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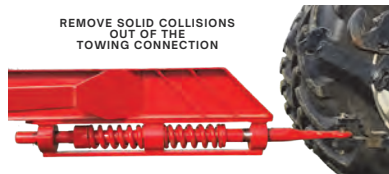
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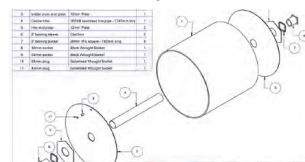


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# Getting back to simpler things

There's something quietly ironic about the rise of "homesteading" as a trend. I suspect my grandmother would laugh at the idea that we now have a fashionable name for something farming families and rural communities have simply been doing for generations.

Growing vegetables. Preserving fruit. Baking bread. Making do. Sharing skills. Living seasonally. None of it was ever branded as a lifestyle. It was just life.

But perhaps that's exactly why homesteading is resonating again.

The cost of living crisis has certainly played a role. Much like Covid did, it reminded people that supermarket shelves are not guaranteed, food security matters, and self sufficiency carries value beyond dollars and cents. When times feel uncertain, there is comfort in knowing how to grow a tomato, bottle fruit or cook from scratch.

Still, I suspect this movement runs deeper than money.

At its heart, homesteading feels like a response to the pace of modern life itself. A quiet rebellion against convenience, constant notifications and the pressure to consume more while somehow feeling less fulfilled.

There is therapy in getting your hands dirty. Farmers have always known this. There is satisfaction in creating something from almost nothing. In watching seeds become meals. In preserving food for winter. In learning skills once passed down without much thought between generations.

Perhaps that is what people are truly searching for. Not perfection, but connection. To food, to seasons, to slower living and to the simple satisfaction of doing things with

their own hands.

And maybe, just maybe, there is another positive to come from it too.

As more urban New Zealanders attempt to grow their own food, even on the smallest scale, perhaps they will gain a deeper appreciation for what farmers do every day. Because anyone who has tried to keep vegetables alive through unpredictable weather, pests, rising costs and time pressure quickly realises producing food is neither simple nor easy.

It takes patience. Skill. Resilience. Experience.

Things our rural communities have understood all along.

In this issue, we meet some of the women inspiring a new generation to reconnect with the land and the food they eat. We meet Holly van Dam, who is growing food alongside life on a dairy farm, often with her young baby in tow, and Laura Macdonald, better known as The Kiwi Country Girl, whose wholesome, practical approach to rural living has struck a chord with thousands of New Zealanders.

We also meet some homesteaders from Oxford who have taken preserving to a whole new level.

Their stories are not about perfection. They are about progress, practicality and rediscovering the value of simple things.

We hope you enjoy this issue. I'm especially interested to hear if anyone has a crack at Holly's sourdough recipe.

With all the noise that comes with an election year, perhaps there's something refreshing about stepping away from the constant debate for a moment, slowing down and getting back to simpler things.



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

# LIFESTYLE NEWS IN RURAL GUARDIAN

If you have a rural lifestyle story idea, contact Rural Guardian editor Claire Inkson: [claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz](mailto:claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz) or 022 129 9496



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# Leading with purpose



**Claire Inkson**  
RURAL EDITOR

**B**ay of Plenty leader Hinehou Timutimu says if her win as the 2026 Fonterra Dairy Woman of the Year inspires even one other woman to step forward, it will have been worth it.

"If I can just inspire one person, that would be amazing," she says.

"I want to open up a doorway and a pathway and an opportunity for others to follow."

The General Manager of Te Tawa Kaiti Lands Trust was announced as the winner at the Dairy Women's Network conference gala dinner in Christchurch on May 5.

The award recognises women who demonstrate leadership and commitment to the dairy industry. Judges praised Timutimu for her "deep connection to people and whenua" and her transformational impact across dairy and Māori agribusiness.

DWN Trustee and lead judge Jenna Smith said Timutimu's leadership was "authentic and anchored in purpose".

"She does not seek recognition or status, but instead looks to progress outcomes for women, for dairy, and anywhere the two collide," Smith said.

Timutimu, (Tūhoe, Whakatōhea and Te Ātiawa), leads a dual-enterprise model combining dairy farming and maize at Te Tawa Kaiti Lands Trust.

Her leadership philosophy is guided by the whakatauki "Ka ora ai te whenua, Ka ora ai te tangata" meaning "When the land thrives, the people thrive."

That philosophy sits at the centre of everything she does.

"We combine western science with mātauranga Māori and think long-term, even 100 years ahead," she says.

"Our leadership is values-led and future-focused."

Current projects include land-use optimisation trials aimed at improving outcomes for land, animals and future generations while reducing emissions.

"We're doing better for the land, better for our animals and better for the next generations," she says.

Leadership, she says, is also about navigating complexity and bringing people together.

"You can't work in silos. You must work together."

Her pathway into the role was not immediate. Timutimu first became involved with the trust by helping with meetings minutes before gradually stepping into leadership.

"I used to sit quietly on the couch during meetings for years just listening and learning about the trust, the people and the land," she says.

Over time she learned not just the business side of farming, but also the importance of relationships and community connection.

That grounding came long before dairying.

Timutimu credits much of her outlook to her late mother,



Hinehou Timutimu was named the 2026 Fonterra Dairy Woman of the Year at the Dairy Women's Network conference gala dinner in Christchurch. The Bay of Plenty leader says she hopes the award helps create pathways for other women in the sector. PHOTOS SUPPLIED

a respected Māori midwife who founded the first Māori community midwifery service in Whakatāne and was later appointed a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to Māori and midwifery.

