49.99  
Explore the lives of the great hunters of the past — from the primeval forests of early New Zealand to Africa, Asia and the Americas — to the present and future of wilderness hunting. This is an essential read for fans of hunting stories and outdoor adventure.



## WHERE IN ALL THE WORLD

by Vanessa Croft  
RRP \$38.99  
From the Rakaia hills to the drawing rooms of London, through the wilds of East Africa and the brutal heart of the Congo Free State, *Where in All the World* traces one woman's journey through betrayal, resilience and self-discovery.



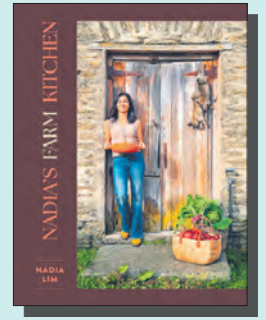
## GOLD UNDER THE MĀNUKA

by Bill Mouat  
RRP \$49.99  
The inspirational Mouat family story, spanning several generations, is about hard work, courage, and the relentless determination to succeed. Through vision, intuition, innovation, and thinking big, they achieved a large-scale, gold-standard farming operation.



## FLORAL ABUNDANCE:

Flowers, food and beauty for the soul by Kate Williams  
RRP \$69.99  
Floral Abundance is an invitation to slow down, gather beauty and find inspiration to create. From the flower field to the styling table, Kate Williams takes you on a food and floral journey that celebrates the artistry in growing, gathering and sharing seasonal abundance.



## NADIA'S FARM KITCHEN

by Nadia Lim  
RRP \$55  
Nadia's Farm Kitchen is a warm, inspiring, and deeply personal cookbook celebrating the rhythms of the seasons and the simple joys of life on the land. Featuring over 70 wholesome, seasonal recipes and more than a dozen heartfelt short stories about life on the farm, this book offers a unique glimpse into the life of beloved cook and TV personality Nadia Lim as she raises her family and grows food on a working farm in rural New Zealand.



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# From mushroom shed to skincare shelf: The rural entrepreneur harnessing nature's potential



Golden Enoki is just one of the mushroom kits Taylor McConnell sells. PHOTOS SUPPLIED



Mushrooms -like this Pink Oyster — are exotic and that appeals to home growers and foodies alike.



**Claire Inkson**

RURAL  
EDITOR

**M**ushrooms and skincare might seem like an unlikely combination, but it's a winning one for North Canterbury entrepreneur Taylor McConnell.

When Taylor McConnell walked away from running a car yard almost a decade ago, he knew one thing for certain: he didn't want to work for anyone else again.

What he didn't know was that a chance encounter with a mushroom kit would eventually lead him into two very different businesses – one supplying homegrown fungi, and another creating natural tallow-based skincare.

"I'd always loved being outdoors. I come from a farming background and enjoyed gardening and surfing," he says. "I bought a mushroom kit on a whim and quickly realised there wasn't much information around about how to grow them. So, I taught myself from textbooks."

McConnell began producing more mushrooms than he could

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Sporeshift evolved from a mushroom farm selling mushrooms like Shiitake to restaurants, but now supplies to other DIY mushroom suppliers and home-growers.



Entrepreneur Taylor McConnell has branched out into tallow skincare — a niche market that has seen a surge in popularity. PHOTOS SUPPLIED

eat, so he started supplying local restaurants.

Before long, what began as a hobby had grown into a full-time business.

By the time Covid-19 hit, he was producing around 100 kilograms of specialty mushrooms a week, mostly oyster and shiitake, for restaurants across Canterbury and Otago.

When lockdowns stopped restaurant trade overnight, he had to come up with a new plan.

"I built a website and went down the education path, showing people how to grow mushrooms themselves and supplying what they needed."

That shift was the start of SporeShift, a company that now sells grow kits, grain spawn, agar plates and everything a home gardener or small farm might need to cultivate their own fungi.

Today, McConnell also supplies

cultures and materials to other commercial growers.

The appeal, he says, is partly in the mystery.

"Mushrooms are a bit elusive and exotic. Gardeners who've grafted fruit trees or grown heirloom vegetables are always looking for the next challenge. For a lot of people, that's mushrooms." Even sensational headlines haven't dented interest.

When news broke of an Australian woman allegedly killing her dinner guests with a poisonous mushroom-laced beef Wellington, McConnell says it only boosted curiosity.

