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WOMEN SHAPING RURAL NEW ZEALAND

Celebrating International Rural Women's Day 2026

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Rural Women, front and centre

Recently, someone with many years in media gave me a piece of advice.

It wasn't the first time I'd heard it.

"Be careful not to have too many women in one issue."

Really?

Because in all my years doing this job, nobody has ever warned me about having too many men.

Well.

Hold my gin.

Because this issue is full of women.

And unapologetically so.

October 15 is International Day of Rural Women, and 2026 is also the International Year of the Woman Farmer, so it seemed like the perfect time to put some of rural New Zealand's women front and centre.

Not because women need to be shoehorned onto pages to tick a box. Quite the opposite.

I have always believed the best stories are simply the best stories.

It just happens that rural women have some bloody good ones.

There's also a saying that you can't be what you can't see.

We shine a spotlight on rural women not just to celebrate what they are doing now, but so the next generation can see what is possible.

So a girl growing up on a farm can see a pathway into leadership, science, business, governance, farming, entrepreneurship, or wherever else she wants to go.

And just as importantly, so the women already out there in the trenches, whether that trench happens to be a muddy paddock or a boardroom, can see themselves reflected back.

Their work matters.

Their contribution matters.

Their voice matters.

And they should know their value and their worth.

For generations, too much of women's work in rural New Zealand has been quietly folded into phrases like "helping on the farm", when the reality is often very different.

She might be doing the books, payroll, GST, banking and compliance. She might be raising calves, shifting stock, managing staff, working off-farm, raising a family and keeping the whole operation moving.

Sometimes all before smoko.

Women are running farms and businesses, chairing boards, leading organisations, doing research, starting companies and holding communities together.

Some are highly visible.

Plenty aren't.

And if we want to get practical about it, women are also major decision-makers in households and businesses. In farming businesses, they are often closely involved in the finances, the planning and the decisions about where money gets spent.

So telling women's stories is not niche.

It is part of telling the story of rural New Zealand properly.

For this feature, I wanted women from across rural New Zealand, not one tidy version of what a "rural woman" is supposed to look like.

There are farmers here. Business owners. Industry leaders. Researchers. Rural advocates. Women who have broken new ground, and others who have quietly got on with the job without ever thinking what they do is particularly remarkable.

We asked them about the challenges, the opportunities, what they would change for rural women tomorrow and, for a bit of fun, what their rural superpower is.

Their answers are as varied as they are.

And that is the point.

There is no single story of the New Zealand rural woman.

There are thousands of them.

We just need to keep telling them.

So yes, there are a lot of women in this issue.

Funny that.



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When does land banking become a subdivision?

Hurunui District Council says Rosewood Terrace is about giving Amberley Beach residents somewhere to go if natural hazards eventually make relocation necessary. But with around 230 sections proposed, roughly half intended for sale on the open market, opposition from neighbouring rural residents and the beach residents' association, and questions over how many beach residents will ever move, Plan Change 7 is proving anything but simple.



Claire Inkson
RURAL EDITOR

For Rose Hinton, the issue can be summed up in one sentence.

"The council is attempting to safeguard one community at the cost of another whilst alienating both."

Hinton lives on Newcombes Road, close to the Rosewood property at 185 Ashworths Road, which Hurunui District Council purchased for $3.8 million in May 2025 as part of its long-term planning for Amberley Beach.

She is among a group of Hursley Terrace and Newcombes Road residents opposing Plan Change 7, which seeks to rezone part of the Council-owned property near Hursley Terrace Road from Rural to Residential 1.

But they are not the only ones asking questions.

The Amberley Beach Residents and Ratepayers Association has also submitted against PC7, despite Rosewood being promoted as a future relocation option for that community.

Under PC7, the rezoning would enable approximately 230 residential lots. Council says its purpose is to provide for the proactive relocation of Amberley Beach, which faces coastal erosion and inundation, river and rainfall flooding, and rising groundwater, in a way intended to be cost neutral to the wider community.

For now, Council is seeking rezoning rather than approval to build the subdivision. If PC7 is ultimately approved, Council says work on a subdivision application would follow, with councillors still to decide when any subdivision proceeds.

Council and the Amberley Beach community have spent several years considering how to respond to the settlement's future hazard risks, culminating in a Coastal Adaptation Plan adopted in June 2023.

Hurunui District Council Chief Strategy and Community Officer Judith Batchelor said residents had previously shown support for land banking.

In 2023, 40 people responded when Council sought an indication of support in principle for a managed-retreat and land-banking initiative. Twenty-nine agreed "in principle", six were not interested and five were unsure.

Batchelor said notes from a further Amberley Beach meeting in March 2025 recorded that most people in the room supported Council buying land.

But when asked whether residents knew at that point that Rosewood was the property being considered, she said no.

The particular parcel could not be disclosed during the purchasing process.

Amberley Beach Residents and Ratepayers Association chair Marc Coulthard said residents had supported exploring long-term options, but he believed the process had advanced far more quickly than many expected.

"We were sold on the plan that it was all based on things that may happen in the future," he said.

Coulthard accepts Amberley Beach faces natural hazards, but questions the urgency of rezoning Rosewood when residents are not currently required to leave and the community's coastal bund was renourished in early 2025.

Council takes a different view of the timing.

Batchelor said the adaptation process is trigger-based and other mitigation measures remain available, but having appropriately zoned land ready provides another option if circumstances change.

"Nothing happens until a trigger has been reached," she said.

Asked why rezoning was needed before those triggers had been reached, she said Council needed residentially zoned land so proactive relocation could be available "if or when that's needed".

The economics behind Rosewood have become another focus of the debate.

Council's 2023 managed-retreat proposal, developed before Rosewood was selected, envisaged enough land for 200 lots. Of those, 109 would be reserved for Amberley Beach property owners and the remaining 91 sold at market rate to help fund the overall development costs.

PC7 now provides for approximately 230 lots.

Batchelor said the current model envisaged around 120 sections being sold at full market price, with those sales helping fund the development and allowing Amberley Beach property owners to access cheaper sections.

"The model is dependent on those other sections being sold at full price to enable Amberley Beach residents to have a cheaper section", she said.

Asked whether Council could proceed with a smaller development, Batchelor said the current number of sections was what worked economically.

The scale of Rosewood is therefore tied not only to the number of Amberley Beach properties, but to the financial model used to make the relocation option affordable.

It also raises the question of what Rosewood could eventually look like if only a small number of beach residents choose to participate.

Hinton recalled an earlier meeting where someone asked the council how many people would have to move to the proposed subdivision for it to proceed. She said the answer given was one, and that the development was described as financially viable

Tracey and Marc Coulthard at their Amberley Beach home with dog Astro. Marc chairs the Amberley Beach Residents and Ratepayers Association, which has submitted against Plan Change 7. PHOTO CLAIRE INKSON





Cattle grazing on Wayne and Jenny Chisnall's Hursley Terrace farm, near the proposed Rosewood Terrace development site. PHOTO SUPPLIED



Rose Hinton, left, with Jenny and Wayne Chisnall. The Hursley Terrace and Newcombes Road residents are among those opposing Plan Change 7. PHOTO CLAIRE INKSON

because the remaining sections could be sold.

Coulthard separately said he had been given the same understanding.

Batchelor did not identify a minimum participation threshold when interviewed by Rural Guardian.

When asked whether very low uptake could mean Rosewood effectively became another commercial residential development, she acknowledged that possibility.

"Yes, it could," she said.

But she stressed Council had not budgeted the cost of constructing the subdivision in either its Long Term Plan or current Annual Plan, and a decision to develop Rosewood would still need to come back to Council.

Whether eventual uptake was one, 50 or 100 households was currently speculation, she said.

Batchelor was equally clear about Council's intention for Rosewood.

"The sole purpose of it is to provide for proactive relocation of the Amberley Beach community sometime in the future if they need to relocate," she said.

The project also has access to significant borrowing.

In September 2025, the New Zealand Local Government Funding Agency announced Hurunui District Council would borrow up to $23.5 million through its Green, Social and Sustainability programme to fund proactive relocation for Amberley Beach residents.

LGFA classifies the project under climate change adaptation and said current risk responses at Amberley Beach were anticipated to no longer be effective in 20 to 30 years.

For Coulthard and wife Tracey, however, the debate is about more than planning models and financing.

The couple moved to Amberley Beach four years ago after more than 40 years living in the city. They had camped there with their children years earlier and were looking for a quieter life.

"We bought this thinking we'd found paradise," Coulthard said.

What they value most is the community.

"We have got fantastic neighbours that talk to one another," he said.

"No footpaths, no guttering. People walk down the road," Tracey added.

They have no intention of leaving.

But Coulthard worries the existence of an official relocation option could itself affect how prospective buyers view Amberley Beach properties.

"If we don't want to go, the biggest fear is that people will not want to buy our property here," he said.

Council says remaining close to Amberley Beach was one of the strongest themes to emerge from earlier engagement with residents, and significantly influenced the area in which alternative sites were considered.

Hinton and the Chisnalls also questioned how closely Rosewood would replicate the coastal connection people had chosen Amberley Beach for.

They said the proposed native planting would screen much of the direct beach outlook from the development, leaving two view corridors where residents could walk to see the coast.

"They won't have actual views out to the beach, but they will have two view corridors where they can walk to view the beach if they want to," Hinton said.

Under Council's 2023 proposal, eligible section owners could pay a targeted rate of $1 a day for 30 years, inflation adjusted, or make a one-off payment of $11,000.

The proposal said this would secure a fully serviced section in the future subdivision in exchange for their Amberley Beach land, with their share in the new land tied to their existing beach property until titles were issued.

But the final legal arrangements have yet to be developed.

"We haven't done the work," Batchelor said. "What does the covenant look like? How will it be tied to the land? None of that work has been done."

On Hursley Terrace Road, Wayne and Jenny Chisnall's farm directly neighbours the proposed Rosewood subdivision site.

They have farmed there for around two decades, and Wayne said their approximately 80-hectare property has carried cattle and a successful Southdown stud, while lucerne and winter feed are also grown.

"This land here can grow real good animals," he said.

The couple fear placing a sizeable residential development alongside working farms could create reverse-sensitivity issues, along with years of construction traffic, machinery, noise and dust.

Wayne said farmers operating lawfully in a rural environment should not have to restrict established farming practices because residential development had subsequently been introduced beside them.

Federated Farmers has raised similar concerns.

Its submission opposes PC7 and argues Council has not sufficiently demonstrated that rezoning highly productive land is necessary under the National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land.

It also argues that Council is proposing to rezone about twice the land area required to rehouse Amberley Beach residents because additional sections are needed to achieve cost neutrality.

Federated Farmers says this does not satisfy the NPS-HPL requirement that the extent of highly productive land rezoned for urban development be the minimum necessary.

It also raises concerns about reverse sensitivity from noise, dust, stock movements, odour, spraying and machinery, along with additional traffic and potential costs to rural ratepayers.

Groundswell New Zealand has also opposed PC7.

Its submission argues Rosewood could function as a new residential area rather than simply a relocation settlement if relatively few Amberley Beach households eventually move there, and says development closer to Amberley's existing urban footprint should be considered instead.

Batchelor said much of the land surrounding Amberley is classified as highly productive and the National Policy Statement does not prevent all residential development on such land.

She said traffic, reverse sensitivity and other effects would be considered through the plan-change process and supporting technical reports.

Neighbouring residents also remain unhappy about how late they entered the conversation.

Hinton said some residents first became aware of the formal proposal around the opening of submissions.

Batchelor said consulting neighbours before Council purchased Rosewood would not have been realistic because revealing Council's interest in the property could have compromised its ability to secure the land economically.

Residents now had the opportunity to participate through the plan-change process, she said.

They have done so in numbers.

Of 107 current submissions on PC7, 89 oppose the plan change, about 83 percent.

Asked whether the level of opposition had prompted Council to reconsider either the site or scale of Rosewood, Batchelor said: "Council hasn't had that conversation."

For Jenny Chisnall, opposition to PC7 should not be mistaken for opposition to helping Amberley Beach.

"This is not about opposing growth," she said.

"It's about whether this is the right place, the right land and the right process for this growth."

Submissions on PC7 closed on August 21. Council is now preparing a summary of submissions, after which eligible parties will have an opportunity to make further submissions.

An independent hearings commissioner or panel will then hear the matter and make a recommendation to Council.

For Council, rezoning Rosewood now is about keeping a proactive relocation option available before it is needed.

For opponents, the concern is that it could permanently change productive rural land before anyone knows how many Amberley Beach residents will ultimately take up that option.

That tension is likely to remain at the centre of the debate over Rosewood.



Wayne and Jenny Chisnall say the productive farmland surrounding the proposed Rosewood Terrace development supports livestock and cropping. PHOTO SUPPLIED

Record avocado crop puts focus on productivity and demand



Claire Inkson
RURAL EDITOR

New Zealand avocado growers are heading into what could be a record season, with almost eight million trays expected to reach domestic and export markets in 2026-27.

The crop is forecast to be worth around $160 million at wholesale level, with close to five million trays destined for export and almost three million expected to be consumed at home.

But NZ Avocado chief executive Brad Siebert says producing more fruit is only part of the equation.

The challenge is making sure growers can remain productive and profitable while continuing to build demand both at home and overseas.

Despite the size of the upcoming crop, Siebert does not believe the industry is facing an oversupply problem.

"The demand is there from export," he said.

More than five million trays are expected to head offshore this season, compared with last year when volumes were split roughly evenly between domestic and export markets.

New Zealand's domestic market also remains particularly valuable because the country does not import fresh avocados.

"We have the opportunity to sell all the avocados we grow, which is a great equation to have," Siebert said.

"It's just making sure we grow that consumption rate, returns to growers increase and Kiwis get more avocados."

New Zealanders currently consume around 3kg of avocado per person each year, compared with about 4.7kg in Australia.

NZ Avocado estimates that lifting consumption closer to Australian levels could increase the domestic wholesale market from around $60 million to more than $90 million annually.

Siebert said Australia had invested heavily in building its domestic market because its ability to export was more constrained.

At the other end of the scale, consumption in Mexico sits at around 12kg per person, while China consumes less than 0.1kg.

That variation shows there is room to grow both domestic and international demand, he said.

For growers, however, one of the biggest challenges remains productivity.

"Top of the list is productivity, making sure we can be as productive as we can on every orchard to meet that demand," Siebert said.

New Zealand has more than 1500 avocado orchards, with growers operating across a wide range of scales and growing conditions.

Most commercial production is concentrated in Northland and the Bay of Plenty, with smaller pockets in South Auckland and some suitable microclimates further south.

Siebert said environmental conditions, weather events, orchard management and post-harvest handling all influenced yields and fruit quality.

Looking five years ahead, he wants to see growers of all sizes able to run viable orchards if they are applying best practice.

"I want to see productivity improve, yields across orchards improve," he said.

"We're doing a lot of work at the moment around fruit quality and general productivity and making sure our pest management programmes are on point."

Avocados can also be a difficult crop to manage because of their irregular bearing patterns.

Climate and orchard management can result in one season producing a heavy crop and another being considerably lighter.

Siebert said growers needed to think several years ahead, particularly around pruning and other management decisions.

"It can be challenging if you're not growing in the right environment and you're not putting in the best practice."

The fruit itself also presents logistical challenges.

Avocados remain green on the tree until they are harvested, after which growers and exporters have around 30 days to get them onto a retail shelf.

Cold-chain management can help preserve export fruit during its journey, but there is limited flexibility once harvest begins.

That makes managing timing and quality across the season especially important.

Unlike many horticultural crops, however, New Zealand avocados are harvested across an extended period rather than during one short, intensive seasonal window.

Siebert said that meant the industry generally did not rely heavily on workers employed through the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme.

Packhouses, growers and contractors were currently able to manage workforce requirements, although larger Northland orchards often used contractors and larger harvest teams.

The extended season also gives growers some flexibility around when fruit is picked.

Some make several picks across the season in an effort to target stronger domestic or export opportunities.

"Some growers hold off and have one or two or three picks across the season to target those opportunities," Siebert said.

While Hass remains overwhelmingly dominant, accounting for more than 95% of global avocado trade, Siebert said there was also growing interest in other varieties.

Reed avocados, sometimes described as the "cannonball" variety because of their large, round shape, harvest later and can fill a small gap as the Hass season begins to wind down.

For the wider industry, Siebert said the focus remained on improving orchard performance, maintaining fruit quality and ensuring demand kept pace with production.

His longer-term goal is straightforward.

"I'd love to see all of our members, no matter what scale they are, be viable on their orchard," he said.

"That's where they're aiming to get to."



Avocado remains a firm favourite with New Zealand consumers, but NZ Avocado says there is still plenty of room to grow domestic demand. PHOTOS SUPPLIED



New Zealanders currently eat around 3kg of avocado per person each year, compared with about 4.7kg in Australia.

Brad Siebert, NZ Avocado chief executive, says improving orchard productivity and grower viability will be key as production increases.

HOW TO CHOOSE A RIPE AVOCADO

For Hass avocados, colour is your best guide.
As they ripen, Hass avocados darken from green towards a deep purple-black. Once the skin has darkened, gently check the fruit for a little give beneath the skin.
Avoid squeezing too hard, as this can bruise the flesh.
The area around the small button or stem at the top may soften slightly before the rest of the fruit, but NZ Avocado chief executive Brad Siebert says colour remains the number one indicator for Hass avocados.

Quick guide:

- Bright green and firm: Not ripe yet
- Darker skin with a little give: Ready to eat
- Very soft: Likely overripe

Green-skin varieties are trickier, as they do not change to a dark colour when ripe, so gentle touch becomes more important.

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Spring management sets the stage for summer

Everything to gain, nothing to lose

If South Island pastures could share their feelings right now, many would be highly anxious.

Nothing scares them more at this time of year than talk of a drought.

Like your animals, they need your support. In this case, that means extra TLC with pasture management.