"She never sat us down and explained leadership," Timutimu says.

"She just took us with her. We saw how she handled meetings, difficult conversations and community work. That's how we learned."

Her mother also established community gardens to teach young mothers how to grow and cook nutritious food.

"It was to show the young mums how to grow nutritious food for their children and how to cook it," she says.

Timutimu believes women bring something unique to leadership.

"I'm very intuitive," she says.

"I tend to sense opportunities and quietly work away at them. I think women bring that intuition to leadership, especially once you become a mum."

The win comes as Timutimu is already immersed in the Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme, which she admits has been more demanding than expected.

"All of us underestimated how much time it would actually take," she says with a laugh.

Her research project will explore women's networks across New Zealand's agri sector and whether they are effectively supporting connection, participation and

empowerment.

"I feel there are women's voices in agriculture that are still being lost," she says.

"I want to explore how we bring those voices forward."

Her working title is inspired by the film Tina.

"Not one more acre of Māori land lost. Not one more voice lost."

The project will examine how women engage with rural support networks and where gaps still exist.

"I want to know do they exist for a start, and do women interact with them? If they don't, is it because there isn't one in their area?"

The Dairy Women's Network conference reinforced the importance of those connections.

"It's so neat being in a room full of like-minded people," she says.

"It's encouraging and inspiring and you feed off that energy."

Alongside the award, more opportunities continue to open.

Later this year Timutimu will travel to Thailand to take part in an international food security and resilience programme after previously representing New Zealand at the APEC Technical Cooperation Workshop in Bangkok last year.

"It's really neat to be in those spaces and share," she says.

For now though, she is still adjusting to life after the award announcement.

"It's all just beginning really," she says.

And while attention may feel unfamiliar, her focus remains firmly on lifting others alongside her.



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Jamie McFadden says a growing disconnect between farmers, advocacy groups and policymakers is the biggest issue facing the sector heading into the election. PHOTO CLAIRE INKSON

# Representation gap at heart of farming frustration, says Groundswell



**Claire Inkson**  
RURAL EDITOR

No matter which government comes to power after the 2026 New Zealand general election, it may make little difference to farmers if the people speaking on their behalf are not getting it right.

That is the view of Groundswell spokesperson Jamie McFadden, who says the biggest issue facing the sector is not just policy, but a growing disconnect between farmers, advocacy groups and government.

"The biggest challenge is the disconnect," McFadden said.

"It's a disconnect from the real world, from grassroots farmers, and now increasingly from our farming leadership as well."

McFadden said that while election cycles tend to focus on policy change, the deeper issue lies in how those policies are formed and who is informing them.

"There's no point trying to encourage the government to change something if the other farming groups are of an opposing view," he said.

"We just won't make progress."

He believes that unless advocacy groups are accurately reflecting the

views of farmers on the ground, government will continue to receive the wrong signals.

"Until we sort out our advocacy voice and our representation, being faithful to the grassroots, we're not going to get change," he said.

## Policy disconnect

McFadden pointed to increasing frustration among farmers with regulation, particularly in the environmental space, which he said is becoming more disconnected from practical reality.

"It's all heading in one direction. It's getting more impractical, more disconnected from the real world."

He attributes this to a shift over time in who is designing policy.

"You've got a whole lot of people now in these bureaucracies who have trained as policy analysts, but they haven't got those connections to rural New Zealand like they used to," he said.

"That disconnect is a lot greater now than it was 10, 20, 30 years ago."

Rather than focusing purely on scrapping individual policies, McFadden said the system that produces them needs to be addressed first.

"There's no point scrapping a policy and then getting the same bureaucracy to write a new one," he said.

"You're not fixing the root of the problem."

"The number one problem is bureaucracy across central

and local government... that is disconnected from grassroots and the coal face."

## Freshwater farm plans a flashpoint

One example he pointed to is freshwater farm plans, which Groundswell has strongly opposed in their current form.

"We don't have a problem with farm plans. They're a great tool when farmers engage with them," he said.

"But when you make them mandatory and put them under a government oversight system, you lose that buy-in."

He said the approach risks applying a one-size-fits-all model to farms with very different environmental contexts.

"Not every farm has freshwater issues. Some farms have operated for decades as low-impact permitted activities, and now they're being brought into a system of government oversight for the first time."

"That's where it doesn't fit."

## Local government under scrutiny

Groundswell's recent legal action against the Gore District Council over its proposed district plan is, McFadden says, part of a broader issue.

"It's not that councils are out of control, it's that they're so disconnected from the real world that it's impossible for them to come up with workable rules."

He said similar issues are

emerging across the country, with land use rules and environmental provisions having significant impacts on property values and farm operations.

"We're seeing so much stuff now where you just shake your head and go, where are these people coming from?"

Section 6 of the Resource Management Act, which covers matters such as heritage and sites of significance, has become a growing point of tension for landowners.

"In the last week Groundswell NZ continued to receive concerns from property owners across New Zealand impacted by Section 6."

## Paris Agreement and siloed policy

McFadden was also critical of how climate policy linked to the Paris Agreement is being applied.

"The Paris thing has become an obsession. It's siloed on emissions, and it takes away the ability to look at the bigger picture."

He said focusing too narrowly on methane reduction risks overlooking other, more immediate environmental priorities.

"On many farms, emissions isn't the priority. Freshwater quality is the priority. Or weeds and pests. Or just trying to make a living."

He pointed to funding criteria tied to carbon outcomes as an example of policy not aligning with on-farm realities.