"There were lots of jokes about it, but all media is good media. Every time a story like that hits, website traffic goes up and so do sales."

For beginners, SporeShift's ready-to-grow kits are as simple as placing a bag on the bench and watching the fungi grow.

DIY kits offer a more hands-on experience, while advanced growers can delve into agar work and spawn production in a sterile lab environment.

On his family's 20-acre Ohoka property, McConnell operates a custom-built cleanroom, incubation space and packing area, most of which he designed and built himself because the equipment wasn't available in New Zealand.

While SporeShift continues to thrive, McConnell's eye for emerging trends led him in another unexpected direction.

"I watch a lot of what happens in the US and Canada because New Zealand usually lags behind by a year or two. I saw the rise of tallow-based skincare and thought it would be cool to make something clean and simple for friends and family."

The result is Tālōs Skincare, a

small-batch, tallow-based body balm made from South Island beef fat, olive oil, mānuka honey and essential oils.

The name comes from Greek mythology: Talos was a bronze guardian who protected the island of Crete. "We liked the idea of the product as a protector of the skin," he says.

One of the biggest formulation challenges was neutralising the natural smell of beef fat, without chemicals.

"My sisters were ruthless testers. Getting rid of that smell in a natural way is time-consuming, but it sets us apart."

McConnell is quick to address common misconceptions about tallow.

"Some people think it's gross to rub fat on your skin or say there's not enough science behind it. You can't patent beef fat, so no one's funding big studies. But people

are surprised how well it soaks in. Tallow is very similar to the oils our skin produces, so it absorbs easily. It's also rich in fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E and K, which are absorbed and stored by the skin."

For now, Tālōs is sold only online, much like his mushroom supplies, but interest is growing.

"Some of the bigger brands are doing the hard work educating people about tallow, which is great. Once customers want a product with a cleaner scent, they start looking for alternatives."

Both ventures, he says, started the same way.

"I wanted to make something useful and natural for the people I care about. If it turns into a business, that's a bonus."

**Find out more:**  
SporeShift Mushrooms — [www.sporeshift.co.nz](http://www.sporeshift.co.nz)  
Tālōs Skincare — [www.talosskincare.co.nz](http://www.talosskincare.co.nz)

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# Digging deep for kids



**Claire Inkson**  
RURAL  
EDITOR

Children from Ashburton to Ashley can now enjoy a ride-on experience they will never forget, thanks to a new Canterbury business that uses digger hire to fund free rides for children who might otherwise miss out.

Little Rides, launched in May by Christchurch mother and banking professional Angel Noble, offers fully operational mini diggers for hire at children's parties, community events and family gatherings across the region.

The unique trailer-mounted digger gives children aged two and over the chance to operate real machinery in a safe, controlled environment.

What sets Little Rides apart is its purpose.

Revenue from private bookings directly funds free visits to preschools, early childhood centres and charity events, ensuring children from all backgrounds can experience the joy of hands-on play.

"We do as many free preschool visits as we can during the week," Noble said. "We've been to charity events, visited early childhood centres and even worked with kids in care. It's not about profit. It's

about making sure all children get to experience that joy."

## Purpose before profit

The idea was sparked while Noble was on maternity leave after attending a charity gala focused on encouraging young people into the trades.

"I wanted to create something that was fun but also purposeful, something that could inspire kids, especially those who might not have the easiest start in life," she said.

Noble, who continues to work full time in banking, said the project was driven by a desire to give back to the community and provide opportunities for children whose families might be struggling financially.

"I'm really lucky, I love my job, we're doing okay, and we don't go without," she said. "But I know that's not everyone's reality. I think about the parents who are struggling just to pay for groceries or power. The idea that their kids might miss out on something as simple as play because of that, I couldn't shake it."

## Safe, hands-on learning

The Little Rides digger is mounted on a trailer and can be set up within minutes.

Once installed, children climb a short set of stairs, strap in and operate the digger using two simple levers, digging and scooping sand within the boundaries of a built-in sandpit.

The machine has been modified to run at slower speeds with restricted movement, and



Angel Nobel, with sons Charlie (left) age 18 months and Archie (four), launched Little Rides in May after attending a charity gala focused on encouraging young people into trades. PHOTOS SUPPLIED

additional safety features include weight sensors, seatbelts and automatic stops.