The great thing is they will pay you back in spades. If El Niño lives up to prediction, taking certain steps to protect pastures in coming weeks will grow more grass, improve pasture persistence and give you extra feed in autumn.

It all comes down to two things — identifying your best, most productive pastures; and following simple rules to keep them strong and ready for whatever summer throws at them.

In the next two months, all existing ryegrass tillers in your pastures will die. This is normal; tillers only live for 12 months.

Before they go, however, each one can leave up to three daughter tillers to carry on in its place.

These daughters are your bread and butter for summer survival, and the coming year's production. Help them thrive, and they'll keep pastures thick and resilient.

The first thing that kills them is lack of sunlight. So don't let spring growth get away. If you can't control it with grazing, top it or cut silage, but light crops only, please.

Heavy silage crops, which are yellow in the bottom, are the kiss of death for daughter tillers and white clover too.

Fast forward to December, and a dry period is the next challenge. The killer here? Overgrazing.

It's fine to graze a ryegrass pasture down to about 5 cm for cattle, or 3 cm for sheep. At these heights you've grazed the leaf off and are left with the basal stems, which are where ryegrass stores its reserves to survive the dry.

So, if El Niño hits hard this summer, do whatever you can to protect this level of cover. Overgrazing is eating into the basal stem (and reserves) below this height.

Avoiding overgrazing means sacrificing older paddocks (or ones you plan to crop), and baring them out, to protect your best and newest pastures.

They're the ones that will help the farm recover when rain comes, and while there are no guarantees, they will have a much better chance of quick recovery and getting your feed supply back on track ASAP in 2027.

Speaking of re-growth, in the event of drought this season, there's one more for all pastures afterwards: Do not graze the first bit of green that appears.

Plants need time to re-fuel and recover. At best, grazing too soon will delay re-growth; at worst, it will kill them.

Graham Kerr, pasture specialist, Barenbrug.

Less red tape will lower food production costs

Colin Hurst

Give farmers more certainty, and less impractical regulation, and they'll continue to deliver for export earnings and New Zealand's economy.

I think that's the headline message to take from our latest Farm Confidence Survey.

It's telling that a third of farmers named cutting regulation and compliance costs as their number one priority for the next government to deal with.

That level of concern outstripped the second and third-ranked priorities, economic and fiscal policy changes, by a country mile.

For the politicians of all stripes who are ramping up their electioneering and making policy announcements – take note.

The key ask from farmers is to finish what has been started.

Lock in Resource Management Act reforms, continue to simplify consents and audits, and rein in council powers.

The current government has done a good job of responding to Federated Farmers' calls to slash red tape and get Wellington out of farming. But the survey shows farmers are worried the November election result could undo progress.

When farmers are doing well, it means our provinces and rural towns benefit too.

The Feds survey shows the number of farms in profit – 72% – is the highest in a decade, with fewer than one in 20 making a loss.

That's a huge turnaround from just a few years ago, when high interest rates, low commodity prices and sky-high input costs made it really hard for farmers to earn a living.

Strong returns are back for dairy, sheep and beef. The farming sector – with the exception of arable – is a bright spot in an otherwise sluggish economy.

But there's real anxiety about whether the good times will hold.

Confidence in current economic conditions is strong, but sentiment over the 12-month outlook heads sharply downhill.

Nearly 30% of farmers expect conditions to worsen, compared with only 12% expecting improvement.

Fuel, fertiliser, freight, insurance and other costs are ratcheting up faster than returns, and farmers have limited ability to pass these costs on. That's farmers' No. 1 concern.

Despite the pessimism about the year ahead, more than half of farmers plan to increase on-farm spending, and many expect to lift production.

To stay on track with those gains, we encourage all political parties to take on board our five-point plan to double farm productivity, cut costs and improve the environment.

One of our asks is for 10 new national permitted activity standards to be passed by whichever parties form the next government within their first year in office.

Such standards – covering such things as vegetable growing, solar installations and water storage - would enable farmers and growers to get on with on-farm work if they meet set criteria, without the delay and cost of obtaining resource consents.

We've created a crazy system where getting permission to do sensible things on your own property can take months or even years, and cost tens of thousands of dollars.



Colin Hurst — The key ask from farmers is to finish what has been started.

Those costs flow through the supply chain all the way to our supermarket shelves.

National permitted activity standards would provide much-needed consistency and certainty while keeping environmental safeguards in place.

The benefits to all New Zealanders in terms of lower costs of putting food on the table, ability for farmers to spend more in their provincial communities, and from export earnings, are obvious.

Colin Hurst is President Federated Farmers of New Zealand



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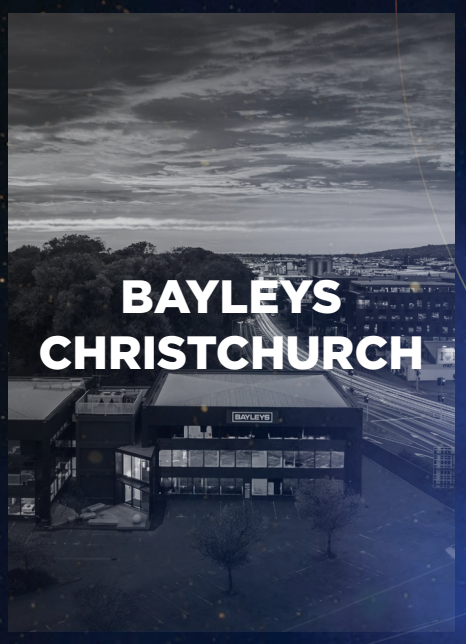

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Amy Riach
REPORTER

Paul Henry has spent decades in television. Now he wants a new stage: Parliament.

"There is a certain amount of theatre to [Parliament], which is very important.

"It's the most expensive entertainment any New Zealander will pay for. So it should be good, and it should be fun."

Henry's instinct for performance has certainly not deserted him. Neither has the quick wit.

Asked which politician would benefit most from a seven-second delay button in Parliament: the same dump button once within reach during his broadcasting career, Henry does not hesitate.

"Everyone in the Māori Party."

Then he pauses, and laughs.

"I would like to think Chlöe [Swarbrick]. But Chlöe would just say the same thing again seven seconds later, wouldn't she?"

It is a very Paul Henry way to begin a conversation: quick, mischievous and delivered with the confidence of someone who has spent decades on the other side of the microphone.

Henry appeared in Ashburton in August at a public meeting, part of a national road trip that saw him not grilling politicians, but seeking a place in Parliament himself.

After a career spent asking other people questions they did not want to answer, there is now one Henry is already tired of answering: Why politics?

"I worry that I've given the answer so many times that people will sort of roll their eyes, because if you say the same thing too many times, people start to think it might not be true.

"So it is a worry when people ask me that, because for me, getting into politics, I was reluctant to do it. It's going to consume a lot of my time, and you have to be committed."

At 66, Henry is seeking a place in Parliament on ACT's list, but he has already put an expiry date on his political career.

"I'm 66 years old. So the reality is we're talking two terms."

Two terms, he said, is enough.

"I don't want to hang around past my use-by date. I know I'm not past my use-by date now. I'm committed to two terms and I want to achieve a lot of things in those two terms."

But the possibility of ACT ending the next election in opposition is "a nightmare scenario."

Asked how long he would be willing to stay in opposition, Henry said the possibility "would be diabolical for me."

"I will have much less chance to effect the kind of change that I want to effect, the kind of positive change I want to effect, from opposition. Like much, much less chance.

"But you do have a lot of chance to blow the whistle on those that are in charge. And so I suppose I will have to focus on that."

His political prescription is familiar: smaller government, lower taxes, individual freedom, and a private sector given room to grow.

"Three years just isn't a very long time," Henry said.

"A government spends the first year half-pie congratulating itself for winning, the second year, maybe doing something, and the third year campaigning."

"You need to get in, and you need to celebrate by actually starting to deliver."

That impatience with political drift comes from someone whose broadcasting career was built around demanding answers.

For Henry, a good political interview was often a battle of attrition.

"No, that doesn't answer my question," was the essential line.

His rule was simple: at least once a week, there had to be "blood on the floor".

But party politics brings a new problem: sometimes the person saying something stupid is on your own team.

So how good will Paul Henry be at saying "no comment"?

He does not appear particularly interested in pretending politicians are infallible.

"Well, a bit stupid is okay. Because you can say, it was a bit stupid."

The important thing is what happens next.

"I mean the best thing in the world, when you know you've said something a bit stupid, is to actually address it immediately. Because you extinguish the problem immediately if you do that.

"But so often of course, people think, 'I think I got away with that.' And it comes back and bites you later."

"We're all imperfect. There are things I've said which have been technically incorrect, because I haven't known the answer," he admitted.

"But I think reasonable people understand that it happens, that happens with everyone."

"It is a collegial situation, and we're all in it for the right reasons. I haven't met someone that isn't in this for the right reasons."

In the spirit of collegiality, Henry remains supportive of the current coalition, despite National's recent leadership turmoil.

But his faith comes with a caveat.

"National's heart is in the right place. They are a very good partner in government for ACT, but they spend almost as much time looking over their shoulder as they do looking to the future," Henry said.

Henry has previously stood for National, in Wairarapa during the 1999 general election.

Now, he sees ACT as a better fit for the political philosophy he has arrived at.

"National has had its problems and it's a great shame, because the last thing the people that we're supposed to be working for need is to have us working for ourselves.

"And there's been an element of National working for itself. I hope they've ironed that out. I suspect they haven't, but I hope they have."

If ACT's role is to "apply pressure", from inside the government, Henry said that pressure is best aimed at government bureaucracy.



Paul Henry has spent decades in television. Now he wants a new stage: Parliament. PHOTOS AMY RIACH



Paul Henry is not past his "use-by date" just yet. At a public meeting in August at Hotel Ashburton, he answered questions from locals about what comes next.

Paul Henry Unlocked, the political road-trip that features a tour bus and a national series of public meetings.



"The really injurious thing about the government being way too big is it becomes very self-serving.

"We have whole departments that spend most of their time doing work for themselves, creating red tape which we tangle farmers in, which we tangle local business in, which paralyzes the very thing that we want most: the private sector to be encouraged to grow our economy.

"Our productivity levels are, and have always been, actually painfully poor."

Then there are the roads.

Henry spent less than a week in Mid Canterbury, but when asked about the issues facing local communities, he quickly settled on the roading.

"I've been here for a few days and I'm outraged. I can only imagine what it would be like if I lived here."

Rural infrastructure, particularly roading, "is a complicated thing," Henry said.

"But I think there needs to be much more equity in that."

For someone whose career has been built around putting people under pressure, Henry is determined to shake things up.

"I've only got so much time. I want to get stuff done. I want to get it done quickly. I don't want to waste my time or anyone else's.

"So I'm not going to hold back."

Sponsored Content

Pilot trial records nearly 5kg greater liveweight gain in Vitalise ewes

An on-farm pilot trial investigating calcium and magnesium supplementation in late-pregnancy and lactating ewes has recorded encouraging results, with ewes offered Vitalise gaining 4.8kg more liveweight than the control group from pre-lambing to weaning.

Vitalise is a pelletised mineral supplement produced by CP Lime and originally developed for dairy cattle. The formulation used in the pilot supplied calcium, magnesium, phosphorus and trace elements.

The pilot trial, conducted by Dr Samuel Dennis at Isherwood Research Station, Glenroy, was designed to explore the potential role of mineral supplementation during a period of high nutritional demand.

Lighter twin-bearing ewes were deliberately selected for the pilot, with one group offered Vitalise from one month before lambing and a control group not offered Vitalise.

At the beginning of the trial, the groups were almost identical in weight, averaging 58.9kg in the control group and 58.8kg in the Vitalise group.

By weaning, control ewes averaged 62kg, while Vitalise ewes averaged 66.7kg. Overall, the control ewes gained 3.1kg compared with 7.9kg for the Vitalise ewes.

"The control ewes had put on 3.1 kilograms, and the Vitalise ewes had put on 7.9 kilograms, almost five kilograms more than the control ewes," Dennis said.

"This was a dramatic difference. They were in much better order."

Lamb growth was essentially the same between the groups, with mean weaning weights of 27kg in the control group and 27.2kg in the Vitalise group.

Dennis interpreted the comparable lamb growth alongside the difference in ewe condition as an indication that the control ewes had drawn more heavily on their own nutrient reserves during lactation.

He also observed differences in ewe vigour during the pilot. Some control ewes were reluctant to move with the flock, while the Vitalise ewes generally appeared more active.

Blood samples taken from five ewes in each group at tailing indicated higher magnesium concentrations among the Vitalise ewes, while calcium levels were similar between the groups.

Dennis had also introduced Vitalise to his wider ewe flock about a month before lambing, when signs consistent with calcium deficiency had begun to appear. He observed no further hypocalcaemia symptoms in the main flock from that point until lambing.



While the pilot did not provide sufficient data to quantify any effect on ewe mortality, Dennis said the results around ewe condition were particularly encouraging.

"Better condition at weaning means the ewes go into summer in good condition and only need to be maintained through to mating," he said.

"Poor condition at weaning means condition must be gained somehow over summer, on lower quality feed, and may not be possible due to drought. Anything that allows ewes to gain condition over spring helps to match feed demand to supply and to the environment."

Dennis said the economics also looked encouraging.

Recorded Vitalise usage over the 119-day ewe trial averaged about 0.41kg per ewe and her lambs, including any spillage. Dennis suggested farmers could budget on around half a kilogram per ewe over spring.

"If that half a kilogram of Vitalise can result in almost a five kilogram increase in ewe liveweight at weaning, the economics of it stack up very well," he said.

Dennis believes flocks where calcium or magnesium deficiency is suspected, including those experiencing metabolic health issues or below-desired performance, are likely to benefit most.

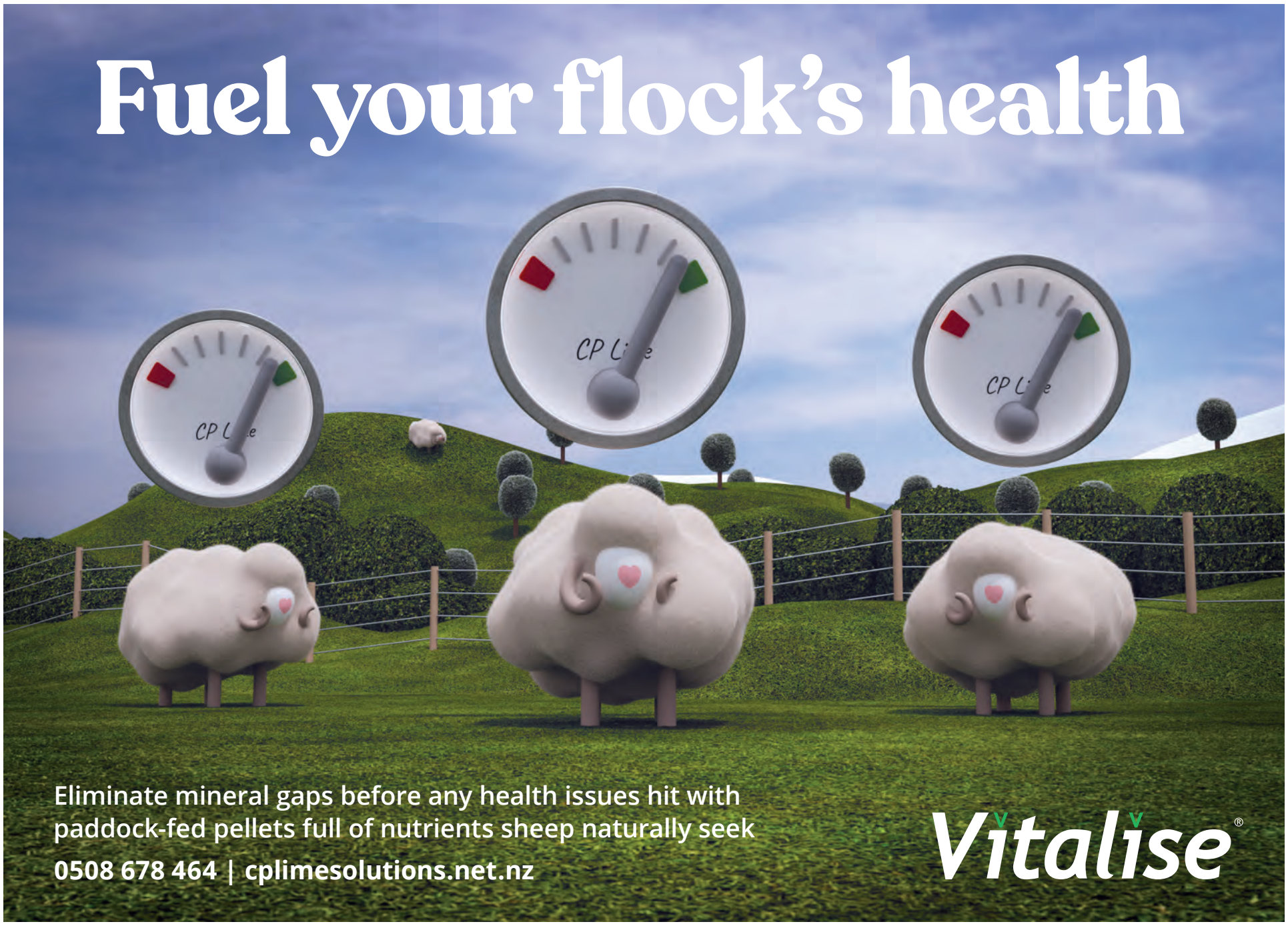
At the end of the pilot, previously untreated control ewes consumed Vitalise when it was offered, while the supplemented group showed little interest. Dennis believes this may reflect differences in mineral need.

The pilot found no measurable improvement in growth from feeding Vitalise directly to weaned lambs and did not continue long enough to determine whether better ewe condition would translate into improved reproductive performance at the following mating.

Dennis said the results were encouraging enough for him to continue using the product in his own flock.

"I'm very impressed with this product. I think it made a major difference to my ewes this spring and the trial results bear that out," he said.