"We're going to see more of that sort of thing, policy that looks good on paper but doesn't work on the

ground."

"Paris is a policy in a silo."

## Advocacy under pressure

McFadden said the role of industry groups is also under scrutiny, particularly where their positions differ from farmer sentiment.

"There are a number of issues where farming groups have supported policies that farmers themselves don't support."

"I would wager most farmers would be unaware that some of the main unworkable regulations have been promoted or supported by our farming groups."

## What success would look like

For McFadden, success after the election would not be defined by a single policy change, but by a shift in how decisions are made.

"The first step is a proper stocktake, understanding what's actually happening on farms and in the environment."

"The second step is a major overhaul of the bureaucracy that's designing all of this."

Ultimately, he said, success would be visible in everyday conversations on farm.

"I'll know we've got it right when I can go onto a farm and we're not talking about dumb rules or dumb conditions of consent," he said.

"When the rules are practical and they work, that's when we've achieved something."

# If it works there, it'll work anywhere

## Ironmax Pro® takes on slugs and one of our most challenging climates

Chris and Stacey Hatfield have a 100 ha dairy farm and milk 180 cows in Murchison. Their system is mostly grass, though they have recently introduced some maize.

The Hatfields' Tasman property has around 2,020 mm of rain annually and, mostly, enjoys a temperate climate. Unfortunately, so do slugs.

Chris has a long-term vision for their business and is focussed on setting up a foundation for whatever the next generation of his family wants to achieve. He also believes in an investment and result, rather than just a cost approach.

And, it pays off.

"The more yield and quality you produce, the cheaper the crop becomes. Every mouthful the cows take, you see the benefit in the vat. When you're spending money, you want to see the best return." He says that also shows in cow health and welfare.

However, it comes with a challenge. New, high density, high performing pastures give slugs more places to hide and more enticing feed prospects — this within an environment and climate, which is perfect for them.

Chris' approach, he says, is aggressive. He goes in hard with a 7 kg/ha application of Ironmax Pro to take out not only the adults existing in the pasture but also the next generation. "It catches all the waves of populations. If you go hard from the get go, that way every plant gets a crack. Otherwise, it's like the equivalent of slugs going from one McDonalds to the next!"

Slug population explosions are common, as the pests can produce 300-500 eggs over their 13 month lifespan.

Chris has also established "buffer zones"



Chris Hatfield uses Ironmax Pro slug bait for his pasture and recently planted maize to take out adult slugs and the next generation.

around drilled paddocks to avoid the risk of running crops over or compacting soil when reapplying bait.

With pets and kids on the farm, he says the safety aspect of low toxicity Ironmax Pro is also important.

Mark Prosser, Technical Field Representative for PGG Wrightson, says dairying, in general, is scientific and measurable but Chris sets the bar high, with elevated pasture sowing rates to suppress weed pressure, and meticulous all-around management.

He echoes Chris' comments about the density of swards of new grasses and the unintended consequence of the positive environments they create for slugs. But says for the right response — it's worth it. He says dairy cows, especially, need the good grass and it's important to protect it. "Even a 1%

improvement in DM can be massive — and, if they're not controlled, slugs will always eat the good stuff."

Mark says, in his experience, Ironmax Pro actually draws slugs away from grass or maize. He says he trusts the product, even after multiple rain falls where other slug baits would break down. "I've confidence that it'll do the job. It's got endurance in the field and our climate and it's safe."

Alex Easton, UPL NZ Regional Manager Upper South Island, says he's so confident in Ironmax Pro's performance and safety that he uses it in his home garden, even though there are small children around. He says slug pressure can be high because of surrounding paddocks. "There's nothing slugs like better than brassicas in nice, straight rows!"

Travelling up to 13 metres in one night, slugs are phenomenal feeders — capable

of consuming more than 50% of their own body weight. Unprotected, damage to plants — especially seedlings — can happen surprisingly quickly. Infestations can appear seemingly out of nowhere.

Alex says Ironmax Pro has significant advantages over old-school coated baits. "Coated baits only have a lick of the active on the outside. Ironmax Pro is manufactured with the finest durum wheat using a unique wet manufacturing process ensuring the active ingredient is mixed all the way through. Not a bite is wasted.

"Looking for dead slugs is not the best way to access a bait's efficacy. Instead check for crop damage. No damage indicates an effective bait programme."

His colleague, Pieter Van Der Westhuizen, UPL NZ Ltd Regional Manager Upper North Island, says slugs will always ingest a lethal dose of Ironmax Pro, even juveniles. "I had a field representative say to me that they'd seen slugs still in the field after Ironmax Pro had been applied. I suggested a simple test — squeeze the slug. If there's visible blue residue, it means they've eaten the bait and won't be eating anything else."

Apart from efficacy, there are other benefits with Ironmax Pro.

The optimised pellet size and consistency ensure even distribution and a widespread width. Every pellet has the same size and weight, which equals excellent ballistics. Every load is the same as the one before. This eliminates any fiddling around with the setup of spreaders.

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# Young Farmers still hopeful despite growing pressure



**Claire Inkson**  
RURAL EDITOR

As New Zealand heads towards the 2026 general election, New Zealand Young Farmers chief executive Cheyne Gillooly says one of the biggest frustrations for the next generation is not a lack of passion for farming, but a lack of policy that supports them to succeed.

Gillooly says young people remain deeply committed to the food and fibre sector, despite increasing financial, educational and structural barriers.

"It would be great to see a continued focus on celebrating the rural economy and what it means to New Zealand and to be a New Zealander," he said.