The ride is suitable for adults too, with many parents taking the chance to try their hand at the controls.

The concept is believed to be the only one of its kind in New Zealand and one of only two in Australasia.

"With such a strong rural culture here, you'd think someone would have done it before," Noble said. "But it means we get to bring something completely new to families."

## Building futures

While the digger ride is a source of entertainment, Noble hopes it will also spark interest in trades and machinery among young people.

"Maybe it's their first experience of machinery, or the first time they realise they're capable of doing something on their own," she said. "Every 'I did it' moment matters."

With plans to import additional rides and expand community outreach, Noble said Little Rides was just getting started.

"It might look like charity work from the outside, but for us it's about joy."

"It's about meeting incredible kids and families, hearing their stories, and creating moments they'll never forget."

Little Rides offers four-hour private hires from \$220, with all profits used to fund free community visits. Bookings and more information are available at [www.littlerides.co.nz](http://www.littlerides.co.nz).



Children as young as two - right through to adults - can experience driving a digger first-hand in a safe and controlled environment.



Little Rides' diggers are hired privately with funds used to provide the ride-on experience for children who may otherwise miss out.

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# Charred Meatballs with Peanut Chilli crack

Recipe courtesy Nadia Lim

These Vietnamese-inspired meatballs are packed with flavour. Ideally cooked on the BBQ for that smoky char, they're lifted to new heights by the addictive Peanut Chilli Crack — a spicy, salty, crunchy topping that brings heat and texture to every bite. Serve with noodles and lettuce cups, or straight from the pan with a cold beer. A true crowd-pleaser.

## Serves 4–6:

- Prep time: 45 minutes
- Cook time: 15 minutes

## Peanut chilli crack:

- ½ cup roasted peanuts
- 1 clove garlic, thinly sliced
- 1 teaspoon finely grated ginger 1 Tablespoon chilli flakes
- 1 Tablespoon soy sauce
- 1 Teaspoon brown sugar

## Meatballs:

- 2 shallots, finely diced
- 1 stalk lemongrass, finely chopped (optional)



- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 Tablespoon finely grated ginger 800g lamb, pork, or chicken mince (or a combination)
- 1 Tablespoon soy sauce
- ½ Tablespoon fish sauce 1½ teaspoons brown sugar

## Noodles:

- 250g vermicelli noodles 1 teaspoon sesame oil

## Chilli lime dressing:

- 1 red chilli, finely chopped
- juice of 2 limes
- 2 Tablespoons sweet chilli sauce
- 2 Tablespoons fish sauce
- 2 Tablespoons water

## Apple carrot slaw:

- 1 apple, cut into fine matchsticks 2 carrots, coarsely

- grated
- 100g mung bean sprouts
- 1 bunch fresh mint, chopped

## TO SERVE (optional)

- leaves of 1 large cos lettuce, lime wedges
- fresh coriander
- crispy fried shallots

## Method:

1. Finely chop or pulse the peanuts in a food processor until coarsely crushed. Heat a generous drizzle of oil in a small pan over low heat. Add the garlic and ginger, and sizzle gently for 1 minute. Stir in the crushed peanuts and chilli flakes and cook for another 30 seconds. Add soy sauce and sugar, mix well, and remove from heat. Set aside to cool and crisp up.
2. Finely dice the shallots and lemongrass (if using), and add the garlic and ginger. Alternatively, blitz everything in a food processor to form a rough paste.
3. In a large bowl, combine shallot mixture with the mince, soy sauce, fish sauce, and brown sugar. Mix well. Use a tablespoon measure to portion and roll into balls, then flatten slightly. Cook on a hot BBQ, or in a large cast-iron or a non-stick frypan over medium-high heat until nicely charred and cooked through, about 2–3 minutes per side.
4. Place vermicelli in a heatproof bowl or pot. Pour over boiling water to cover and let sit for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until soft. Drain noodles, rinse under cold water, and snip in a few places with kitchen scissors to shorten the strands. Toss with sesame oil to prevent sticking.
5. To make the dressing, in a small bowl, mix together chilli, lime juice, sweet chilli sauce, fish sauce and water.
6. Toss apple, carrot, bean sprouts and mint together in a bowl. Drizzle with half the Chilli Lime Dressing and toss to combine.
7. Serve the meatballs alongside bowls/plates of vermicelli noodles, lettuce leaves, Apple Carrot Slaw, remaining dressing, and the Peanut Chilli Crack. Serve with lime wedges, fresh coriander and a sprinkle of crispy fried shallots if desired.