"This is a product that I am incorporating into my own management and will be using every year."



Spreading the load



Erin Neale

You've had another successful year on the farm: your accountant does the maths, tells you how much belongs to IRD, and you (willingly? begrudgingly?) write the cheque.

Sound familiar?

That's certainly one option. But farming income is rarely consistent from one year to the next. The milk price moves, the next "100-year" weather event hits, or perhaps the price of diesel teeters at $3.80 a litre. Fortunately, our tax system contains provisions designed with that volatility in mind.

In a year where everything is going your way, Inland Revenue's Income Equalisation Scheme can be the hero you've been waiting for. Farming, fishing, and forestry businesses can make payments to the scheme, and those payments are recorded as a deductible expense. If the money is left there longer than 12 months, IRD will pay you interest at a rate of 3% per annum. The funds can sit with IRD for up to five years, until a leaner year comes along and you withdraw them, recording the refund as taxable income. You may not have heard much about it, but at 30 June 2025 Inland Revenue was holding almost $193 million in deposits.

Timing matters. If you have an extension of time to file your return, you can generally make a deposit up to six months after your balance date and include it in the previous year's return. This means you may still have an opportunity to use the scheme once your accountant has calculated your tax position.

Let's put this in practical terms. In a good year, taxable income of $1 million would mean $280,000 of tax (at a 28% tax rate). Deposit $300,000 into the scheme and taxable income drops to $700,000, reducing that year's tax to $196,000.

In a leaner year, say taxable income falls to $400,000, you can withdraw that $300,000, bringing taxable income back to $700,000, and your tax bill up to $196,000 again.

Clearly a manufactured example — but you get the idea. This isn't a scheme to reduce your overall tax obligation (we're not magicians). Instead, taxable income that would have swung from $1 million to $400,000 has effectively been levelled at $700,000 in each year — smoothing your tax payments and, importantly, your cashflow.

There are caveats. The payment must be made in cash — it can't be creative accounting we perform at year end — and generally your deposit needs to stay with IRD for 12 months. Early withdrawal is possible, but only if you meet specific criteria.

Income isn't the only thing we can move between years. Sometimes, we can shift expenses too.

Enter: Deferred Fertiliser.

Under the Income Tax Act, farmers can spread the deduction for fertiliser — including cartage and spreading costs — over any or all of the following four income years. The fertiliser boosts pasture and production for seasons to come, so matching the deduction to when the benefit is realised makes more sense.

Say you spend $100,000 on fertiliser this year. You could claim the whole lot now or claim $20,000 and spread the remaining $80,000 over the next four years. Through smart tax planning with your trusted advisor, you can strategically claim and defer fertiliser expenditure each year, effectively rolling the benefit forward into a new four-year window until you need it most.

Neither of these is a loophole. They're legitimate tools that recognise farming income doesn't arrive in neat, predictable instalments, so why should the tax treatment pretend otherwise? The trick isn't making the tax disappear — despite what you may expect from your accountant — it's making sure you're paying it at the time that makes the most sense for your business.

Content in this article is general and does not constitute advice – please get in touch if you'd like to discuss your specific circumstances.

Erin Neale, Associate at Brown Glassford & Co Limited.

Who do YOU think you are?

Kathryn Wright



Recently, I had an experience that reminded me that not everyone is happy for you when you reach important personal or professional milestones. This particular milestone was proof that I had worked hard, studied hard and pushed myself to my limits. The person in question, through their dismissive, cutting comment, showed me something important: *living with meaning will sometimes provoke people who aren't living with theirs.* It also reinforced some of the findings in my recent research, that visibility in small communities changes the way people see and respond to you.

In New Zealand, we are familiar with the idea of Tall Poppy Syndrome. In simple terms, it describes the tendency to criticise, undermine, or "cut down" people who are perceived to be successful. Some people see it as a cultural mechanism that keeps us humble. Others believe it discourages leadership, innovation, entrepreneurship, and ambition.

Like many cultural ideas, the truth probably sits somewhere in the middle.

Humility is one of the things I genuinely value about rural New Zealand. Many of us would agree with the sentiment: "be successful if you want, but don't boast about it". Success itself is rarely the problem. The challenge comes when criticism is directed not at arrogance, but at visibility. And visibility is something my research helped me understand differently. In rural communities, visibility is unavoidable.

We live in places where people know who you are. They know where you work, what land you farm, who your family is, what committees you're involved with, and whether you've recently succeeded or struggled. My research found that being known is actually one of the great strengths of rural life. People notice when you're missing. They check in when things aren't right. They support you in times of need. But visibility has another side.

The mo e involved you become, the more visible you become.

If you step into leadership, advocate for a cause, build a successful business, challenge the status quo, gain public recognition, or simply put yourself forward, more people form opinions about what you're doing. Most of those opinions will be positive, but some won't.

Sometimes that appears as gossip. Sometimes it looks like exclusion from social groups. Sometimes it shows up as sarcastic comments, eye-rolls, criticism on social media, or a "must be nice" response.

Not every criticism is Tall Poppy Syndrome. Success doesn't make any of us immune from feedback, mistakes, or accountability. Sometimes criticism is fair. But sometimes the reaction has less to do with what you've done and more to do with the discomfort that visibility can create in a small community.

One of my findings was that belonging in rural communities is often negotiated rather than automatically granted. Communities have social rules, expectations, and unwritten norms. Most of the time these create cohesion and stability. Occasionally they can also create gatekeeping and resistance to people who challenge existing ways of doing things.

The reality is that meaningful contribution isn't always comfortable. People who create change often attract attention. People who attract attention often attract criticism. Whether you're volunteering, advocating for your community, running a business, conducting research, serving on a board, trialling a new farming system, or taking on a leadership role, you're stepping into a space where not everyone will understand your decisions, motivations, or goals. And that's okay.

The lesson I've taken from both personal experience and years of listening to rural people is this: don't confuse criticism with failure.

Listen to genuine feedback.

Stay grounded.

Stay humble.

Keep learning.

But don't make yourself smaller simply to avoid making other people uncomfortable. Rural communities need people who are willing to contribute. They need people prepared to take calculated risks, ask difficult questions, challenge assumptions, and help shape positive futures. They need people willing to be visible. But know that this can expose places where others feel stuck, because it highlights the gap between where they are and where they hoped to be.

The people who care about the work will usually recognise what you're trying to achieve, even if they don't always agree with every decision you make. Meaningful work has never required universal approval.

It only requires a good reason to keep going.

Kathryn Wright Rural Mental Health Clinician/Educator

Gemma Hansen

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 Hamilton Young Farmers Club member Gemma Hansen.

1 What is the name of your club, and how long have you been a member?
I have been a member of the Hamilton Young Farmers Club for two years and am currently the Vice Chair.

2 What has been the highlight for you of joining Young Farmers?
One of the highlights of joining Young Farmers has been supporting friends competing in the Young Farmer Grand Final and making a great weekend of it each year. A recent highlight was touring the Gallagher building, and of course, catching up with the Hamilton Young Farmers Club each month for a beer and a yarn.

3 What are the benefits a d experiences that you feel have helped you most?
Taking part in the Ignite Foundation Skills for Emerging Leaders programme has been one of the most valuable experiences I've had through Young Farmers. It helped strengthen my communication, teamwork and leadership skills while connecting me with like-minded people from across the industry. It was a great opportunity to learn from others and develop skills that I use both in my job and everyday life.

4 How did you become involved in agriculture?
Growing up on a sheep and beef farm in Waerenga sparked my passion for agriculture from an early age. I've always enjoyed helping on the farm, working with animals, and being outdoors, so I always knew I wanted to be involved in the ag industry.

5 What is your job now? Tell us about your role, and what your journey has been like so far.
I'm a Pasture Systems Agronomist with Barenbrug. After completing a Bachelor of Agriculture at Massey University, I joined Barenbrug as a graduate, which gave me the opportunity to learn about all parts of the business, from developing new genetics right through to getting seed onto farm. From there, I spent time in the plant breeding team before moving into agronomy.

My job is all about making sure the grasses, herbs and brassicas we develop will perform for farmers right across New Zealand. There's a lot of trial work involved, so you'll often find me out in the paddock collecting data, pushing a mower, taking endophyte samples, or checking plants for insect damage. If I'm not doing that, you'll find me working with farmers and resellers through training events and field days, sharing what I've learned from my trials and helping them get the best results from their pastures.

6 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 the future of farming is really positive. Through Young Farmers, I'm seeing so many talented and enthusiastic young people becoming part of the industry, which gives me a lot of confidence for the future.

I think farming will continue to focus on producing more high-value products with fewer inputs. This will be achieved through better genetics, improved technology, and more resilient farming systems.

For New Zealand, I'd like to see continued investment in pasture and forage innovation, along with practical environmental improvements that work for farmers. Strong collaboration between farmers, researchers, and the wider industry will also be important. Researchers need to understand the challenges and opportunities farmers are facing so they can focus on developing solutions that deliver real value on farm.

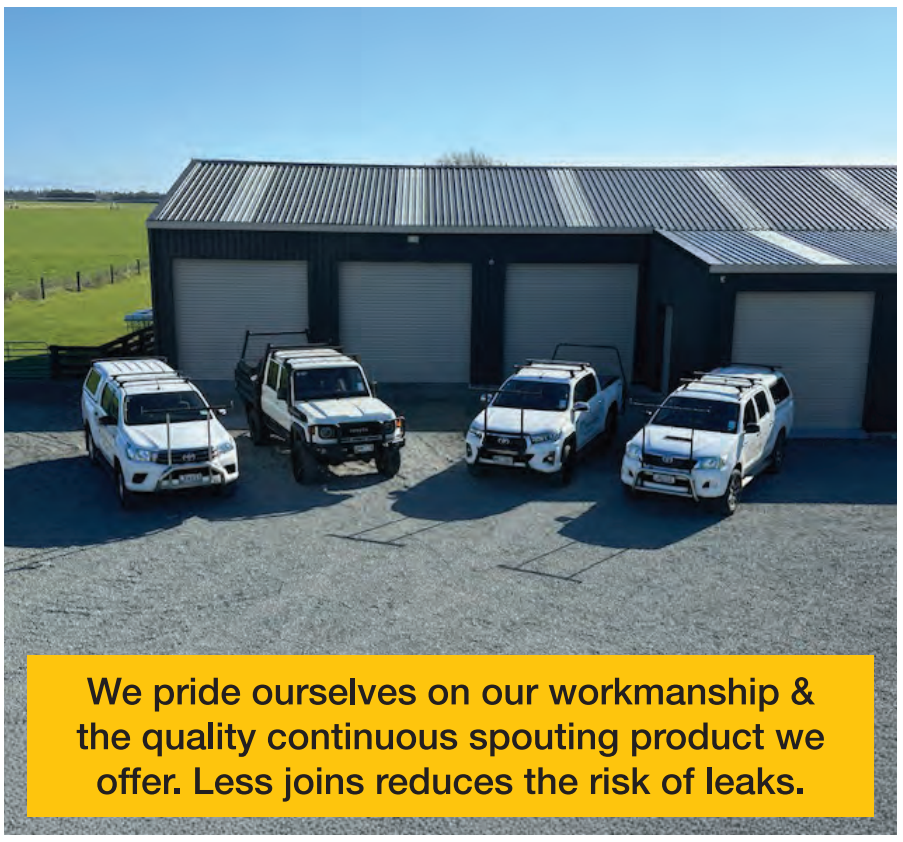
7 What are your future plans?
I'd love to continue developing my career in a way that allows me to keep helping farmers get the best out of their businesses and achieve their goals. Whether that's through improving pasture performance, adopting new technologies, or providing practical advice.

8 And anything else you would like to include about your club we can include too.
If you're farming around the Hamilton area and thinking about joining Young Farmers, come along to our monthly meeting. It's a great opportunity to get off farm, meet like-minded people and build connections in the industry.



Nomination —
Gemma is a superstar, and has been a consistent active member of young farmers. She goes above and beyond for our Hamilton club consistently. She is a pleasure to be around and always has a smile on her face. Recently she organised by herself some calving/lambing packs for the club which were incredible. They included goodies like Cold pressed Rapeseed Oil, Tea, Peanut butter, popcorn, pumice hand scrub, iced coffee, fudge, hand soap and dog food! In addition to this she also made baking for dessert at our Gallagher plant tour and organised a card and thank you gift for Darren who hosted us. We are extremely lucky to have Gemma as part of our club.

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Chilli competitors set to face the heat at Ashburton Show

AMY RIACH

The second-ever Great Ashvegas Chilli Competition is returning to the annual Ashburton A&P Show. Pictured is last year's winner: Jesse Painter of North Canterbury.



Regret starting to kick in, after the fourth round at the chilli eating competition last year. Event host Jay Madgwick-Pamment says the regret is "in the name!" PHOTOS SUPPLIED



Ashburton's chilli lovers should prepare for a serious test of their taste buds when the Great Ashvegas Chilli Eating Competition returns to the Ashburton A&P Show.

The competition, which proved a crowd favourite at last year's show, will return for its second year at 11am on Saturday, October 31, with $500 on the line for the winner.

A further $100 is available to the runner-up, while third place will receive a competition box containing 10 SpicyBoys hot sauces.

Hot sauce aficionado Jay Madgwick-Pamment will once again be at the helm of the fiery contest, having hosted the inaugural competition last year.

The owner of Christchurch-based hot sauce company SpicyBoys, Madgwick-Pamment is no stranger to the world of extreme chilli eating.

SpicyBoys runs the annual Southern Spice Chilli Eating Competition in Christchurch, and after hosting the inaugural Ashburton event last year, he's looking forward to bringing the "horrible" challenge back again.

"The show was awesome last year. There were definitely a few hundred people just in the audience watching us. We destroyed a lot of people down in Ashburton," he laughed.

The competition begins with home-grown jalapeños before the heat steadily ramps up, eventually reaching the notorious Carolina Reaper.

"That's a killer," Madgwick-Pamment said. "It's in the name!

"We start with your typical jalapeños, and we slowly get up to that Carolina Reaper level of spice. It's pretty hot up there."

But competitors shouldn't expect the same chillies every year, with SpicyBoys also sourcing unusual varieties from growers around the country.

"We get some new, freak varieties every now and then from some growers around New Zealand, so always something new," he said.

While the competitors are the ones putting their stomachs on the line, Madgwick-Pamment said the spectacle is an important part of the event.

"It's always a highlight at an event. The determination of the competitors and the atmosphere created by the crowd make it a real experience.

"I always get very nervous that they're going to eat all my chillies," he laughed.

Madgwick-Pamment is the MC of the competitions, giving him a front-row seat for the action.

"I always view it as all the competitors against me, rather than them competing against each other. And I don't like to lose!"

Competition organiser and A&P committee member Carmen Lye said last year's event had provided plenty of entertainment for the crowd.

"Our first ever chilli competition last year was a huge success. It was great entertainment, and it really sorted out the serious chilli eaters after about the fifth round."

Lye encouraged anyone confident enough to try, to get their name down early.

"If you think you have what it takes, get in and start building up your tolerance now."

There are only 30 places available, and competitors must be aged 18 or over.

Entry costs $40 and includes full-day admission to the Ashburton A&P Show.

But for those not brave enough to take part, the competition still offers a ringside view of competitors battling the Carolina Reaper.

FARMVIEW

OPINION

What is a good bugger?

LEANNE BLAKELOCK



Another question from our European Rural Exchange students that stopped me and got me thinking. What is a good bugger?

I don't think it is the same thing as being nice. Nice can be manners. Nice can be smiling, saying the right thing, being pleasant to deal with. A good bugger can be blunt, scruffy, sarcastic and not especially polished.

I think the thing with good buggers is that they notice. They notice what is happening around them, what other people need, what is about to become someone else's problem. And then, here's the magic, they do something about it.

A good bugger includes everyone in the conversation. It is not about politeness. It is about awareness. Have they noticed another person has entered the space? Are they looking beyond themselves, their conversation, their phone, their sales pitch? That tells me far more than whether they shook my hand properly and whether I wish to trust them with my business. The best good buggers pick up the piece of rubbish that might be blowing across the track as they are talking.

I see the same thing in tiny moments around the farm. I'm coming down the race on the tractor and someone is standing near a gate. They see me coming, work out where I'm headed, and open it. I could have done it myself. But they were there. They noticed. They thought, I can make that easier. That is good bugger behaviour.

There's a well-known story about former Xero Australia managing director Trent Innes and his "coffee cup test". At the end of an interview, he would notice whether a candidate offered to take an empty cup back to the kitchen. It wasn't really about the cup. It was about whether they noticed the small job that needed doing and assumed some invisible other person would deal with it.

Rural communities run on the energy of the good buggers.

Do you notice the gate that needs opening? The person carrying too much? The ute parked blocking the way? The neighbour having a rough week? The job that will otherwise be left for whoever comes next? Do you return borrowed gear tidy and fuelled? Do you see the animal where it should not be, the hose still running, pick up the stray fencing staple sitting on the yard, and sort all of those things even though technically they're not your problem?

A good bugger is not necessarily the person doing the biggest thing. They are often the person who notices the small thing.

That is why I think calling it "being nice" misses the point. Nice is often about how you appear to other people. Being a good bugger is about how aware you are of the world around you and your part in it. It is the willingness to spend a little of your own time, energy or convenience to make somebody else's day easier. That generosity of spirit is one of the things rural communities do particularly well.

That is what strong communities are built on, thousands of tiny decisions made when nobody is keeping score.

So maybe that is my definition of a good bugger. Not necessarily the nicest person in the room. It's the person who notices.

And when they see a chance to make life a little easier for somebody else, they quietly get on with it.

LeAnne Blakelock is a Taranaki based dairy farmer and accountant, and founder of the social media platform, the Calf Chronicles.

Trojan Horses



Eva Harris

My daily commute is filling up with glittering signs proclaiming pointless slogans from airbrushed, friendly-looking wannabe politicians angling for my vote. The news is full of stories about the Opportunity Party, while Labour is saying very little, presumably hoping National will lose before they put their foot in their mouth.