"Our members are very proud to be part of an industry that feeds people, houses people, clothes people, and is intrinsically linked to the New Zealand identity."

But while politicians across parties often speak positively about the rural sector, Gillooly says that support is not flowing through into practical policy as parties begin shaping their rural agendas ahead of November's election.

"What we're not seeing is that translate into policies that actually support the next generation coming through."

## Pathways into ownership

Gillooly said one of the biggest issues facing young farmers is the ability to access and build wealth within the sector.

"The signal changes around KiwiSaver so people can buy a farm property are an interesting start, but I think they miss the wider problem."

Instead, he believes more attention should be placed on pathways such as employee share schemes and earn-in ownership structures.

"We're still not addressing things like encouraging employee share schemes, earn-in and earn-out farm ownership structures," he said.

Those issues, he says, are solvable.

"With a little bit of effort, they could be resolved for the benefit of the country."

Despite the challenges, Gillooly says young people are still ambitious about farming and ownership.

"There are still pathways into ownership. People are still sharemilking, still buying property, still finding their way in."

Gillooly pushed back strongly on the idea that younger generations are losing interest in agriculture.

## 'Young people do want to farm'

"Young people want to get into farming as much now, if not more than ever," he said.



Cheyne Gillooly says young people still want to farm "as much now, if not more than ever", but are looking for new ways into ownership and modern farming systems. PHOTOS SUPPLIED

"What they're saying is they don't want to farm the way it's always been done."

Instead, he says younger farmers are looking for innovation, productivity and more balanced lifestyles.

"They want innovative ways into ownership. They want to invest in technology and productivity. They want multiple revenue streams on farm and better lifestyles."

"They don't want long hours for low returns."

He believes the industry itself also needs to change how it talks about farming.

"As an industry, we need to stop talking the industry down and stop talking people out of it."

## Education system failing rural pathways

Gillooly was also highly critical of the education system's treatment of vocational and agricultural learning, saying it continues to be designed through an urban lens.

"The complete lack of focus in our education sector around vocational training, and what it actually means to train people to work and live and thrive in rural New Zealand, has been really disappointing."

He said practical rural training programmes were producing excellent outcomes but were not properly recognised within current funding systems.

"The training programmes in the rural sector actually get people out on the land, get them engaged, and have very high conversion into employment."

Gillooly said the structure of the funding and credit system itself was part of the problem.

"The fact that TEC (The tertiary Education Commission) and NZQA (New Zealand Qualifications Authority) still insist on capping the number of credits that can be earned in one year is a real issue," he said.

"The system assumes desk-based learning and ignores the fact that practical learning allows people to learn multiple concepts at once."

He pointed to programmes such

as Growing Future Farmers as an example.

"In one day somebody might learn time management, cooking, hazard identification, day planning, animal management, fencing, diesel mechanics. That's just a normal day."

"But the NZQA system says it's impossible to earn more than 100 credits in a year."

Gillooly said programmes delivering practical rural training were also carrying a significant pastoral care burden that was not recognised in funding models.

"Those programmes are only funded per credit delivered, and none of the pastoral care can be recognised in the funding model," he said.

"They take young people, often from difficult backgrounds, and teach them how to be physically fit, prepare meals, manage routines, clean, work hard and contribute. Those things are vital and often missed."

Yet despite the broader support provided, he said they were funded the same as urban classroom-based programmes.

"They're funded the same way as an urban trades academy where students arrive at 8.30am and leave at 3pm."

"It makes no sense to me."

Gillooly also questioned why agriculture continues to sit on the fringe of many school curriculums.

"The few ag teachers we do have often have to secure their own funding and justify programmes against things like rugby or overseas trips," he said.

"If teachers take these programmes on, it's often not recognised as career development or additional work. They're expected to do it for free."

He believes schools should be better supported to introduce agriculture and food production into classrooms and communities.

"Why isn't there a fund where schools and teachers can apply to introduce rural or agricultural programmes into schools?" he said.

"Teaching kids how to grow



New Zealand Young Farmers chief executive Cheyne Gillooly says vocational and agricultural training continues to be overlooked despite strong employment outcomes and growing demand for skilled workers in the rural sector.

food, bringing local farmers into schools, running agri-based initiatives. There are so many things that could connect students to their communities and career pathways."

"At the moment it just feels shoved in a corner, ignored and forgotten about."

"The food and fibre sector is one of the most entrepreneurial, technology-led and globally connected sectors we have," he said.

"If you are young and ambitious, you can go so far in this industry."

He said agriculture could also provide an important pathway for students who struggled with traditional classroom learning.

"Agriculture is a great pathway because it gives them a reason

to engage with maths, science, biology and communication."

## A hopeful generation

Despite the frustrations, Gillooly says there is still strong optimism among young farmers.

"That's because they just get on and get things done."

For him, the wider issue is whether government policy is prepared to recognise and support what is already happening successfully in rural communities.

"This sector doesn't care who you are or who you've been. It cares whether you're willing to give it a go, back yourself, be part of a community, support others, work hard and be innovative."

"If you do that, you can go anywhere in our sector."

**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 David Reesby from Marton Young Farmers Club**

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

I have been part of the Marton Young Farmers club since 2019.

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

The highlight of joining Young Farmers was meeting my to-be wife, Sez. I've had a lot of great experiences from Young Farmers. Competing at Grand Final was an amazing experience and making networks all around the country with other Young Farmers members.

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

Growing up on a dairy farm, I was always interested in agriculture and going to Feilding Ag High School, which had a great agriculture program.