## Let everyone serve themselves.

Images and text extracted from Nadia's Farm Kitchen by Nadia Lim, published by Nude Food Inc, RRP \$55. Available at all good bookstores or from [www.nadialim.com](http://www.nadialim.com)

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Pieter Van Der Westhuizen, UPL NZ Ltd Adjuvant Lead, says insects, by their nature are all over the place. "They're not that easy to pin down."

Nor, it turns out, easy to combat. That's despite excellent chemistries being available.

Pieter says there's not one bit of the leaves on crops including forage brassicas, fodder beet, maize and cereals that isn't vulnerable to insect attack. He adds insecticides, however efficacious, combined with water, are not enough to deliver effective coverage and protection. "Too often, sprays don't actually get to the intended target."

"The traditional school of thought was that using more water would improve spray coverage. That's not actually the case. To have the highest level of efficacy, the highest level of coverage is essential. The ideal is to cover every square millimetre of the target surface."

Pieter says there is a solution.

"Super spreader Du-Wett reduces the surface tension of spray droplets - which is key. One spray droplet containing Du-Wett can provide up to 20 times the spread of the insecticide active compared to an insecticide applied without an adjuvant, and at least 6-8 times compared to a conventional, non-ionic surfactant. Many other adjuvants just don't get into all the nooks and crannies."

In addition, Pieter adds, Du-Wett has capillary action - transferring insecticides to the leaves' undersides. "Otherwise, insecticides will typically just drip off the tip of the foliage and onto the ground. That causes waste and exposes the crop to insect damage."

"The active in any insecticide needs to be present on the plant surface to maximise insect control. Du-Wett means you get as close as possible to



Adding Du-Wett Super-Spreader to your insecticide sprays ensures optimum coverage and spread of hard to wet crops (e.g., forage, cereals).

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Pieter says around a 20% reduction in spray drift can also be achieved using Du-Wett. This potentially extends the spray application window and delivers greater certainty of spray targeting. "Aside from, again, reducing waste, it's part of being a good neighbour and respecting our environment. It also makes life easier for spray contractors and optimises their use of equipment and time."

Du-Wett it is compatible with a whole range of commonly used insecticides including Sparta®, Exirel® and Aphidex®.

Pieter acknowledges that everyone in the industry is cost conscious right now, but he says Du-Wett will easily pay for itself. "You get the most out of every drop of the spray. We get a lot of positive feedback on that. Du-Wett means sprays can deliver to their full potential."

Pieter says, particularly with helicopter and drone application where low water volume is a definite advantage, Du-Wett provides significant

savings. "With Du-Wett you cover a greater area faster, with a much-reduced water volume and still get better protection for the crop."

White butterfly, diamondback moths, aphids and nysius (which also attacks fodder beet and forage brassicas) are all likely to be threats.

In maize, Pieter says there's a very real potential for FAW (fall army worm) to be out there and spreading rapidly if it's not tackled effectively early on. "The female moth drops eggs, and the little larvae spin silk threads which carry them across the paddock." Unchecked it can result in almost total infestation. While New Zealand has always had corn earworm and tropical army worm, FAW takes the potential for destruction to a whole new level. "They're a terrible pest."

This season is not Du-Wett's first rodeo. The product is the brainchild of Elliott Chemicals Limited (now UPL NZ) which began work on adjuvants in this country more than two decades ago. Approved in 1996, Du-Wett is backed by years of dedicated research and development.

Pieter says it's recommended that Du-Wett be used at 200 mL/ha for most insecticides, except for Attack® (then use at 300 mL/ha) and chlorpyrifos (recommended use 250 mL/ha).

Water volumes are 50-250 L/ha for ground applications and 50-100 L/ha for aerial applications.

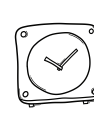
Optimum spreading and wetting from Du-Wett will occur between pH 5 and pH 9.

For more information on getting the most out of insecticides with Du-Wett talk to your local technical advisor or contact Pieter Van Der Westhuizen, UPL NZ Adjuvant Lead, at 021 392 740.

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