Election season must be upon us.

Most policy announcements from the major parties seem to focus on health and the cost of living, which is presumably what their underlings have told them voters care about most. However, this voter wants to know where they stand on environmental policy.

Cost of living promises might win headlines and bribe voters, but they can also act as a Trojan Horse. While everyone is looking the other way, major environmental reforms could quietly make their way through Parliament and have a significant impact on how people farm their land.

While it's understandable that freshwater and climate change are no longer dominating the political conversation, there is a downside. The lack of scrutiny means we have very little idea what a new Government might do in this space, or what that could mean for farmers once they get into power.

At the time of writing, the Natural Environment Bill is still working its way through Parliament, although it may well be law by the time this article is published. It is intended to replace the existing resource management system and create a new planning framework for managing our environment. When in place, it will give ministers significant power to direct environmental policy as they see fit.



This government has released an early example of how the new system could operate, but it is only intended to test ideas. Formal consultation is not expected until next year, and a different government could easily take a different direction.

From what I can tell, most political parties seem keen to keep Freshwater Farm Plans in some form. Most also see room to improve climate policy, although they differ on how far New Zealand's obligations should go and how quickly change should occur.

Meanwhile, MCERT seems to be having kittens about what any weakening of freshwater or climate obligations might mean for trade relationships. At the same time, the organisation is still in nappies itself and working out how to provide robust advice to ministers on these requirements.

The problem is that most of the important details remain missing. Voters and farmers are being asked to support a major overhaul of environmental regulation without knowing many of the details that will matter most on the ground.

What standards will farmers be expected to meet? Who will enforce them? Will the new regulatory entities have the skills and resourcing needed? What will compliance cost? Nobody seems particularly keen to answer those questions just yet.

That uncertainty doesn't appear to be slowing investment in the dairy sector at the moment. Confidence remains surprisingly strong. But I do wonder how long that optimism can last when there is still such a large black hole sitting where future environmental regulation should be. Maybe the horse has already bolted and future governments will feel compelled to overcorrect. The new legislation will make it easy for them to do so.

Either way, the devil will be in the detail, and so far most political parties seem content to kick that particular can down the road.

Let's see what they come up with over the next few weeks, so I can make a genuinely informed decision about what I'm signing myself up for on 7 November.

After all, nobody likes discovering what's hidden inside the Trojan Horse after it's already inside the gates.

Eva Harris is Principal Environmental Advisor for Enviro Collective

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For forage brassica success, prevention is better than cure

But get ready to pivot

With a super El Niño forecast, farmers planting forage brassicas from October to December will need to be on their toes.

Dr Lauren Jones, UPL Regional Manager Central South Island, says farmers are used to adapting to seasonal conditions and adjusting their plans as weather patterns change.

Lauren says highly effective pre-emergence crop protection programmes built around Monarch®, Merit® and Major® require approximately 13 mm of rainfall or irrigation within 10 days of application to achieve optimum performance.

"For best results and less weed competition, these should be applied immediately after sowing and before the forage brassica crop emerges. Apply when good growing conditions are forecast if you can, ideally not when cold, wet conditions are likely."

However, timing is everything with high-value forage brassicas.

It typically takes four to eight weeks for crop canopy closure. Before then, vigorous weeds can out-compete the crop for moisture, nutrients and light, leading to yield losses of up to 60%.

"Once the crop canopy closes there's usually no problem, but it's important to get it to that stage," Lauren says.

The weed problem can also extend well beyond the current crop.

"If weeds are unchecked, a weed seed bank can build up in the soil, impacting paddock productivity for years. You don't want weeds dumping seeds that will affect future rotations. Farmers always have to be looking a couple of years ahead or there can be long-term negative production outcomes.

"There are a whole range of weeds to tackle, and they can vary from property to property and even paddock to paddock. Failing to get on top of them can impact not only the current crop but future crops for years to come.

"Annual weeds such as black nightshade can produce several thousand seeds, with established plants producing up to 10,000 seeds per plant that can remain viable in the soil for decades."

Lauren says forage brassicas are a hugely important winter feed crop in Canterbury, contributing between 5 and 20 percent of total feed requirements.

"Kale, rape and swedes are used across dairy, sheep and beef systems. Taking out weeds early improves the chances of a good crop and reliable feed through the critical winter period."

Greg McIntyre, UPL NZ Regional Manager Otago & Southland, says monitoring paddocks and understanding their history are both essential.

"With forage brassicas, it can be two weeks from a potentially good crop to disaster. If you do the basics right, that's a good start. If weeds aren't controlled early, trying to salvage crops post-emergence can easily become a nightmare."

Greg says the strength of the recommended programme lies in using multiple herbicides with complementary strengths.

"One active ingredient is not necessarily the best way. All have their particular strengths. The combination of Merit for grasses, Monarch for fathen and black nightshade, and Major for a broad range of annual weeds gives really good pre-emergence weed control. They're also compatible, which makes application easy and cost-effective."

Merit (alachlor) controls a range of annual grass and selected broadleaf weeds in forage brassica crops. It extends the weed spectrum in a pre-emergence programme and has a comparatively lower odour than some other herbicides on the market.

Major (clomazone) is a residual pre-emergence herbicide controlling a wide range of annual broadleaf and grass weeds in forage brassica crops. It provides outstanding control of problem weeds such as Shepherd's purse, chickweed and cleavers.



Early weed control sets the foundation for successful canopy closure and a healthy forage brassica crop.

A residual herbicide, Major is taken up through roots and emerging shoots of weed seeds and must be applied before weeds and crops emerge.

While Shepherd's purse (Capsella bursa-pastoris) may seem relatively harmless, it is a host of clubroot, a soilborne disease that affects all brassica species. Clubroot spores can survive in the soil for more than ten years and infect future brassica crops, making prevention an important part of any weed management strategy.

Greg recommends applying the three herbicides to a fine, firm and moist seedbed. Large clods and poor seedbed preparation can reduce weed control performance.

For minimum tillage systems, pre-emergence Major, Merit or Monarch can be mixed with glyphosate.

Seasonal conditions don't always allow the ideal preemergence programme to be activated by rainfall.

While irrigation may be an option in some situations, Lauren says early post-emergence spraying with Monarch can provide valuable flexibility when conditions remain dry.

"It gives you flexibility."

Monarch (clopyralid and picloram) is specifically formulated for both pre-emergence and postemergence weed control, balancing crop safety, efficacy and affordability.

Containing twice as much clopyralid as some alternative products, there is no need to add additional clopyralid to the tank mix. Lauren says Monarch's comparatively low rate of picloram also reduces the potential for residual effects on clover.

"It also has substantial plant-back advantages compared with other products on the market."

She adds that combining Monarch with Centurion® Xtra can provide highly selective grass weed control within forage brassica crops.

When it comes to adjuvants, Lauren recommends including Unison® with Major, Monarch, and Merit for pre-emergence weed control. Trial work has shown improved efficacy when Unison is included. For postemergence applications with Monarch, her preferred adjuvant is Peptoil® or Sidekick® crop oil concentrate.

For more information on how to protect your forage brassica crops right from the start, contact Dr. Lauren Jones, UPL NZ Regional Manager Central South Island, at 021 987 735 or Greg McIntrye, UPL NZ Regional Manager Otago and Southland at 021 519 772.

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UPL

Rebekah Graham

WHERE AND WHAT ARE YOU FARMING?
We're on a dairy farm in Ashhurst.
WHAT YEAR, MAKE, AND MODEL IS YOUR TRUSTY UTE?
2018 Isuzu MU-X.
WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE FEATURE (OR QUIRK) ABOUT YOUR UTE?
Definitely its 4WD ability.
WHAT SONG IS ALWAYS ON YOUR PLAYLIST WHEN YOU'RE BEHIND THE WHEEL?
We usually just crank up the radio, but *I Like to Move It* is one of the kids' favourites.
WHAT'S YOUR ULTIMATE ROAD-TRIP SNACK WHEN YOU'RE OUT ON THE FARM OR HEADING TO TOWN?
We all love beef sticks or chippies.
WHAT'S ALWAYS ROLLING AROUND IN THE BACK SEAT OR TRAY?
Kids' bikes, helmets, changes of clothes, snacks, dogs and sometimes even our pet bunny! There's also a portable DVD player for those average mornings. It's all in the boot, of course. We basically live out of this car!

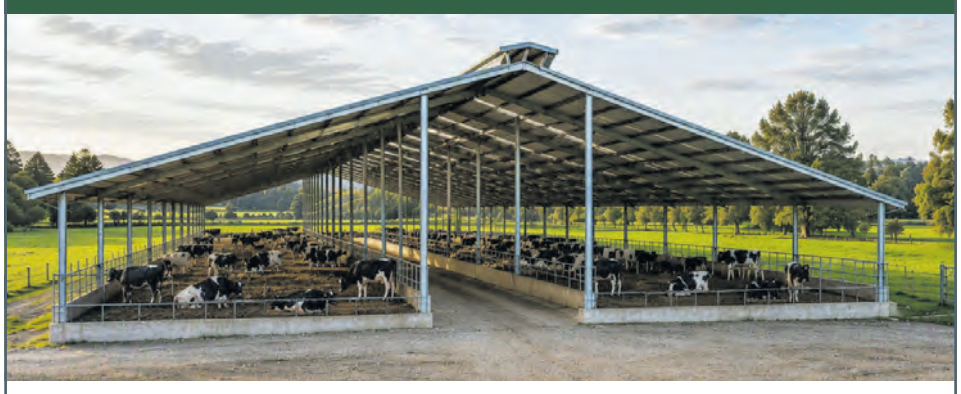




Daisy Graham (left) with Saffy, and Samuel with Blossom.



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The women shaping rural New Zealand

THE WOMEN
RURAL NEW ZEALAND RUNS ON
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OCTOBER 15, 2026



RURAL GUARDIAN | THE WOMEN NEW ZEALAND RUNS ON

CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL RURAL WOMEN'S DAY 2026



Shannon Fry

Shannon Fry has built her farming career from the ground up, progressing from shepherding into genetics and management at Cleardale Station in the Rakaia Gorge. With a hands-on approach and a strong interest in stock performance, she represents a new generation of women building serious careers on farm.

You came from a Christchurch city upbringing and competitive dancing into farming. When did you first f el that agriculture was where you really belonged?

Growing up in Christchurch gave me great exposure to a variety of different opportunities including competitive dancing which I competed in for 20years. I'm so thankful to have had those opportunities but my ties to agriculture stem back to family roots and my favourite place growing up, Banks Peninsula. Every weekend or school holiday where I wasn't tied up with competitions or other commitments I was on the peninsula. I spent a vast amount of time with my cousins on farm, and as we grew up we had the opportunity to do more to help out. My first on farm memory I can remember I was primary school age. We were on school holidays and I went to the peninsula to stay as normal. My cousins and I helped bring the sheep in for shearing, we mustered on foot and I can remember everyone having so much fun. When we arrived back at the homestead there was a huge array of different food set out for lunch, we all sat around the table and ate together after a good mornings work. That is a fond memory that I still think of today. I've always loved being outdoors and spending time with family; helping on the farm and being around stock was an added bonus. That time spent on the peninsula surrounded by people so passionate about farming is what started it all and here we are 20 odd years later and I'm literally living my dream. I mean who doesn't want a beautiful New Zealand landscape as their office?

You started at Cleardale as a shepherd and have since moved into genetics and now management. What have been the biggest lessons as your responsibilities have grown?

My biggest responsibility for the genetic programs are making sure we record the right data traits at the right time and making sure it is done in the most efficient way possible whilst creating the least amount of opportunity for human error so we can be as accurate as possible. Also keeping accurate records of everything we do and submitting those records on time.

Genetics has become a real passion for you. What do you enjoy most about seeing the decisions you make today coming through in the next generation of animals?

I find it most rewarding when we look back at our stock and their datasets and see the generational progress occurring through various traits. Being able to track an individual animals progress whether it be an offspring history or a sires success rate, tracking different elements is not only interesting but I think it has helped us narrow down our strengths and weaknesses and find the areas we can improve faster as we can see the raw data infront of us and make calls to further improve our stocks performance and meet our genetic targets. Genetics have become such an active part of modern agriculture and although I believe phenotype still has a role to play within stock selection, raw data doesn't lie.

You previously said that at Cleardale it has never been about being male or female, but about being the best person for the job. Do you think that is increasingly the experience for young women coming into farming?

I think back to my first animal science laboratory at Lincoln University in 2018 and I remember joking with the small handful of girls in attendance that the class was about 80/90% males. I guarantee if I went back to that laboratory class today it would be a whole different story. I think the perspective around women in the industry has significantly changed and although I can't speak for every person in the industry, I've thankfully never had negative experience in any environment where I have felt like my gender has been the limiting factor.

I've never been one to let anything stop me if it's something I'm truly passionate about and there were people in my life when I was younger that doubted whether or not I would follow through with an agriculture career not but because of my gender because I grew up in the city and was a competitive dancer surrounded by the glitz and glam of that world, it has been a great feeling to prove them all wrong.

What does being a rural woman mean to you in 2026?

I'm proud to be a rural women in New Zealand. I think it takes a certain type of person to commit to farming as a full-time career and I'm grateful to be surrounded by likeminded people who want to do their best by the industry.

I think being a rural women means you aren't afraid to get your hands dirty when the goings tough and being able find a way to achieve whatever goal has been set before you to the best of your ability. Giving things your all, not being afraid to fail and learning from your mistakes.

What is the one thing you would change for rural women tomorrow if you could?

For the younger generation of women sitting on the fence debating to join the industry, doubting their own abilities and whether or not they can succeed. All I can say is 'Just do it'. You don't have to know everything or be the best at everything on the first go, if you have the drive, commitment and a willing to give things a go then what's holding you back other then yourself. The industry needs more young people coming through and your background and prior knowledge won't hold you back.

What's your rural superpower, the skill, quality or instinct you rely on most?

My ability to problem solve and look at situations in different light when things aren't working. As ever farmer knows, each day is different and working with stock always keeps you on your toes. What worked yesterday doesn't always work today, and being able to read situations and adjust to better suit our desired outcomes is something I believe I am good at.

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Michelle Ruddell

Michelle Ruddell is Chairperson of the Rural Support Trust National Council and a dairy farmer, bringing both governance experience and a strong understanding of the realities facing rural families. Her work is focused on strengthening rural communities and ensuring support is there when people need it most.

Rural Support sees people at some of the hardest points in rural life. What have those experiences taught you about rural communities?

No one is immune to the challenges of rural life. We all face similar challenges albeit weather, financial pressure, relationship pressures, family pressure, changing economic environments — but what I have learnt from all of this is that our ability to work through the pressure is different for each and every one of us; depending on many life factors at the time.

We talk about having a tool box of mental health strategies to help us get through tough times, and this idea validates that we need different options at different times in our life to deal with the hard times we face — no one size fits all, no one size fits anybody actually.

What this has taught me about rural communities though, is that with timely support, targeted resources and social connection, rural communities can support each other and they do. Rural people are practical and generally just get on with it, and Rural Support is not a hand out, it's a hand up of wrap around support for individuals, their families/whanau and their business.

What pressures are rural women carrying that might not always be obvious from the outside?

I didn't grow up in farming, so the idea of being a rural woman was exciting until the reality hit me head on! The pressure of being a rural woman changes depending on the age and season you are in. I still face pressure now, 20 years later, that I have to navigate and work out how I get through it. This question has me stop and reflect why the pressures are not always obvious, and I think for me it comes down to the emotion we carry as the woman of the house and the business. And not wanting to come across as 'not coping'.

It is a very traditional view that I am taking here (rightly or wrongly) but I have always recognized my role and my part in our business is mostly at home with some farm work. I shared a story at a ladies long lunch I spoke at about 'the marriage counselling needed after a visit to the runoff'.... all the woman in the room knew exactly what I meant .... with many sharing "How hard it is at times" and "We understand and feel the same". So the pressure a rural woman carry's, I believe is reflective of the 'role' we see ourselves filling in our home, our relationship, our family, our business and if we have the energy, in our communities too. That's why it is unseen — because it is how we choose to show up, and then get stuck in. This pressure is cumulative, often we feel undervalued and we can't just switch off from as we live and breathe our home, our business and our family 24/7 — there is no leaving work and shutting the door.

Leadership in Rural Support can be very diffe ent from corporate leadership. What does good leadership look like when people are struggling?

Leadership is always about the people, the values and the actions, not the position or title. Good leadership is about being vulnerable, sharing who you are with people, building trust, being authentic, humble and take people with you. This to me is being inclusive, always having a growth mindset, being compassionate and understanding that there is always more than one way to do something.

I have an analogy that has always helped to steer my leadership and it works in all areas - when people are struggling, they want support, they want to see different ways of doing things, they want to see them in action and they also want to know what doesn't work. So rather than trying to 'get everyone on the bus together' ... get everyone on the journey together instead. Offer different 'minivans' for people and they can move at what pace suits their circumstance with their trusted people, and together we are all moving in the same direction with the same overall 'Why' — to be well supported and healthy as we navigate life and work through our tough times.

What gives you confide ce in the resilience of rural communities?

Let's get rid of the word resilience, and let's change the language to be positive and forward thinking.

What gives me confidence that our rural communities will thrive through adversity ....it is our people. Rural Support is an amazing network of rural people helping rural people and their communities to thrive. We are here to show how communities can thrive through social connectedness, sharing of kai and being together in their local safe space. These basic tools are the foundations for our rural communities to build on, grow from and continue to be the best they can be. I see part of our role is bringing in the thinking, the resources and the people to help make it happen.

What does being a rural woman mean to you in 2026?

This is the hardest question of them all....

To me, being a rural woman in 2026 is to be confident in your sharing your voice, confidence in your decisions and confidence in yourself. We are role models for our daughters, nieces, each other and being a rural woman is about being proud of where we have come from and what is still possible for the future. A rural woman in 2026 is unstoppable — we just have to ensure we stay true to ourselves and our family/whanau.