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

I am currently herd managing our 425 cow family dairy farm near Glen Oroua in the Manawatu.

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

I see the future of farming being the continual gain of efficiency from the use of technology, improving our high quality products to export around the world.

**6** What are your future plans?

I would like to continue progressing within the dairy industry to farm ownership.

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

The food and fibre sector and the people who get out there, create, innovate and help to improve the sector.



**Nomination —**

Over tournament weekend, Dave was a good sport to everyone during the weekend, he stepped up to debate with the Wellington young farmers team as one member had a bereavement, and he was very helpful to two of our newest Fitz members during fencing. They were new to tournament and hasn't done fencing, but Dave was really nice and made sure that had all of their posts sorted and that the girls were properly instructed for fencing. We really appreciated Dave for helping the girls out.



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# School buses, fuel and isolation among top concerns for rural women



**Claire Inkson**  
RURAL EDITOR

As New Zealand heads towards the 2026 New Zealand general election, Rural Women New Zealand says rural families are continuing to face growing pressure around cost of living, fuel, isolation and access to basic services.

Chief executive Sandra Kirby said many of the issues affecting rural women were deeply interconnected, with fuel costs and school transport remaining among the organisation's biggest concerns heading into the election.

"I think we can't go into this year's election without talking about the price of fuel and the impact of that," Kirby said.

"The fuel impact affects cost of living; it impacts people's ability to connect."

Kirby said uncertainty around fuel supply and pricing was creating anxiety for many rural families already dealing with significant transport demands.

"We know the cost of fuel already has an impact."

## School bus system 'fundamentally broken'

Kirby said Rural Women New Zealand had been raising concerns around school buses for years, but believed the issue could no longer be ignored.

"The school bus system is outdated. The funding system is outdated. It's not working. It needs a rethink."

She said the impact went well beyond simply getting children to school.

"We know it is the difference for families between being able to get kids to school, and sometimes it's the difference between staying in a rural community or moving."

Rural Women New Zealand recently welcomed interim changes to the system, but Kirby said they did not go far enough.

"Stoppag is not enough for a scheme that is fundamentally broken."

She said when school transport becomes unreliable, the burden often falls back onto families, particularly women.

"If you are doing the school run, then you are committing yourself to an hour or more at the beginning and end of every day," she said.

"That limits your ability to do other things. It impacts your cost of living because that's a lot of travel."

"It impacts your ability to earn a living, but also your ability to connect socially."

Kirby said isolation remained

one of the biggest ongoing issues facing rural women.

"Isolation was one of the reasons Rural Women New Zealand was set up 100 years ago, and that sense of isolation for rural women is still there."

"The important thing about having time to connect, time to do some work for yourself, on yourself, by yourself, is really important."

She said the organisation wanted to see a rural school bus service that was "safe, sustainable and reliable".

"They don't seem to be impossible asks."

## Cost of living showing up differently in rural communities

Kirby said the cost of living crisis often looked different in rural communities, where travel distances and access to services added extra pressure.

"One concern we've definitely heard is people putting off doctor's visits," she said.

She said many rural families were already operating on very low incomes, while also facing long travel times to access healthcare and essential services.

Fuel costs were also compounding the issue.

"For us, they're so interrelated. The fuel and the cost of living."

## Pay equity still a major concern

Kirby said pay equity also remained a major issue for Rural Women New Zealand, particularly in female-dominated sectors common across rural communities.

"Fair pay for rural women is an investment in the community," she said.

"A lot of women in rural areas are undertaking roles that are currently not paid proportionately because they are female-dominated sectors."

Kirby said the organisation remained concerned not only about pay equity outcomes, but also how recent changes were handled.

"We would call on a reversal of the changes that were made," she said.

"We are concerned not just about what was in it, but the way it was passed."

She said any future changes should go through a full select committee process.

## Pilot programmes 'literally saving lives'

Kirby said Rural Women New Zealand remained deeply concerned about social isolation in rural communities, particularly among vulnerable women.

The organisation has been running pilot programmes in Southland and Taranaki focused on reducing isolation and

Rural Women New Zealand chief executive Sandra Kirby said uncertainty around fuel supply and pricing was creating anxiety for many rural families already dealing with significant transport demands. PHOTO SUPPLIED



connecting women with support services.

"We know they've made a difference. They've literally saved people's lives."

The programmes help connect women with services including:

- Budget advice
- Mental health support
- Suicide prevention services
- Housing support
- Women's Refuge

"These are life-saving changes that women at the end of their tether need help navigating."

Kirby said there was concern around the lack of guaranteed long-term funding for the programmes despite their success.

## Weather events adding pressure

Kirby said adverse weather events were also becoming a growing issue for rural communities and infrastructure.

"This year we have seen at least one adverse weather event every month."

She said repeated road closures

and infrastructure damage were increasing isolation and making access to services even harder.

"We call on all parties to consider how we can build communities that can recover from these events."

Kirby pointed to the ongoing closure of State Highway 3 in North Taranaki as an example.

"People living in the northern part of Taranaki have had four hours added to their drive to get to the hospital."

"It's been four months and there isn't really an end in sight."

She said governments needed to focus more on long-term infrastructure planning rather than repeated short-term fixes.

## Rural families 'need to feel like they count'

Kirby said Rural Women New Zealand believed governments generally understood rural issues, but rural communities still risked being sidelined by urban-focused decision making.

"We do find we have to

constantly remind government that there are 400,000 women who live rurally," she said.

"Every government struggles with balancing the pull of the cities against rural communities."

She urged politicians to listen closely to ministers and communities with lived rural experience.

"We would urge the Government to listen to ministers who have rural experience because they do know the issues for their communities."

For Kirby, success after the election would not be measured in slogans or announcements, but in whether rural families felt supported in everyday life.

"Rural families would feel like they counted," she said.

"They would be able to get their children to school safely, they would be able to work and have their work valued appropriately, and they would have access to services that improved their health and wellbeing."

"It's not asking for much."

# Changing of the guard for Mid Canterbury Federated Farmers



Outgoing Mid Canterbury Federated Farmers of New Zealand provincial president David Acland (left) hands over the reins to incoming president Kerry Harmer following his four-year tenure. Harmer becomes the first woman to hold the role in the branch's 81-year history. PHOTO ANGELA CUSHNIE

CLAIRE INKSON

There has been a changing of the guard at Mid Canterbury Federated Farmers, with high-country farmer Kerry Harmer taking over as provincial president after the completion of David Acland's four-year tenure.

Harmer's appointment was announced at the branch meeting on May 7.

Harmer, who farms with her family at Castle Ridge Station, becomes the first woman to hold the position in the branch's 81-year history.

But Harmer says gender was never something she considered when taking on the role.

"It honestly hadn't even crossed my mind," she said.

"It wasn't until someone mentioned it at the meeting that I realised the significance of it.

"These days it should be assumed that it doesn't matter who you are. You should get the job because of your skills and ability, and that's how it should be."

Harmer said while the milestone was notable, she believed it was more reflective of timing and circumstance than anything else.

"There have been a huge number of capable women involved in Canterbury Federated Farmers over the years," she said.

"Sometimes it's just timing or circumstance."

She said women of her generation often stepped away from careers while raising families before later returning to leadership pathways.

"With women, you get a gap," she said.

"Maybe that's changing now because more women are juggling careers alongside raising children and taking less of a break."

Harmer said having a mix of people around leadership tables remained important.

"A mix of genders creates a different dynamic," she said.

"You tend to think about things differently and that's positive. You want a diverse range of people, ideas and ways of looking at

things around any leadership table."

Harmer steps into the role at a significant time for the rural sector, with ongoing debate around RMA reform, local government reform and rural services continuing to dominate conversations across the country, particularly as New Zealand heads into an election year ahead of voters going to the polls on November 7.

"The big things are RMA reform and local government reform because those two cover nearly everything that impacts us in the rural community," she said.

She also pointed to concerns around school bus services, access to services and New Zealand Post in rural communities.

"There are parts of our community, whether it's older people or those further out rurally, who simply don't have alternatives," she said.

"People say everything can be done online these days, whether that's banking, reading the paper or accessing services, but that's not reality for everybody. We all need to be heard and listened to."

Harmer said the role of Federated Farmers remained clear, regardless of which government was in power.

"Federated Farmers is there to advocate for the rural community," she said.

"We wouldn't be doing our job properly if we weren't standing up and saying, 'You need to know what our concerns are.'"

Asked why she chose to take on the role, Harmer said it ultimately came down to community.

"I believe in our rural community, and I believe people need to have a voice," she said.

"You need people willing to step up, otherwise you can't complain if you don't like what comes your way."

Harmer also paid tribute to Acland, describing him as "an absolutely cracking provincial president" and "a superb role model to follow."

"He's very good at looking at the big picture and dealing with people in a clear, concise and gentlemanly way," she said.

"He's got a huge amount of respect in the community because of that."

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# Relationships key to success



**Claire Inkson**  
RURAL EDITOR

Southland couple Scott and Stacey Mackereth say people, relationships and creating opportunities for others have been central to their success after being named the 2026 New Zealand Share Farmers of the Year.

The couple took out the national title at the New Zealand Dairy Industry Awards in Rotorua on May 9, alongside three merit awards including the Trelleborg Sustainable Pasture Award, DairyNZ People & Culture Award and Federated Farmers Leadership Award.

Scott and Stacey contract milk 1400 cows for Fortuna Group at Edendale on a 464-hectare property and manage a team of 13 staff. Judges described the pair as a “dynamic team”, noting Scott’s data-driven approach and Stacey’s grounding influence within the business.

For Stacey, who comes from a counselling background, the recognition around people and wellbeing was especially meaningful.

“A lot of that definitely comes from my counselling background,” she said.

“We really focus on supporting all aspects of our staff wellbeing and making sure they feel looked after and supported.”

Part of that approach includes reflection journals for staff, encouraging them to step away from distractions and reflect not just on work, but life, relationships and personal goals.

Scott said the farm had become a place where staff were encouraged to grow and progress through the industry.

“It’s not just about working for us, it’s about their future too,” he said.

“We’ve got two staff members moving into farm management roles within our group this year and that’s hugely rewarding for us.”

The awards cap off a remarkable few years for the couple, who rebuilt their lives after COVID disrupted Scott’s dairy farming ventures in the United States.

Scott spent more than a decade dairy farming at scale in America before returning to New Zealand in 2020.

“We originally went over there with stars in our eyes thinking we’d grow capital and make a fortune, but it’s definitely a boom-or-bust environment,” he said.

After returning to New Zealand and spending time in consultancy roles and farming in the Waikato, the couple eventually saw opportunity in Southland and made the move south.

“It’s honestly been a whirlwind ever since,” Scott said.

The pair, who have known each other since childhood and reconnected later in life, say balance has been key to both their relationship and business success.

“Stacey balances me really well,” Scott said.

“I’ve always got ideas and want to do everything immediately, while Stacey’s the one making sure

everyone’s okay while my tornado runs through the farm.”