What is the one thing you would change for rural women tomorrow if you could?

One thing I would change for rural woman tomorrow is to give every rural woman the confidence and belief in themselves and to champion each other!

What's your rural superpower, the skill, quality or instinct you rely on most?

My rural superpower.....The authentic, humble and compassionate qualities that I live everyday — I know I am enough!

Kate Acland

Kate Acland is Chair of Beef + Lamb New Zealand, a Mid Canterbury farmer and the inaugural 2026 Rural Woman of the Year. A strong advocate for rural communities and the red meat sector, she brings both practical farming experience and national leadership to the table.



You've reached one of the most infl ential governance positions in New Zealand agriculture. What has shaped the way you lead?

I've been lucky to have some fantastic mentors along the way and a great network of trusted people I can test things with. This type of leadership can be a lonely place so having that network has been so critical to me.

When you look beyond the boardroom, what do you think rural women are contributing that still isn't fully recognised?

Success of rural NZ will not come from the boardrooms, it will be built from the ground up — through the school committees, community trusts and community boards, sports clubs, catchment groups and local government. Having a pipeline of motivated and skilled women stepping into all of these roles is crucial and we should value these women and the roles for the contribution they make to our communities.

You've spoken about the women before you who pushed the door open. Where do you think the doors are still difficult o open?

Often the biggest barrier for women to move forward is in our own heads — the self-doubt and imposter syndrome are real (I know from experience!). We need to get used to feeling a little uncomfortable and pushing ourselves out there to take on these roles and opportunities.

What are you most optimistic about for the next generation of women coming into agriculture?

I have a 13-year-old daughter who currently wants to be a farmer — I'm excited that I can see a clear pathway for her, there is no doubt in my mind and no suggestion from anyone she's come across that it isn't a realistic option for her future. I'm genuinely excited at the calibre of some of the young women I meet who are choosing agriculture as a career — because we need the best and brightest coming into our sector.

What does being a rural woman mean to you in 2026?

I just feel incredibly lucky to have the life I do — that I can be in the calf sheds one day, the boardroom the next and attending a kids' sports day the following — the flexibility, the lifestyle and the community make it all worthwhile.

What is the one thing you would change for rural women tomorrow if you could?

Better access to healthcare.

What's your rural superpower, the skill, quality or instinct you rely on most?

With my current pace of life I think delegation is my superpower — I've had to get better at asking for help and letting others around me pick up some of the slack — both at home and at work. I'm starting to learn that doing less but doing it well, is better than trying to do everything and making a bad job of it!

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Beverley Forrester

Beverley Forrester MNZM has spent decades turning rural enterprise, wool and creativity into a distinctive New Zealand brand. A farmer, entrepreneur and long-time contributor to her North Canterbury community, she was made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2026 for services to the wool and fashion industries.

How has your rural upbringing and background shaped the person you are and the path you have taken?

I grew up with an intergenerational interest and involvement in rural artisan crafts, including embroidery, patchwork and basketry. I was taught to knit, crochet and tat by my maternal grandmother and mother.

Growing up on a farm also taught me to use initiative, make decisions, solve problems, get up early, do a job and finish it. There were plenty of fun times too, including pony club, hunting and netball. Team sports taught me commitment and how to be a team player.

My parents always encouraged me to think an idea through, make sure it was cost-effective, budget and save.

A cousin of mine, an accountant in Oxfordshire, England, once gave me some advice that has always stayed with me: if your market is on the opposite side of the world, you cannot sit at home and expect sales. Take your product to the market.

What are some of the biggest lessons you have learned through your career and business journey?

People want to hear the story and the journey, the good, the bad, the challenges and the achievements. They want honesty. They also want to hear about the enjoyment of making and producing a product, as well as those quieter moments when you can measure success.

I am now one of eight designers in the world invited to participate in international fashion parades, with Paris next, although it is at my own cost and requires about two years' warning!

I also always learn from people during question time when I give talks. Their questions often spark new ideas in my mind.

How have you seen the role of women in rural communities and agriculture change over the years?

I have always been involved in rural organisations. I belonged to Country Girls NZ from 1973 and we still meet annually, often at weddings and other occasions. Then came Young Farmers and later Federated Farmers.

I was often the only woman at Field Days, but it was never really an issue. The men were very accepting, particularly after I became a widow and was obviously keen to keep learning and updating my knowledge of agricultural technology and farming methods. I was a farmer with dogs, just the same as they were.

Now, often around 50 per cent of attendees are women.

I have been a guest speaker at the NZ Federated Farmers Conference, including taking part in a wool panel alongside male panellists. I also sit on two boards where I am the only woman among all men.

How important is community to you?

Community involvement is vital. Often you discover informally that someone has skills or experience that another person may not have.

I am extremely active in my community and I am always listening. I enjoy talking with local people and networking, and there are some incredibly skilled people living in rural communities.

But I do not need to be "the leader" of every group, or the person making the decisions. I want balance and I want to simply be me, although I am always more than happy to help.

I am very much a "cup half full" person, not half empty.

As my international profile has increased, I have worked hard to retain my local involvement. I still enjoy helping on the white elephant stall at the street fair, doing a sausage sizzle for local fundraising or helping with our village van. I enjoy being a "normal person".

You have travelled widely and connected with rural women around the world. What have those experiences taught you?

I have been fortunate to be involved with Rural Women New Zealand and, with my sister, the Associated Country Women of the World. Across the organisation there are around nine million members in 52 countries.

I have attended three world conferences and have been a speaker at South Pacific area conferences.

Women across the world face many of the same challenges, particularly around marketing and selling products, despite very different customs, cultures, backgrounds, financial circumstances and religions or faiths.

I have travelled to 59 countries and spoken at international conferences in Israel, Paris and Milan. Those experiences have ranged from sitting in the street gutter talking with a toothless man outside an opera house, to helping a woman who had suffered a stroke after church in a Rarotongan village, to helping a farmer in Oxfordshire tag and tail lambs while discussing his rather complicated way of completing what seemed a simple task. We ended up doing it together using a Kiwi method!

Rural women are natural networkers and sharers of experience.

I now work voluntarily as a business mentor in New Zealand and love it. I have worked with people in hospitality, printing, horticulture and new wool ventures. I am always learning and making new friends along the way.

If you could change one thing for rural women tomorrow, what would it be?

I would encourage and empower every rural woman to believe she has value and can always contribute something to her community. Identify something you can help with and get involved.

Two of us established the first toy library in New Zealand in 1973, initially for disabled children. Toy libraries are now nationwide. Two of us also established the Adult Literacy Programme in Ashburton.

I have always had an interest in and advocated for rural issues, and I believe the different experiences and skills we gather throughout life can all be used to make a contribution.

What is your superpower?

My superpower is probably the same as every rural woman's: multitasking. I try to be attentive at all times, to observe and, most importantly, to listen rather than talk.

When a situation or crisis arises, I can "spin on my heel", reassess it, change direction and act. I always try to consider other people and the potential effect a decision may have on them.

I get very embarrassed about my achievements and the awards that have been bestowed on me. I see much of it as recognising an opportunity and taking it.

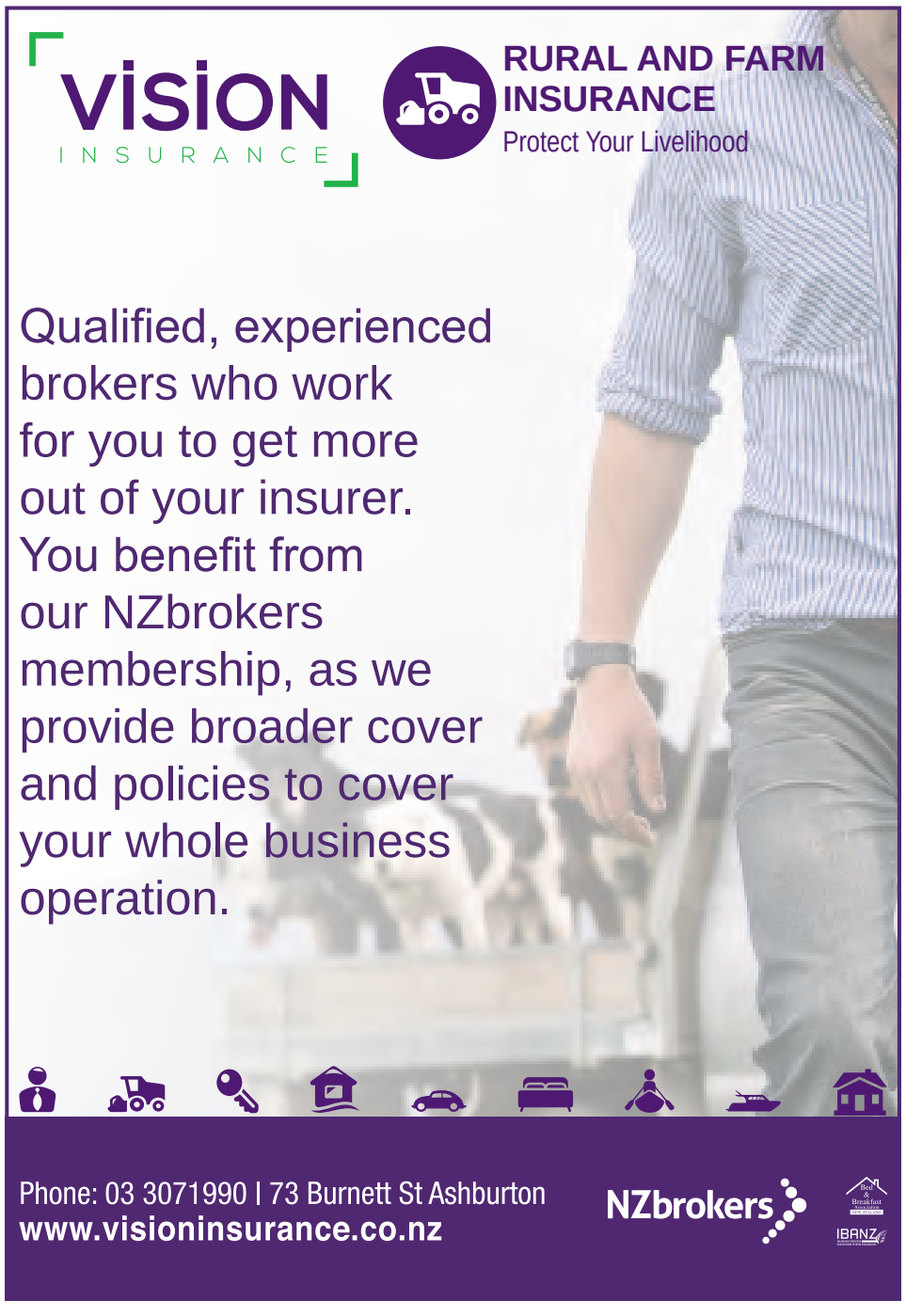
It is always important to remember my roots, acknowledge my past and remember the community where I live and of which I am a part. I also believe in acknowledging the helpers and the whole team behind any achievement.

As I say:

"No sheep, no wool. No wool, no business. Look after the sheep."

And:

"Every team needs a leader, but every leader needs a team."





Hinehou Timutimu

Hinehou Timutimu is General Manager of Te Tawa Kaiti Lands Trust and the 2026 Fonterra Dairy Woman of the Year. Her leadership brings together farming, whenua, mātauranga Māori and a strong focus on creating a better future for the generations coming behind her.

Your leadership brings together people, whenua, farming and mātauranga Māori. How do those elements infl ence the decisions you make?

Every decision begins with whakapapa — who we come from, who we stand for, and who we are accountable to. My leadership is shaped by the people I serve and the land I stand on, but also by the global platforms where I now carry our stories.

I carry the shoulders of my pakeke — their expectations, their sacrifices, their hopes — and that guides me to lead with integrity. On farm, that means choosing practices that honour long-wellbeing. In governance, it means bringing people together, listening deeply, and making decisions that strengthen resilience rather than chase short-term gains. Our partnerships, both national and international, help amplify our voice, but our values determine the path.

You've spoken about Dame Whina Cooper as someone who inspired you. What was it about her leadership and legacy that resonated with you, and what can rural women today still learn from her?

Dame Whina showed us that courage and compassion can co-exist. She led with conviction, but always with aroha, and she never forgot that her strength came from her people and her whenua.

What resonates most for me is her refusal to accept that rural Māori voices were small. She proved they were powerful enough to shift a nation — and now, rural Māori women are influencing conversations not just at home, but globally.

Her legacy reminds us that leadership is service. It teaches rural women today that we stand on the shoulders of giants, and that our responsibility is to continue their work with humility, strength and unity.

You've spoken about the health of the land and the health of people being connected. How does that play out in practical farming?

When the whenua is well, our people thrive. You see that in everyday decisions: healthy soils create healthy kai; clean water supports healthy animals; and a farm system that respects natural rhythms reduces stress for the people working it.

At Te Tawa Kaiti, we combine mātauranga Māori with modern tools like solar and Halter to lighten the load on both land and humans. Our partnerships across the rural sector — and now internationally — help us test new ideas while staying true to our values.

Practical farming becomes a wellbeing practice when you treat the land as a living ancestor, not a resource.

What would you like the next generation of wāhine entering agriculture to inherit from today's leaders?

I want them to inherit courage — the courage to lead authentically, challenge old systems, and trust their instincts. I want them to inherit workplaces where their voices are normal, not novel.

I want them to inherit land, communities and organisations that have been cared for, not depleted. And I want them to inherit strong partnerships — locally, nationally and globally — so they can step into agriculture with confidence, pride and a sense of belonging.

If today's leaders do their job well, the next generation will walk into rooms we never had access to, and they will do so without hesitation.

What does being a rural woman mean to you in 2026?

It means carrying responsibility with strength and humility. It means being deeply connected to whenua and whānau, and being part of the engine room that keeps rural New Zealand moving.

It means leading in ways that are collaborative, grounded and future focused. Being a rural woman in 2026 also means having a global presence — sharing our indigenous knowledge, our farming innovation, and our community led solutions with the world.

Most of all, it means honouring the women who came before us while shaping a better path for those who will follow.

What is the one thing you would change for rural women tomorrow if you could?

I would remove the barriers that make rural women's leadership harder than it needs to be — whether that's access to resources, recognition, support or visibility.

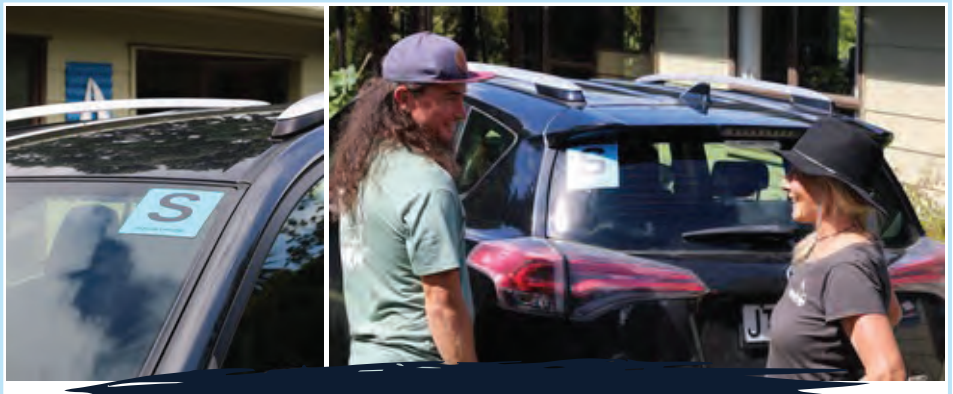
Rural women carry enormous responsibility, often quietly. If I could change one thing, it would be ensuring they have the same opportunities and investment as anyone else shaping the future of agriculture.

What's your rural superpower, the skill, quality or instinct you rely on most?

My superpower is connection — the ability to bring people together around a shared kaupapa and to make decisions that honour both land and community.

I rely on instinct, especially when it's grounded in mātauranga Māori, and I'm not afraid to lead with values first. I carry the shoulders of my pakeke and the legacy of those who came before us, and that keeps me steady.

That combination has guided me through governance, farming, partnerships, national engagements and now global platforms. It continues to shape how I serve our people and our whenua.



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Our goal is to move away from road rage and toward a "safety and sign of respect" culture. We want our elders to feel safe and confident behind the wheel, reducing aggression by humanising the driver that is in front of us - allowing them a bit more time to navigate safely.

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CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL RURAL WOMEN'S DAY 2026

Marie Black

Marie Black is Mayor of the Hurunui District, a role that places her at the heart of one of Canterbury's most strongly rural communities. With deep ties to farming and community life, she brings a grounded understanding of the challenges and strengths that shape rural people and places.



As mayor of a largely rural district, how has your connection with rural people and communities shaped the way you lead?

Living and farming in Hurunui District has given me a practical understanding of what rural communities need to thrive: strong local relationships, resilience, services close to home, and a deep connection to place. Before entering local government, I spent 25 years as a Plunket Karitāne with Whānau Āwhina Plunket, working alongside families across Hurunui and Waimakariri. That experience shaped my commitment to leadership that is grounded, accessible, and responsive to rural realities.

One recent example is an Older Persons Social Worker pilot, developed in partnership with the district's five health centres and Together Hurunui, a group well placed to support and monitor local delivery of social services. I supported securing funding for the one-year pilot so older residents could access social support through trusted local health settings, reducing barriers and keeping services close to home.

As Mayor, I see first-hand the pressures rural communities face, from drought and economic uncertainty to the challenge of accessing essential services. That lived and professional experience has shaped a leadership style based on presence, practical problem-solving, and quiet persistence: listening carefully, understanding the local context, and helping people find solutions without fanfare.

You've seen communities across Hurunui through good times and some incredibly challenging ones. What have you learned about what makes rural communities resilient?

The introduction of Mayors Taskforce for Jobs is an important example of resilience in action. By supporting young people into employment, training, and local opportunities, it helps to build confidence, develop skills, and gain a stronger sense of wellbeing and belonging.

Rural resilience is built when people feel connected and can see a future for themselves, in the Hurunui that means not only helping people through difficult times, but by also creating pathways that give them the confidence and reason to stay connected to where they belong.

The Waiau-Kaikoura earthquake, on 14 November 2016, remains one of the starkest reminders of rural resilience our district has faced. It was a time when people coped by looking after one another and getting on with what needed to be done despite having considerable damage to their homes and properties. The Hurunui recovery planning recognised that social connection, community events and locally led initiatives were important to helping people adapt and move forward. There was a strong sense that nobody should face the aftermath alone.

What role do you think women play in holding small rural communities together, particularly in ways that can sometimes go unseen?

Women provide practical care and leadership and are often the people who notice when someone needs support and act before they are asked. It's taking the lead when a batch of biscuits or a casserole may be helpful for the new family or for someone suffering from illness. These gestures are rural traditions that help to keep the community together.

Women are often the quiet force behind the strength of rural communities. They are the organisers, mentors, and connectors who keep communities vibrant and functioning with much of this work going on behind the scenes and often without recognition.

The wellbeing and vibrancy of rural communities depend on the contribution of women whose impact is felt every day, even when it is not always visible.

Looking ahead, what do you think rural women in communities like those across Hurunui need most to be able to thrive?

Rural women need strong connections, a sense of belonging, and real opportunities to contribute, lead, and grow.

Rural women need reliable access to the essentials that support daily life and long-term wellbeing, including healthcare, education, childcare, digital connectivity, and professional development opportunities.

They also need clear pathways into leadership and decision-making, with recognition of the flexibility, distance, and competing demands that are part of rural life.

Above all, rural women need to know their contribution is valued. When women are supported, recognised, and empowered, the whole community benefits.

What does being a rural woman mean to you in 2026?

To me, being a rural woman in 2026 means being adaptable, resilient, and deeply connected to people and place. As Hurunui District's first woman mayor, I am proud to show that authentic leadership is powerful, and that women have a vital role in shaping the future of leadership.

Rural women carry many roles and contribute in countless ways to their families, businesses, and communities. There is growing recognition of the leadership, expertise, and influence women bring, not only in supporting others' success, but in leading businesses, organisations, and communities. For me, it is about embracing both tradition and change, while staying grounded in the values that keep rural communities strong.

What is the one thing you would change for rural women tomorrow if you could?

If we are serious about creating change for women, we must be willing to challenge the behaviours and attitudes that continue to cause harm to some women in our rural communities.

Respect for women should never be optional, whether in our homes, workplaces, communities, or increasingly, online.

The harmful and disrespectful way women can be spoken about and targeted online should never be accepted as normal. Behind every comment, message, or post is a real person: a mother, daughter, sister, friend, or colleague. Words can cause real harm, and we all have a responsibility to call out disrespect and stand up for one another.

But this is more than social media.

Every woman and child deserves to feel safe in their own home. Families should be places of love, support, and security, not places where people live in fear.

Family harm affects individuals, children, and whole communities. In rural communities, where people often know and support one another, we have a particular responsibility to ensure those experiencing violence know they are not alone and that help is available.

Change starts with each of us.

It starts with teaching our children what respect looks like. It starts with men calling out harmful behaviour from other men. It starts with communities refusing to turn a blind eye. And it starts with making sure women and children know their safety, dignity, and wellbeing matter.

We want our daughters and granddaughters to grow up in a world where they are respected, valued, and safe: online, in their relationships, and in their homes.

That is the change we should all be working towards: families free from harm, women free from fear, and communities where respect is the standard, not the exception.

What's your rural superpower: the skill, quality, or instinct you rely on most?

My rural superpower is relationship building. Strong communities aren't built from the top down, they're built by people who know each other, look out for each other, and are prepared to roll up their sleeves and get thing done.

I value long-term relationships and the trust it builds. Trust forms the ability for vital community contributions from volunteers, businesses, families and individuals who all work together to create positive and resilient rural communities.



Nicola Grigg

Selwyn MP Nicola Grigg is Minister for the Environment, Minister of State for Trade and Investment, Minister for Women and Associate Minister for ACC. Raised on a sheep and beef farm at Mt Somers, she brings a strong rural perspective to national decision-making and remains closely connected to the communities she represents.

How much does your own connection with rural New Zealand infl ence the way you approach your roles in Parliament?

It's at the heart of everything I do. I grew up on a farm in Canterbury, so rural New Zealand isn't something I read about in a briefing paper, it's home. It's where I learned the value of hard work, resilience, community and pitching in when someone needs a hand.

Those lessons have stayed with me throughout my life and they're certainly with me every day in Parliament. Whether I'm representing Selwyn or making decisions as a Minister, I always think about what it means for the people who are out there running farms, businesses, families and communities.

At the end of the day, rural communities are often the end users of many of the policies we develop in Wellington. That's why it's so important that policy is practical, grounded in real-world experience, and actually works for the people who live with it every day.

What do you see as the biggest issues specifical y aff cting women living and working rurally?

One of the biggest challenges is that rural women are often expected to do it all. Many are helping run farms or businesses, raising children, volunteering in their communities and caring for family members, all at the same time.

I've often said that too many women on farms will describe themselves as "just doing the books", when in reality, they're doing far more than that. They're managing the accounts, helping develop the farm plan, raising children, serving on school boards, volunteering in the community, and often keeping the whole operation running behind the scenes. Rural women are incredibly capable, but that doesn't mean it isn't demanding.

Access to services is still an issue too. Things like healthcare, childcare and specialist support can be much harder to reach when you live outside our main centres. We need to keep working towards making sure rural women aren't disadvantaged simply because of where they live.

Are women's voices adequately represented when agricultural and environmental policy is being developed?

We've come a long way, and that's something worth celebrating, although there's always more work to do. One of the really encouraging things I've noticed is the number of young women choosing to study agriculture and related disciplines. When I visit Lincoln University, for example, it's fantastic to see more women coming through the agricultural pipeline and preparing to lead the future of our food and fibre sector.

We also see women increasingly occupying leadership positions across the industry. More often than not these days, women are serving as Chairs, CEOs and senior leaders of agricultural organisations, bringing valuable perspectives, expertise and experience to the table.

That's a positive shift, because the best policy comes from having a diversity of views around the decision-making table. The more women we have helping shape agricultural and environmental policy, the better those policies will reflect the realities of the people working in the sector every day. The good news is that today's generation of rural women are increasingly visible, vocal and influential, and I think the sector is stronger for it.

What would you most like to see change for the next generation of rural women?

I'd love to see young rural women grow up believing there are no limits on what they can achieve. Whether they want to run a farm, lead a company, become a scientist, start a business or enter politics, I want those opportunities to feel completely within reach.

I'm fortunate to have had some incredible role models, including my great-grandmother Mary Grigg, who became National's first female MP. Every generation builds on the work of those who came before them, and I'd love to see the next generation of rural women feeling confident enough to back themselves and take on leadership roles.

What does being a rural woman mean to you in 2026?

Being a rural woman means being part of something bigger than yourself. It's about family, community, contribution, and looking after the place you call home.

As I said before, rural women wear many hats. They're raising families, running businesses, helping drive farm success, supporting neighbours, volunteering in the community, and often keeping everything ticking along behind the scenes.

I've always admired the quiet determination of rural women. They don't often seek recognition, but so much of rural New Zealand depends on their leadership, resilience and willingness to step up when needed.

I think that's something worth celebrating, particularly as we mark the International Year of the Woman Farmer. Rural women are at the heart of our families, farms, businesses and communities, and I'm incredibly proud to be one of them.

What is the one thing you would change for rural women tomorrow if you could?

If I could change one thing tomorrow, it would be for every rural woman to recognise the value of the contribution she's already making.

I've met so many remarkable women who play critical roles in their farms, businesses and communities, yet they're often the first to downplay what they do.

Rural women bring an enormous amount of leadership, capability and practical know-how to New Zealand. I'd love to see more of them backing themselves, putting their hands up for leadership opportunities, and recognising that their experience and perspective matter.

At the same time, we should continue working to ensure rural women can access the services and support they need, whether that's healthcare, childcare, education or business opportunities – as when rural women succeed, their families, businesses and communities succeed too.

What's your rural superpower, the skill, quality or instinct you rely on most?

Growing up in a rural community teaches you to be adaptable. You learn pretty quickly that sometimes you just have to roll up your sleeves, pitch in and help out, whether that's on the farm, at school, at the local sports club, or somewhere else entirely.

I think that's something many rural women have in common. We're used to wearing a lot of hats, juggling competing priorities and finding practical solutions when challenges pop up.

I'm not sure I'd call it a superpower, but I've always valued that rural instinct to get stuck in, work hard and help where you can. It's served me well both in life and in Parliament.

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CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL RURAL WOMEN'S DAY 2026



Heather Sorensen

As National President of Rural Women New Zealand, Heather Sorensen is helping steer one of the country's longest-standing rural organisations into its next century. Her focus remains firmly on the women at the heart of rural communities and the connections, advocacy and support that keep those communities strong.

Rural Women New Zealand has more than a century of history behind it. What does the organisation need to be for rural women now?

Interestingly, when I consider what RWNZ needs to be for rural women today, I find that it is, in many ways, the same thing it was for rural women 100 years ago. Women need opportunities to get together for social connection, opportunities to learn and share, opportunities to be heard and be involved in a wide range of discussions. RWNZ needs to be the organisation that provides a welcoming, warm and safe environment for women to be able to achieve these things. We enable friendships to be fostered, a wide range of skills to be developed and a pathway for advocacy from local to national issues.

How has the role of the rural woman changed while the importance of community has remained?

Women have always undertaken many roles and had a wide range of work and volunteer roles which were most often seen as being in the background, as someone's wife or daughter; essentially invisible. Now there is visibility and women are seen in their own right. There is growing respect for women to be themselves, to be business women, to be leaders, to be whatever and whoever they wish to be which is really great and means that our communities become more vibrant and inclusive as everyone feels more comfortable with the changing scene. The sense of community, of people working together, supporting each other and looking out for each other continues to be very important and now we see more women involved as leaders and drivers of our rural communities. Women have always been involved in communities and are often the 'glue' that keeps things together. The difference now is that we acknowledge and celebrate these women rather than leaving them in the background, most often out the back in the kitchen!

What are women telling you they need most from their rural communities today?

The most common theme I hear from women is the need for connection. Women need to make social connections that they can check in with on a regular basis. I have heard many stories of women who haven't known their neighbours until they have joined Rural Women NZ. It makes so much difference to get to know people and find others you can talk to , seek advice from, share hobbies, share work stories etc. I feel quite sad to learn of the loneliness and isolation that so many women are feeling these days. We need to be making contact and catching up with people, face to face. We need to make sure that people have opportunities for ongoing social connection. It is too easy to hide behind being too busy, too tied to work or property and that's before falling into the trap of thinking that social media, games and other apps are fulfilling the needs. My worry is that we are heading towards greater mental health issues through these situations so it is time to act now and make sure women are provided with opportunities for making real connections. Rural Women New Zealand can play a really important role in this.

As you lead Rural Women New Zealand into its next chapter, what would you like the organisation, and rural life for women more broadly, to look like 20 years from now?

At the risk of sounding corny, I would sum up my response in one word: happy. Right now we have a lot of people who seem to be angry and negative and hence really good at fault finding. I would love to turn that around as much as possible. We need to support people to see the good things that are happening and build on that. There are lots of worries at the moment with issues on school transport, increasing numbers of adverse weather events, roading conditions, cost of living and so the list goes on. Sadly, there are no quick and easy fixes available but we need to be working together and developing solutions to put forward. We need to know and experience the strength of teamwork as we work together, ensure we have those ongoing social connections and most importantly appreciate the strength of laughter as medicine. We can't be happy 100% of the time but I would love to see an increase in the happiness level amongst us all because the powers that be have resolved some of the issues identified and we are working on those issues that we have some control over ourselves, without blaming others.

What does being a rural woman mean to you in 2026?

Being a rural woman in 2026 is about being rural at heart and having a connection to things rural. It is so much more than farming. Farming, in all forms, is a really important part of rural New Zealand but we shouldn't lose sight of all the other aspects of rural. I include viticulture, horticulture, forestry, aquaculture, education, transport, health, tourism, infrastructure, other service industries and so on. We have professionals, trades people, volunteers, farmers, workers, business owners, carers and again the list goes on. A rural woman can be so many things but most importantly she is someone who cares about the rural community and willingly plays a role in her own community in whatever capacity suits her most.

What is the one thing you would change for rural women tomorrow if you could?

It is really difficult to come up with just one thing for effective change as there are quite a few on my list. I would sum it up by saying I would ensure an improved provision of services for our rural communities throughout the country. Many rural people feel very let down by the lack of health service delivery, school transport delivery and road maintenance in their area. If I could effect change I would ensure the resources needed to improve the above would be made available as soon as possible.

What's your rural superpower, the skill, quality or instinct you rely on most?

My superpower is that, above all else, I am a caring human being. I demonstrate that by being a very good listener. I listen with my ears and eyes. I listen to learn, to understand and to gain new knowledge. I use what I hear to help inform my actions going forward. I have a passion for people and I would like to do my best to make people feel important and uniquely special because I listen deeply and respond accordingly. I can't always do what people may think I should, but I will always listen and engage in conversation so that all parties feel heard and valued.

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Corina Jordan

Corina Jordan is Chief Executive of both Fish & Game New Zealand and the New Zealand Game Animal Council, bringing a career that has crossed conservation, freshwater and farming advocacy.
A former senior leader with Beef + Lamb New Zealand, she has spent much of her career working across the sometimes contested space between agriculture and the environment.

Your work sits at the intersection of freshwater, conservation, recreation and rural communities. What has shaped the way you approach leadership in that space?

I grew up around farms in Taranaki and spent holidays running wild in Northland catching flounder. I've since worked both sides of the fence, at Fish & Game and then at Beef + Lamb New Zealand. When I moved between them someone asked if I was the gamekeeper turned poacher, but that framing has never sat right with me. Farmers want and depend on a healthy environment as much as anyone.

That crossover taught me the best outcomes are built by communities, not imposed on them. I lead by asking a lot of questions and listening hard, bringing people together, and then taking decisions and implementing actions.

Freshwater can be a highly contested issue in New Zealand. What have you learned about fi ding common ground when people come to the table with very diffe ent perspectives?

That most people, stripped back, want the same thing. A healthy environment for their kids and grandkids. The disagreement is usually about how we get there, not where we're heading.

So, I start with what we share, not what divides us. When I moved from Fish & Game to farming advocacy, I expected the values to clash. But farmers also care deeply about water and land because it's their livelihood and their legacy. The moment you treat people as adversaries, you lose them. Treat them as partners and real problem solving becomes possible. Catchment groups show that when people own the solution, they make it work.

How important is it that rural women are represented in conversations about land, water and the future of our natural environment?

Essential, and we've a long way to go. Very few Fish & Game councillors are women which means decisions don't reflect the wider population. I've watched how women change the dynamic in a room - more space for how people are feeling, more willingness to sit with a problem before firing off a response. I'd like to see more women join Fish & Game councils.

Rural women have always done the work, on the land, in the catchment groups, holding families and communities together. It's time that was matched by a real seat in the decisions, but we've got work to do to make that attractive to more women.

What gives you the most optimism about the way rural communities and environmental organisations can work together?

The catchment groups where farmers and communities lead their own restoration work, put wetlands back, and protect their waterways.

Fish & Game does an enormous amount of heavy lifting for freshwater, but the real momentum comes when landowners and organisations pull in the same direction.

What does being a rural woman mean to you in 2026?

For me it's knowing where your food comes from because you've grown it or caught it yourself, and caring about doing that ethically.

It also means resilience. Rural life builds character. You get knocked around, sometimes literally, and you get back up. But in 2026 it should mean being visible and heard too, not just quietly doing the work the way rural women always have.

What is the one thing you would change for rural women tomorrow if you could?

I'd put them at more decision-making tables straight away, no waiting for the numbers to slowly improve on their own. In governance, in catchment leadership, in the rooms where the future of land and water gets decided. The talent and knowledge are already out there. What's been missing is the seat and the invitation.

What's your rural superpower, the skill, quality or instinct you rely on most?

Listening. I ask questions and I actually wait for the answers. I am actually listening, not waiting, and taking on board what they're saying and where they are coming from.

Most of what I've managed to do, whether rebuilding trust in an organisation or finding common ground between people who arrived as opponents, has come from listening first and deciding second. Not flashy, but it's the thing I trust most.



Stacey Hoets with daughters Aria (5) in the middle and Sienna (7) right. PHOTO SUPPLIED.

Stacey Hoets

Stacey Hoets is part of a new generation building a future in dairy through equity partnership and a clear pathway towards farm ownership. Based at Akitu Dairies in Mid Canterbury, she and husband Jonathon were among three equal winners of the 2026 Fonterra & ASB First Farm Award at the New Zealand Dairy Industry Awards (NZDIA), recognising first-generation farmers working towards farm ownership.

You and Jonathon have taken a firs -generation pathway into equity partnership and farm ownership. What has that journey looked like for you so far?

Farm ownership has always been one of our goals. We've always tried to be open to learning and take up opportunities that push us outside our comfort zone and allow us to surround ourselves with people we can learn from to help us get to that point. For us, that has included entering the NZDIA and being involved with our regional committee, as well as getting involved with SIDE – first attending and then later helping to organise it. Those experiences have given us different perspectives, new skills and a really good network of people around us.

We have been with the Rylib Group since 2018, and the first couple of years were really about learning the business, understanding the farming systems and getting to know the people we were working with. That time was really valuable in building a strong relationship with Rylib and gave us the confidence to start having conversations about buying into the farm we were on, Kairoa. We were able to slowly build our equity getting us to where we are today on Akitu Dairies.