Pasture management and data-driven decision-making also sit at the core of the operation.

Since arriving on the farm three years ago, the couple have increased pasture production from around nine tonnes of dry matter per hectare to more than 14 tonnes.

Scott said while the operation used technology and software systems extensively, the fundamentals remained simple.

“We’re constantly measuring grass, monitoring grazing intervals and making data-driven decisions,” he said.

“Pasture is New Zealand dairy farming’s competitive advantage globally, so it’s something we put a huge focus on.”

The couple also spoke highly of the Dairy Industry Awards process, describing it as an invaluable networking and learning opportunity.

“It was honestly amazing,” Stacey said.

“By the final night you’d spent several days together doing activities and networking, and you’d built genuine friendships.

“By the time the awards came around you were excited for everyone, not just yourself.”

The success of the Mackereths was part of a strong showing for South Island farmers at this year’s Dairy Industry Awards, with Mid Canterbury couple Jonathon and Stacey Hoets also recognised on the national stage after winning the Fonterra & ASB First Farm Award.

The award recognises first-generation farmers who are on the verge of farm ownership and aims to help remove barriers to entering farm ownership.

Currently in an equity partnership with the Rylib Group at Kairoa Dairies, the couple have spent years steadily building equity and industry experience.

“We haven’t followed the traditional pathway,” Jonathon said.

“From early on we’ve really valued relationships, and that’s created opportunities for us.”

Jonathon has been involved with the Rylib Group for eight years, initially stepping into management before progressing into equity partnership.

“We’ve used that as our vehicle for growth over the last six years,” he said.

The couple said industry involvement had also played a major role in their progression. The Hoets are no strangers to the Dairy Industry Awards, having previously won the Canterbury/North Otago Share Farmers of the Year title in 2023.

Stacey is also involved with SIDE (South Island Dairy Event). “It’s a really cool group of people and everyone’s there for similar reasons,” Stacey said.

“You’re putting yourself out there, networking and trying to grow.”

The couple were previously regional managers for the Canterbury Dairy Industry Awards programme and say the experience helped build valuable industry connections and confidence.

“One thing I’ve always tried to do is be ready for opportunities,” Jonathon said.

“Go to discussion groups, attend AGMs, put yourself out there and



Scott and Stacey Mackereth were named the 2026 New Zealand Share Farmers of the Year at the New Zealand Dairy Industry Awards in Rotorua. PHOTOS SUPPLIED



Mid Canterbury couple Jonathon and Stacey Hoets were recognised on the national stage after winning the 2026 Fonterra & ASB First Farm Award.

get your face known. If you’re prepared and ready, it makes it much easier when opportunities come along.”

Stacey said she would encourage more young people in the industry to enter the awards.

“It’s not all about winning,” she said.

“The process itself teaches you so much. It’s a really good way to grow personally and professionally.”

The Hoets hope to purchase their own farm within the next two years and believe there are still strong opportunities for young people entering the dairy sector.

“Relationships are huge,” Jonathon said.

“Even if you want to move into equity partnerships or sharemilking, relationships matter. Ask questions. Put yourself out there. The worst someone can say is no.”

The national awards celebrated dairy farming excellence from across the country.

**2026 SHARE FARMER OF THE YEAR**

**Winner:** Scott and Stacey Mackereth

**Runner-up:** Glenn and Georgie van Heuven

**Third:** Karl and Jess Wood

**2026 DAIRY MANAGER OF THE YEAR**

**Winner:** Lauren McConnachie

**Runner-up:** Miriam Lauridsen

**Third:** Annie Gill

**2026 DAIRY TRAINEE OF THE YEAR**

**Winner:** Mark Ready

**Runner-up:** Sam O’Neill

**Third:** Conor Attrill-Mundt

**2026 FONTERRA RESPONSIBLE DAIRYING AWARD**

Tony Dodunski from Canterbury/North Otago

**2026 ASB ALUMNI OF THE YEAR AWARD**

**Winner:** Alvaro Luzardo and Ximena Puig

**2026 FONTERRA & ASB FIRST FARM AWARD**

**(there are three equal winners)**

Johno and Tania Burrows

Jonathon and Stacey Hoets

Marc and Nia Jones

# Behind the figures



**Erin Neale**

“Can’t you just make it work?” are familiar words my colleagues across NZ will be all too used to hearing. As rural accountants, we understand that the numbers aren’t the reason you get out of bed each day, and when you dreamt about farming growing up, we doubt you pictured yourself sitting at a computer trying to sort your annual accounts & taxes. However, the software and systems available today mean shoeboxes filled with faded receipts are no longer the standard in terms of maintaining adequate farm accounting records.

So, before you pack up this year’s records and send them in, let’s run through some “do’s” and “please-do’s” that can help make the end-of-year accounts process smoother for everyone involved.

## Understanding the bigger picture

Fill us in on how your season has gone. We want to hear how you’re doing, and this inside information builds a picture for us beyond the numbers on the balance sheet.

Discuss your capital expenditure with us so we can understand what occurred. Was there a trade-in? Which asset is that GPS attached to? Was that development project complete at balance date? Is that a NEW asset and therefore eligible for the Investment Boost? These are questions we consider when we see capital transactions, so help us help you.

## Let the software do the hard work

Add a brief description to your transactions. Regardless of whether you use accounting software or run a manual cashbook, include notes and additional information regarding large or unusual transactions. This allows us to make sense of the transactions — which in the end will mean fewer follow-up queries for you.