What have been the biggest lessons in moving from working in the dairy sector to having a real stake in the business?

It's been a real learning curve and a bit of a change of mindset for me. I have never been keen on debt, making it through university without a student loan even, but I've had to learn that debt is a tool to help you along the way. It has helped that we have taken it slowly starting with 20% equity and working our way up to 50% where we are now.

Do you think women sometimes underestimate the role they play in building the strategy, systems and long-term direction of a farming business?

I can't speak for other women, but I do think I sometimes underestimate the value I bring to the business. It's easy to look at the bigger decisions around strategy and direction and think that someone else is taking care of those things. But I've know that the smaller jobs matter too. I do a lot of running around town picking up supplies, keeping things organised, helping with odd jobs on the farm or simply being another person to bounce ideas off. I think sometimes we can underestimate our contribution because we're so close to it and it just feels like what needs to be done.

What would you say to younger women who want a future in farming but feel farm ownership is increasingly out of reach?

I would say set yourself some goals and have a bit of a plan for how you might get there, but don't be too rigid about it. Be open to opportunities that come along, as sometimes the path you end up taking isn't the one you originally imagined. Patience is definitely key – farm ownership doesn't happen overnight. There will probably be a few bumps and changes along the way, but as long as you're continuing to learn, grow and move forward, you're heading in the right direction.

What does being a rural woman mean to you in 2026?

I'm finding as the kids get older life is a real juggle. Women end up wearing lots of hats from taxi driver to cleaner, farmer to home and school committee member and everything else in between. There's always something to remember, organise or get done, and it can be a lot to hold in your head. But I think that's also part of what makes rural women so adaptable – we just get on with what needs doing and somehow make it work.

What is the one thing you would change for rural women tomorrow if you could?

I think it would be the pressure women put on themselves to do everything and do it well. There are so many expectations around being a good mum, partner, farmer, employee, volunteer and on top of that take care of yourself. Sometimes we can feel like we should be able to juggle it all without dropping anything. I'd love to see more women feel comfortable asking for help, sharing the load and accepting that sometimes "good enough" really is good enough.

What's your rural superpower, the skill, quality or instinct you rely on most?

I don't know if it's a rural superpower as such, but organisation. I am such a planner with lists and diaries. If I don't write it down, I'll forget it so planning my week is an important part of making sure every part of life is getting the attention it needs, including making time for exercise and relaxation!



Kate Ivey

From a high-country farm near Twizel, Kate Ivey has built a nationwide fitness business focused on helping women become stronger, healthier and more confident. Through Kate Ivey Fitness and DediKate, she has turned the realities of rural life, motherhood and limited access to gyms into a business with reach well beyond the farm gate.

You built Kate Ivey Fitness and DediKate from a farm near Twizel. How much did rural life shape the business you eventually created?

It is the foundation of it all really. My fitness platform is built for busy women who are juggling life, farm, family etc — short effective workouts and trainers who get the challenges because they are living it too. Women on farms can't relate to a fitness model from the Gold Coast, but they can relate to us and that's so motivating for them.

Rural women are often juggling farm, family, work and community responsibilities. What do you think gets in the way of women prioritising their own health and strength?

We surveyed our community (75% of whom live in a rural or regional area) recently and as expected time was the biggest barrier. I believe it's also a perceived barrier, because I've experienced it myself, where I think I don't have time, but then I make it happen and actually it makes my day and life more successful. 20 min workouts are key!

Your work increasingly focuses on women through peri-menopause and beyond. What do you wish rural women understood earlier about looking after their bodies as they age?

I wish they knew that losing strength and getting frail is not inevitable — with strength training we can improve our capabilities, mental and physical health and strength at any age.

You've shown that living remotely doesn't have to limit the business or career you can build. What has rural life given you that you might not have had in a city?

I can't imagine living in the city now! Rural life has given me community and connection with like-minded people, the ability to overcome challenges and adapt, and for DediKate a point of difference that you can't fake.

What does being a rural woman mean to you in 2026?

To me it means being whoever and whatever you want to be. As rural women we don't have to look and be a certain way anymore — we can define how we want our lives to be. But we're all still united — there's a deep understanding amongst us, of what it's like to be a rural woman, what we overcome, the challenges we face and the beauty of it too.

What is the one thing you would change for rural women tomorrow if you could?

I'd like rural women to be more appreciated — for what we achieve and juggle in the home and outside it, what we give back to our communities and the km's we do!

What's your rural superpower, the skill, quality or instinct you rely on most?

I'd say mine is my work ethic and determination. I don't give up, I am relentless in what I want to achieve day in and day out.

Karen Williams

Karen Williams is Chief Executive of Irrigation New Zealand and a long-time advocate for farmers and rural communities. With a background spanning farming, industry leadership and agricultural advocacy, she brings a practical voice to some of the sector's biggest conversations around water, land use and the future of food production.

You've worked across farming, advocacy and irrigation leadership. What has kept drawing you into roles where rural voices need to be heard?

My passion is driving better outcomes for rural New Zealand. I want successful farming and growing businesses that care for their people and livestock, look after our land and water, and are economically sustainable. Economic, environmental and social outcomes aren't competing objectives. Rural New Zealand needs all three. That's also what drew me to IrrigationNZ: reliable access to water helps enable those balanced outcomes.

I farm with my husband in the Wairarapa, where we run an irrigated arable and livestock operation, so I understand first-hand both the value water brings to a farming business and the responsibility that comes with managing it well.

Water can be one of agriculture's most contentious issues. What have you learned about leading through difficult onversations?

Strong, trusted relationships matter enormously, particularly with people who don't necessarily see things the same way. That doesn't mean shying away from difficult conversations, but having them constructively, listening to different perspectives and looking for common ground.

Earlier this year I was on a Farmstrong panel with Sam Whitelock and he shared a simple test before making a comment: "Will it help or will it hinder?" That really resonated with me. It's not about avoiding the hard things that need to be said, but saying them in a way that helps move the conversation forward.

At IrrigationNZ, we talk about water resilience delivering for our people, our environment and our economy. Multi-purpose water storage can support food production, regional prosperity and community resilience, alongside environmental outcomes. Finding solutions that recognise those different interests is why constructive dialogue matters.

For those involved in irrigation and the wider water sector, I'd encourage you to join IrrigationNZ. The stronger our collective voice, the more effectively we can advocate for good water outcomes in Wellington.



How important is it that women are involved in discussions around water, land and the future of food production?

Absolutely essential. But women aren't waiting to be invited into these conversations. They are already farming, leading businesses, managing natural resources and shaping rural communities. Many lead their local catchment groups and through the Ballance Farm Environment Awards, I often see women taking the lead in entering their farming businesses. Programmes offered by AWDT and Rural Leaders have also helped build the confidence, capability and networks of women stepping into leadership.

One of my pet hates is hearing people automatically refer to "the farmer" as "he". Women of all generations are an established and important part of New Zealand farming. Farmers are both women and men, and our language should reflect that.

What has changed most for women in agriculture during your career, and what hasn't?

The biggest change is the visibility and recognition of women as farmers, decision-makers and leaders in their own right. It's also great to see so many young women choosing careers in agriculture. Women are leading farming businesses, raising families and contributing to their communities, often alongside off-farm careers that bring additional skills, experience and income to the farming business.

A highlight of my agricultural tour through Europe and the UK this year was meeting Lisa Hogan from *Clarkson's Farm* at Diddly Squat Farm. I admire the way she has shown a global audience the many ways women contribute to successful farming businesses, bringing common sense, business nous and a touch of glamour. I see those same qualities in women throughout rural New Zealand.

I love seeing women recognised through awards, but perhaps the ultimate measure of progress will be when separate recognition is no longer necessary. I look forward to the day when we simply talk about great agricultural leaders.

What does being a rural woman mean to you in 2026?

It's less a label and more part of who I am. No matter where work takes me, getting home to the farm in the Wairarapa keeps me grounded and connected to the practical realities of farming and rural New Zealand.

I'm proud to say I'm a farmer and come from a rural community, whether I'm on the farm or around a table in Wellington. I'd encourage other rural women to be equally proud of that experience and perspective. I've never subscribed to the idea of an urban-rural divide. We are all part of the same New Zealand, with far more connecting us than dividing us.

6. What is the one thing you would change for rural women tomorrow if you could?

I'd like every rural woman to have genuine choice and opportunity to contribute in the way that works for her, without having to fit somebody else's definition of what a farmer or rural woman should look like. There are many ways to contribute to a farming business, family and community, and none should be valued above another.

What's your rural superpower, the skill, quality or instinct you rely on most?

Probably pragmatism, optimism and tenacity. Farming teaches you that circumstances change and you find a way through.

I'm also a great believer in building strong relationships before you need them. That builds the trust to work through difficult issues constructively when they arise.

More than any particular skill, what drives me is delivering better outcomes for rural New Zealand and leaving it in a better place for those who come after us.



RURAL GUARDIAN | THE WOMEN NEW ZEALAND RUNS ON

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Emma Burke

Emma Burke is the woman behind Take the Wheel, an initiative designed to give rural women greater confidence with practical skills such as 4WD driving. Her work is grounded in a simple idea: when women are given the chance, encouragement and support to have a go, confidence follows.

You've lived rural life in several parts of New Zealand before settling in Canterbury. What has each community taught you about fi ding your place and belonging?

The fact that no one is coming down the driveway anymore to welcome you to the district, you have to be brave — put on your big gal undies, take a deep breath, and put yourself out there. By joining committees, you have to have conversations, and it is through those conversations that you find your tribe. The further from town you are, the more there is a community, but regardless of location, you get out / back what you put in. Each different location has taught resilience, grit, determination and heightened my passion for rural people and all things rural

The idea for Take the Wheel came from wanting women to feel confide t behind the wheel of a 4WD rather than being the "passenger princess". Why was it important to you to turn that idea into something practical?

The words "passenger princess" ground my gears, fired something up inside of me and got me thinking — why can't women feel confident behind the wheel too? I hate having to step out of the driver's seat to get someone else to take over because I can't. Can't isn't really in my vocabulary. The shove to make my idea a reality came about when I was selected to be part of the inaugural Leadership Development Program run by No 8HR in conjunction with Rural Women NZ and a project was part of the training. Rather than coming up with something new, I breathed life into "Take the Wheel". On a more simplistic view too, was what if something was to happen to the driver while you are out the back of the middle of nowhere and you had to get him and the vehicle home — could you do it? So a safety issue also came to mind.

You've also talked about helping women build confide ce with skills such as using a chainsaw or putting up an electric fence. What happens when women are simply given the opportunity and encouragement to have a go?

Given the encouragement and non-critical experiences, women shine. They also love the rationales of why you do things in a certain way, rather than just doing a task because that is what they have been told to do. Why should someone have to wait for the man of the house to do the tasks you want done when, with a bit of training and confidence boosting, you can do it yourself? Stops you being accused of nagging (you only asked once before and that was 6 months ago!)

You originally joined Rural Women New Zealand looking for connection. How important are those networks, particularly when women move into a new rural community?

Absolutely vital. I wouldn't be where I was now if it wasn't for a new friend inviting me to come along. Even though I was the youngest in the room, it brought about connection with others who get it. Getting involved gives you a step up into gaining local knowledge, upskilling, and your chance to make a difference to your new community. Moving inter-island and hardly knowing a soul is challenging. You don't lose your existing friends but they are no longer just around the corner to catch up with so you have to find a new tribe and with adult children, you don't have preschool or school to meet others, so by getting involved with RWNZ, you start to meet others. Like anything, you get back what you put in.

What does being a rural woman mean to you in 2026?

It's a privilege, as not everyone gets to live in paradise / the country. It means that we are the trailblazers of a modern woman psyche, we are advocates, leaders, instigators, shoulders to lean on, uplifters, role models, adopters of technology to reduce isolation, its being the jack of all, with a can do attitude, its using a wet wipe to wipe the mud that has found its way onto your shoes before you enter a meeting, it's the messy bun — making sure that there isn't hay in it before jumping on a zoom / teams! It is being strong but also gentle, kind, caring and nurturing. Its rolling with the punches and getting up again tomorrow to do it all again. It is carrying on well beyond your reserve when a weather event hits because your livestock depend on you and possibly even your community, depending on the severity. Its being a leader and a voice.

What is the one thing you would change for rural women tomorrow if you could?

That their role is valued well beyond the tea and scones maker. The rural women is juggling so many extra balls than her urban counterparts. As the Farmlands billboard says "rural never stops" — a rural woman certainly doesn't and this needs to be valued. I'd change the fact that meetings (i.e. with bank manager, accountant etc) don't start until she is seated as well, her voice is heard, and she has equal access to services. Her work is acknowledged and appreciated.

What's your rural superpower, the skill, quality or instinct you rely on most?

Improvisation — you must be a MacGyver of everything — whether that be in the kitchen, in a nurse's uniform, garden, out on the farm or wherever you may be. It's also not settling for "that's the way it's always been done / we've tried that and it didn't work" mentality… hold my gin and let me …

Lifestyle



FROM THE HEART OF THE COUNTRY

Page 34

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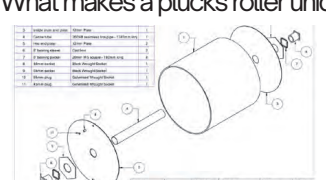


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The cancer her mammogram missed

Three months after receiving a clear mammogram, North Canterbury woman Sarah Starkey was diagnosed with stage 3 triple-negative breast cancer. Now she wants other women to know something she didn't: their breast density.



Claire Inkson
RURAL EDITOR

When Sarah Starkey received the all-clear following a mammogram last September, she believed breast cancer had effectively been ruled out.

It hadn't.

Three months later, Starkey, 48, a Swannanoa mother and volunteer firefighter, was diagnosed with stage 3 triple-negative breast cancer.

By then, she had a large tumour and the cancer had spread to multiple lymph nodes.

What Starkey didn't know when that reassuring mammogram result arrived was that she had extremely dense breasts.

"I'd been having mammograms for years. I'd always been clear," she says.

"But women have no idea that that mammogram might not actually work as well for them."

Now, as she continues treatment and faces an uncertain future, Starkey wants other women to know their breast density.

BreastScreen Aotearoa does not currently measure or report breast density as part of routine screening.

'I thought my breasts were fi e'

Starkey had been having regular mammograms since becoming eligible for screening at 45.

When she had the mammogram last September, however, she already had concerns about her breasts, including pain, nipple changes and a palpable lump. She also had a family history of breast cancer.

The mammogram found no evidence of cancer.

In the months that followed, Starkey developed lumps in her armpit and saw three different GPs.

Starkey says breast cancer was not raised with her as a possible explanation for the armpit lumps, and none of the three GPs examined her breast.

She was initially prescribed antibiotics and later referred for an ultrasound.

"I knew there was something wrong," she says.

But the clear mammogram remained in the back of her mind.

"I kept saying, 'This can't be related to my breast, can it? Because I've had a clear mammogram.'

"I was living under this false idea that my boobs were fine because I'd had a clear mammogram."

Private health insurance helped her access further investigation more quickly, eventually leading to a biopsy.

Five days later, her GP called.

"At that point, I knew."

The biopsy had found cancer.

An uncertain future

Starkey had a large tumour and cancer had spread to lymph nodes in her armpit and neck.

For a week, she and her family waited for a PET scan believing she could be facing stage 4 disease.

The scan showed no distant spread. Instead, Starkey was diagnosed with stage 3 triple-negative breast cancer, an aggressive form of the disease.

She underwent six months of chemotherapy followed by a mastectomy and full lymph-node clearance.

All 18 lymph nodes removed contained cancer, and chemotherapy had killed only about half of the cancer.

Starkey says she has been classified as having a high risk of recurrence. She is undergoing further treatment, with radiation still to come.

Her future, she says, remains "very, very uncertain".

Why breast density matters

For Starkey, one question has become impossible to ignore.

Why wasn't she told she had extremely dense breasts?

Breasts are made up of fatty, fibrous and glandular tissue. The greater the proportion of fibrous and glandular tissue, the denser the breast.

Breast density cannot be determined by how breasts look or feel. It is identified through breast imaging.

And it matters for two reasons.

Women with dense breasts have an increased risk of developing breast cancer, but density can also make cancer more difficult to detect on a standard mammogram.

On a mammogram, fatty tissue appears darker, while dense breast tissue appears white or light grey.

Cancer can also appear white.

That means a tumour can be much more difficult to distinguish against dense tissue and, in some cases, can be masked by it.

Health NZ says women with higher breast density are two to five times more likely to develop breast cancer than women with low breast density.

For Starkey, who had extremely dense breasts, that is what makes the clear mammogram she received while already experiencing breast changes so significant.

She knew the mammogram had found no evidence of cancer.

What she didn't know was that her breast density could make cancer more difficult to see on that mammogram.

Depending on a woman's symptoms and individual risk, other imaging can include ultrasound, three-dimensional mammography, known as tomosynthesis, and MRI.

Which imaging is appropriate depends on the individual and should be discussed with a healthcare provider.

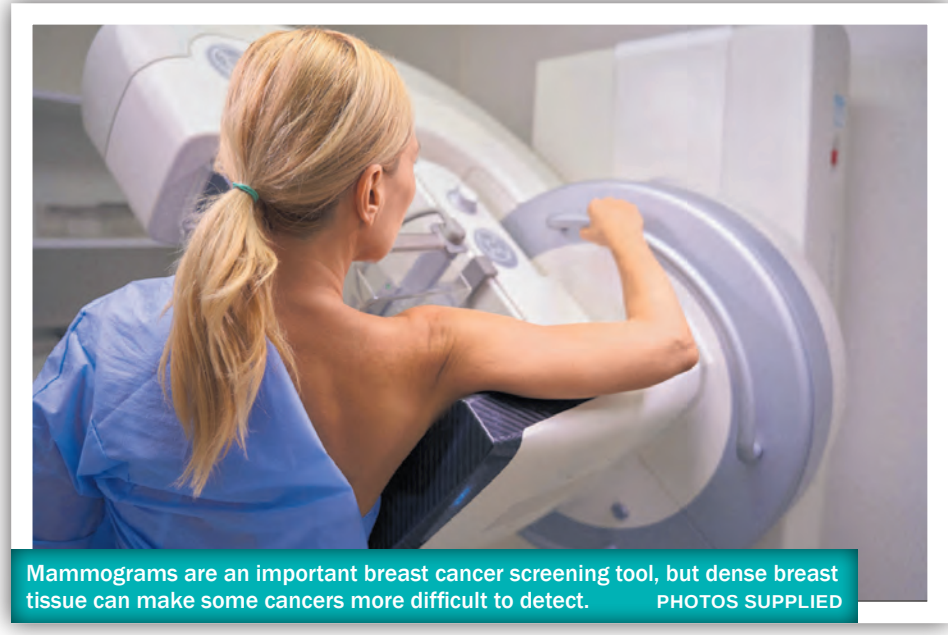
National Director Prevention Screening Alana Ewe-Snow says introducing routine density reporting would need to be accompanied by clear advice, agreed follow-up pathways and access to any additional assessment or imaging that may be appropriate.

Health NZ says it is also considering costs, equity implications and workforce capacity. No decisions have yet been made.

For Starkey, the argument is much simpler.

Give women the information.

"Women need to be told if they have dense breast tissue and they need to be told what their options are."



Mammograms are an important breast cancer screening tool, but dense breast tissue can make some cancers more difficult to detect. PHOTOS SUPPLIED

A clear mammogram isn't a guarantee

Starkey is not suggesting women stop having mammograms.

Health NZ says mammograms find eight or nine out of 10 cancers in women aged 45 to 69, but acknowledges they do not find every cancer.

"A mammogram may look normal even if there is cancer somewhere in a breast," Ewe-Snow says.

Women are advised to look for changes between mammograms and talk to their healthcare provider if they notice symptoms.

For Starkey, that message is critical. Her clear result influenced how she interpreted what was happening in the months that followed.

Starkey describes herself as tenacious. She kept going back because she knew something wasn't right.

Not every woman will.

"Women shouldn't have to fight that hard to be heard."

The price of treatment

Starkey has been privately funding pembrolizumab, known as Keytruda, as part of her treatment.

Her family estimates the private treatment costs associated with the immunotherapy have now exceeded $80,000.

"It's not just the drug that you pay for, it's the administration of it," she says.

"It was roughly $10,000 a month."

For Starkey, being able to use private health insurance during her diagnosis and later pay for treatment has made her acutely aware that other women may not have the same options.

"It shouldn't come down to whether you can afford additional investigation and treatment yourself."



Swannanoa woman and volunteer firefighter Sarah Starkey was diagnosed with stage 3 triple-negative breast cancer three months after a mammogram found no evidence of cancer.

Walking for Sarah

Through the uncertainty of treatment, Starkey says the support of the firefighting community has been extraordinary.

It began in Murchison, with a brigade and community she had no previous connection to.

"The Murchison brigade started fundraising even though I had no connection with them. One very tenacious young woman decided what was happening wasn't okay and rallied their community."

Starkey and one of her sons travelled to Murchison for the fundraiser, which raised more than $10,000.

Then her own brigade picked up the baton.

On September 18, firefighters from Swannanoa Volunteer Fire Brigade and neighbouring brigades set off at 3.30am for the 58.5km Walk for Sarah, raising over $40,000 to help Starkey and her family with the financial impact of her treatment.

"I'm incredibly humbled by the amount of support they have given me and my family."

Putting her story into the public arena was never something Starkey expected to do. She decided to speak publicly in the hope her experience might help another woman.

"I just hope that it helps someone else not have to go through what I'm going through."

Her future may be uncertain, but the message she wants other women to take from her experience isn't.

Know your breasts.

Know your breast density.

And if something doesn't feel right, keep asking questions.

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Breast Cancer awareness month:

Know your normal: the breast changes women shouldn't ignore



Claire Inkson
RURAL EDITOR

A breast cancer diagnosis is something most women would rather not think about.

But Community Breast Nurse Educator Debra Leutenegger says breast awareness is not about being frightened. It is about knowing your own body well enough to recognise when something changes.

"Knowing your normal" is a phrase women hear often, but Leutenegger says it means becoming genuinely familiar with how your breasts normally look and feel.

"What's normal for me won't necessarily be normal for you or someone else," she says.

One breast may naturally be slightly larger than the other, nipples may look different from one another, and some women simply have lumpier breast tissue.

Breasts also change throughout different ages and stages of life.

The important thing is recognising when something is new.

Leutenegger encourages women to remember TLC: touch, look and check.

When checking breasts, women should feel through the breast tissue rather than simply touching the surface, working from below the collarbone down to the bra line and around into the armpit.

Looking is equally important.

Changes can include a new lump or thickening, a nipple becoming inverted or pulled to one side, clear or bloodstained nipple discharge, dry or crusty skin around the nipple, puckering or dimpling of the skin, an area that may look like orange peel, or a change in the size or shape of a breast.

Persistent pain in one breast should also be investigated, particularly when it is unrelated to the menstrual cycle.

While most breast lumps are benign, Leutenegger says every new lump should still be checked.

Screening is not the same as diagnosis

One distinction Leutenegger believes women need to understand is the difference between routine breast screening and investigating a symptom.

A screening mammogram is designed for women who do not have breast symptoms. Its purpose is to find changes before they can be felt.

If a woman discovers a lump, nipple change or another new symptom, she should not simply wait for her next routine mammogram.

"If you have a symptom, no matter what age you are, your first port of call should be your GP, not your screening mammogram," Leutenegger says.

That remains the case even if a woman has recently received a normal mammogram result.

A mammogram provides information about the breasts at a particular point in time. Changes can develop between routine screenings, which is why remaining breast aware is important.

What are dense breasts?

Breast density is another area Leutenegger says many women know little about.

Breasts contain different proportions of fatty, glandular and fibrous tissue. Younger women generally have denser breast tissue, although some women continue to have dense breasts as they get older.

The difference matters when it comes to mammography.

On a mammogram, fatty tissue appears darker or grey, while cancer can appear white. Dense breast tissue also appears white, potentially making abnormalities more difficult to see.

"You've essentially got white on white," Leutenegger explains.

Women cannot tell whether they have dense breasts simply by looking at or feeling them.

Leutenegger says women with questions about their individual breast density or screening needs should discuss these with their doctor.

Not all breast imaging is the same

A standard mammogram is a two-dimensional, low-dose X-ray of the breast.

Ultrasound uses sound waves to examine breast tissue and can provide additional information when a particular area or symptom is being investigated.

Three-dimensional mammography, or tomosynthesis, takes multiple images through layers of breast tissue, providing a more detailed view.

There is also contrast-enhanced mammography, which combines mammography with an intravenous contrast agent to help highlight areas of abnormal blood flow that may be associated with tumours. This is currently only available at some private specialist clinics in New Zealand.

Which investigation is appropriate depends on the individual woman and why the imaging is being carried out.

Breast health in rural communities

For rural women, access can be another piece of the breast health puzzle.

Distance from screening services, time away from the farm or work, and fitting appointments around family and other commitments can make looking after their own health easier to put off.

Leutenegger says mobile services are helping bring breast health information and screening closer to rural communities, although the two services are sometimes confused.

Breast Cancer Foundation NZ's pink campervans travel throughout the country, including into rural and remote communities, offering free breast health education and helping women learn how to check their breasts.

BreastScreen Aotearoa operates separate mobile screening units, which provide mammograms to eligible women in communities around New Zealand.

"They're not into every little town, but it's closer than maybe going to a city to get your mammograms," Leutenegger says.

For women juggling farming, work and family, she says it is important not to continually put their own health at the bottom of the list.

"We look after elderly parents, husbands, children and grandchildren, we work, and we tell ourselves we don't have time.

"But we want to be around for our whānau. Looking after our own health is part of that."

Talk about it

Leutenegger's message this Breast Cancer Awareness Month is simple.

"Know what is normal for you."

And if something changes, get it checked.

"Don't be afraid to have something checked, even if you've recently had a mammogram. That decision could save your life."

Leutenegger also wants women to talk about breast health more openly.

"We need to support and encourage each other.

"Ten years ago, when I started working at the Foundation, I didn't know whether my girlfriends were having their mammograms. I do now, because we talk about it."



Breast Cancer Foundation NZ community breast nurse educator Debra Leutenegger says knowing what is normal for your breasts is key to recognising when something has changed. PHOTO SUPPLIED





Ashburton singer-songwriter Molly Harrison is forging her own path in country music at just 17.

Dolly, Molly and the road from one hillside to another



Claire Inkson
RURAL EDITOR

Few artists have shaped country music quite like Dolly Parton.

When Parton died on August 25, 2026, aged 80, she left behind far more than a catalogue of iconic songs. She had changed what was possible for generations of women while remaining proudly connected to the rural upbringing that shaped her.

Born into a poor family in Tennessee's Smoky Mountains, the fourth of 12 children, Dolly turned the hardship and experiences of her childhood into music.

For 17-year-old Ashburton singer-songwriter Molly Harrison, just beginning her own career, that may be one of Dolly's most enduring legacies.

"She always stayed true to herself and her roots, and that shone through with her writing and everything," Molly says.

"I feel like that's something I'm still trying to find with my songwriting."

Dolly never seemed interested in hiding where she came from. Songs such as Coat of Many Colours drew directly from her childhood, turning an ordinary family experience into something millions could see themselves in.

It is also one of Molly's favourite Dolly songs.

"I think that one is just really, really beautiful."

That ability to tell a story is what drew Molly to country music too.

"It can bring people together."

Molly started singing at eight and competing in country music competitions at 12. At 15, she attended the Country Music Association of Australia's Junior Academy, an experience that confirmed music was what she wanted to pursue.

"I got to meet a lot of like-minded people who were keen to give it a go as a career.

"I just don't think there's anything else I want to do apart from music."

Her family has backed her all the way.

"I don't look at it as a money-making thing. It's for the love and the passion.

"You've just got to keep going and stay true to yourself."

It is advice Dolly herself might have given.

Her image never wavered. While other artists reinvented themselves, Dolly remained unmistakably Dolly – blonde wigs, rhinestones, heels and all.

She famously quipped: "I'm not offended by all the dumb blonde jokes because I know I'm not dumb, and I'm not blonde either."

Behind the glamour was a razor-sharp businesswoman.

When Elvis Presley wanted to record I Will Always Love You, his manager, Colonel Tom Parker, wanted half of the publishing rights. Dolly refused. Decades later, Whitney Houston's version became a global phenomenon.

Dolly also challenged assumptions about what a powerful woman should look like. She could be glamorous, deliberately sexy and feminine while also being ambitious, intelligent and firmly in control of her career.

For Molly, her impact on the women who followed is undeniable.

"She had a huge influence on women in country music, just paving the way," she says.

"She was establishing herself in a male-dominated industry, so she opened up those doors for generations of women in country music to come."

Molly cites Lainey Wilson, Ella Langley and New Zealand's Kaylee Bell among her influences.

Her debut single, From the Hillside, has reached around 27,000 Spotify streams. She recently spent several weeks in Australia, where she won the Ekka Country Music Showdown and secured a performance at the Gympie Music Muster next year.

Her long-term plans include moving to Australia and becoming a touring artist.

"I'd love to go and play my music for people around the world and share stories," she says.

"My goal with songwriting is to connect with people and make people feel seen."

That ambition sits naturally within the genre Molly has chosen. Country music has long taken deeply personal experiences and made them universal.

Dolly did that for decades, writing about family, poverty, heartbreak, work and home in a way that reached far beyond the Smoky Mountains.

Molly was in Australia with her best friend, another singer, when she heard Dolly had died.

"We were both like, 'Oh my gosh, Dolly's gone.'

"It was a shock. You just don't think about it."

But Dolly's legacy was never confined to music.

Her Imagination Library began in 1995, inspired by her father, who could not read or write. What started in her home county grew into an international programme that has gifted more than 300 million books to children. She also supported disaster relief and medical research.

Her sense of identity and values shone through in her philanthropy and her songwriting.

Molly is still discovering exactly what a Molly Harrison song sounds like.

Dolly built a career by staying true to where she came from, while Molly is only just beginning to see where her own hillside might lead.

At just 17, she has a long climb ahead, but she already looks well on her way to the summit.



Molly Harrison says storytelling is what drew her to country music, with her debut single From the Hillside already finding an audience.



Dolly Parton challenged expectations of what a powerful woman could look like, combining glamour and femininity with formidable talent and business savvy.



A young Dolly Parton, whose unmistakable style and rural roots remained part of her identity throughout her career.



Dolly Parton built her career on songs drawn from family, hardship, home and the rural Tennessee community that shaped her.

Out of the gate and onto the map



Claire Inkson
RURAL EDITOR

For two months, Em Nesbit watched thousands of vehicles pass her roadside stall on State Highway 1 near Kekerengu.

Only one stopped.

The sale was a meagre two seedlings, for $6.

A few weeks later, she packed up the same produce and drove an hour to a growers' market, where she sold out before lunch.

"That was when I could see it wasn't a problem with the produce," Nesbit said.

"It was just that people weren't stopping to see that it was there. How does someone flying past at 100 kilometres an hour know that I've got eggs and they're available today, or that I've sold out?"

That question became the starting point for GateShare, a new nationwide online map and marketplace designed to connect people directly with roadside stalls, honesty boxes, growers, crafters and makers.

"The best way I can describe it is Trade Me, but for produce and arts and crafts," Nesbit said.

"Anyone can list. You could be in the middle of town with one spare courgette and no gate at all, and it won't cost you a thing."

GateShare has a free plan for sellers listing one product at a time, with paid options available for those wanting to list multiple products or operate commercially. No commission is taken on sales.

Nesbit and her family moved to their Kekerengu lifestyle property about three years ago and have been steadily working towards a more self-sufficient way of living.

That inevitably created a surplus.

"I ended up planting way more seedlings than I needed and having way more vegetables than I needed."

With a large bus shelter-style structure beside State Highway 1, a roadside stall seemed like an obvious solution.

It was not.

Despite signs and local advertising, hardly anyone stopped.

At the same time, Nesbit was seeing regular posts in community Facebook groups about roadside stalls being targeted by thieves, with produce and cash tins stolen.

Her husband, Aaron, suggested she build an app.

"I said, 'No way. That's way above my head.'"

Nesbit had built several websites before, but nothing on the scale of GateShare.

She eventually decided to give it a go, building the platform herself without investors.

"If I knew how much work would go into it, I don't think I would have even started," she said.

"When I thought I was 90 percent done, I was probably 10 percent done."

GateShare allows sellers to list anything from eggs, vegetables, honey and flowers to baking, seedlings, firewood, pottery and handmade goods.

Sellers do not need a physical roadside stall. Goods can be collected from a front door, driveway or another agreed location, while made-to-order options allow sellers to produce items only once an order is confirmed.

Privacy and safety were central to the design.

A seller's exact address is hidden, with the map showing an approximate location within 500 metres of the property. Depending on the payment and sale options selected, the collection address is only released once an order is confirmed or paid for.

Buyers and sellers can also review each other.

Nesbit said one of the most time-consuming parts of building GateShare was not the map itself, but working through the rules around selling different types of food.

"There are quite a lot of different rules."

The platform does not police compliance, but prompts sellers with relevant information when they list products such as eggs or baked goods, while responsibility for meeting legal requirements remains with the seller.

Nesbit believes the platform could also strengthen local food networks when communities are disrupted by road closures, something Kaikōura and Marlborough residents know only too well.

"We weren't here for the major Kaikōura earthquakes, but the area was cut off," she said.

"It's easier when you know your local community to be able to buy food from each other and bring back that old-school method of shopping, where you share food, exchange things and buy from your neighbours."

GateShare also allows sellers to list goods for koha, swap or free.

At the time of writing, the platform had 57 live stalls and 72 stalls created in total, with sellers able to switch listings on and off as produce becomes available.

The project has been built around an already busy life.

Nesbit has two children, Anthony, 7, and Layla, 6, works part-time, helps with her husband's business, The Shed Specialist Co, serves on the school board and runs the family's lifestyle property.

Asked how she fits it all in, she laughed.

"I don't.

"Something has to give and it's usually the housework."

For now, she hopes GateShare will make it easier for people to bypass the supermarket, support local growers and discover what is available just down the road.

The idea is simple.

Know what is at the gate before you drive past it.

GateShare can be found at gateshare.co.nz or downloaded from the Apple App Store.



GateShare founder Em Nesbit with her children, Anthony, 7, and Layla, 6, at their Kekerengu lifestyle property. PHOTOS SUPPLIED



GateShare founder Em Nesbit checks the newly launched GateShare platform, which connects buyers with roadside stalls, growers, makers and producers across New Zealand.

Italian Potato Salad with Avocado & Basil

Courtesy of Nz Avocado

- 30 mins
- Serves 4

Ingredients

- 600g baby potatoes (or waxy potatoes), halved
- ½ red onion, finely sliced
- ¼ cup sun-dried tomatoes, finely chopped
- 1 avocado, diced
- 1 handful fresh basil leaves, torn
- 1 handful fresh parsley
- 2 tbsp pine nuts, lightly toasted
- Dressing:
- 3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tbsp red wine vinegar
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- ½ tsp honey

Method

1. Place the potatoes in a pot of cold salted water. Bring to a boil and cook for about 10-12 minutes, or until fork-tender. Drain and let them cool slightly.
2. To make the dressing, in a small bowl, whisk together the olive oil, lemon juice, red wine vinegar, Dijon mustard, garlic, honey, salt, and pepper until well combined.
3. In a large bowl, combine the warm potatoes with the red onion, sun-dried tomatoes, and half of the dressing. Toss gently.
4. Add diced avocado, basil, and parsley, and gently mix.
5. Drizzle with the remaining dressing and sprinkle with toasted pine nuts.
6. Serve warm or at room temperature.



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