Attach relevant invoices and statements to transactions in your software. If unsure, check with your accountant - most will say attach more, not less.

Make sure you have accurate GST records. Your accounting software does this for you, so if you file your returns through your software, job done. If you’re filing returns manually, include your workings for each period so we can match it ourselves.

Check your payroll records. Or better yet, provide us with third-party access so we can run the reports we need.

Set up bank feeds in your software for all your business bank accounts, credit cards and rural supply stores. This way we have the full year’s transactions available to us, so we only require the closing statements as at balance date.

## Details matter

Maintain your livestock records throughout the year. Reconciling your purchases, sales, births, deaths, and tallies throughout the year can save you — and us — significant time down the track. Attaching your livestock invoices and credit notes to the transactions in your software can help take away some of the guesswork.

Make sure that companies in which you hold shares have your IRD number. The more investment income that is recorded directly at Inland Revenue, the better - no more rifling through the bottom drawer looking for a dividend statement from last April.

Understand your year-end adjustments — including your after balance date payables and receivables, and recording any stock on hand. If work has been done, stock has been purchased, contracts entered into, or income earned before balance date, chances are we need to know about it. Use your software to capture this information as the transactions occur rather than relying on memory down the track.

We will never know your farming business as well as you do, but quality information and accurate records help us better understand what’s happening behind the figures — and ultimately help us all make it work.

*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.*

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# Methven Lions Machinery Auction Draws Crowds and Community Spirit



**Amy Riach**

There's no gavel in sight. Just an auctioneer with a keen eye, and a clipboard to bang. But auction day was a huge success for the Methven Lions Club, which hit record numbers at the Methven Machinery Auction

on Friday, April 15.

With 224 lots on offer, the annual machinery auction has continued to grow in popularity, after beginning in 2024 with just 90 lots up for sale, said organiser Alastair Clemens.

From tractors and ploughs, to motors, nuts and bolts, machinery covered the showgrounds.

Braving the cold, buyers and sellers gathered for what is quickly becoming a fixture on the local calendar.

"The whole project was borne about from the old clearing sales. Over the years, the number of clearing sales has dropped

quite dramatically, so it was an opportunity to sell a bit of gear and have a chin-wag to your neighbour," Clemens told the Guardian.

The Lions Club takes a small commission from each sale, with all proceeds returned to local causes and organisations.

"All that money ends up going back to the local community: to the kids at school, or any number of organisations around Methven who benefit from it."

The auction attracted more than 300 people to the Methven Showgrounds, for a busy day of bidding and "neighbours

nattering," said Clemens.

"There was a very good crowd on the day."

"This is our third year, so we're just starting to know what we're doing," he laughed.

The auction was run by Methven stock agent John Farrell, alongside Richard Ashworth and Greg Cook, who kept the crowds interested and the bids going up.

With hot food on offer, and a coffee cart to keep hands warm, visitors were well-looked after while they browsed the auction lots.

"Doing a great job keeping everybody fed," the Lions Club grill

was very popular, providing a spot for lunch, and a place to sit and chat.

"It's an occasion to get all the people together really," Clemens said.

"Even though it was cold out, people were in good spirits, enjoying themselves."

With growing numbers and strong community support, Clemens said the machinery auction "seems to be becoming a bit of an event."

"It's good having something on the local calendar, and while there's still a demand, we'll keep doing it."



**Meeting of the minds:** the auctioneering team convene on matters of names and numbers.

Keeping the crowds warm and fed, Lions Club volunteers man the grill. From left, Mike Markillie, Carl Shannon, and Ian Ridge on duty.



Charles Collett (left), and Bruce Gray, who arrived as sellers, but may go home with more than they came with!



Methven locals Derek Sargent (left) and Hayden Tasker. Not selling or bidding, but instead "loitering with intent", said Tasker. "Being nose-y!" corrects Sargent.



John Barwell from the Lions Club, and Patrick Murray from the Menzshed, having a "sit-down and a natter." PHOTOS AMY RIACH



Up for inspection: hopeful bidders take a close look at the lots on offer, examining tires and starting engines.

Record crowds gathered at the 2026 Methven machinery auction, much to the delight of organiser Alastair Clemens.



## Brie Heuff

### WHERE DO YOU WORK?

I work in Ashburton at the CLAAS Harvest Centre in the parts department

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

My Ute is a 2018 Mitsubishi BT-50 4x4

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

My favourite feature has got to be the pink suspension!

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

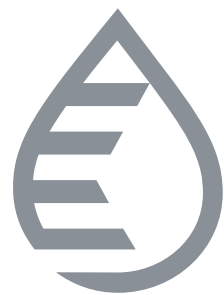
I usually play my country playlist! It's always my go to!

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

Road trip snack, has to be Turkish delights, I know a lot of people look at me sideways for it, but they are the best!

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

Most times there's always my pair of Redband gumboots, you never know when you might need them!



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# Up Before Dawn, Down Before Winter: the iconic Lake Heron Muster

**Photographer Anna Munro captured the Lake Heron autumn muster as it unfolded over four days in the high country.**

Set high in the Canterbury foothills, Lake Heron Station is one of those places where the seasons still dictate the pace. Each autumn, the station comes alive with the annual muster, a job that has changed little over time.

The Lake Heron autumn muster ran over four days from 14 April, with the final day pushed to the following Sunday after a break for bad weather.

It remains a key moment in the farming calendar, bringing around 3000 Merino wethers down from the high country ahead of winter. All mustering is done on foot. Shepherds head out early each morning, climbing to elevations nearing 1900 metres at the highest points.

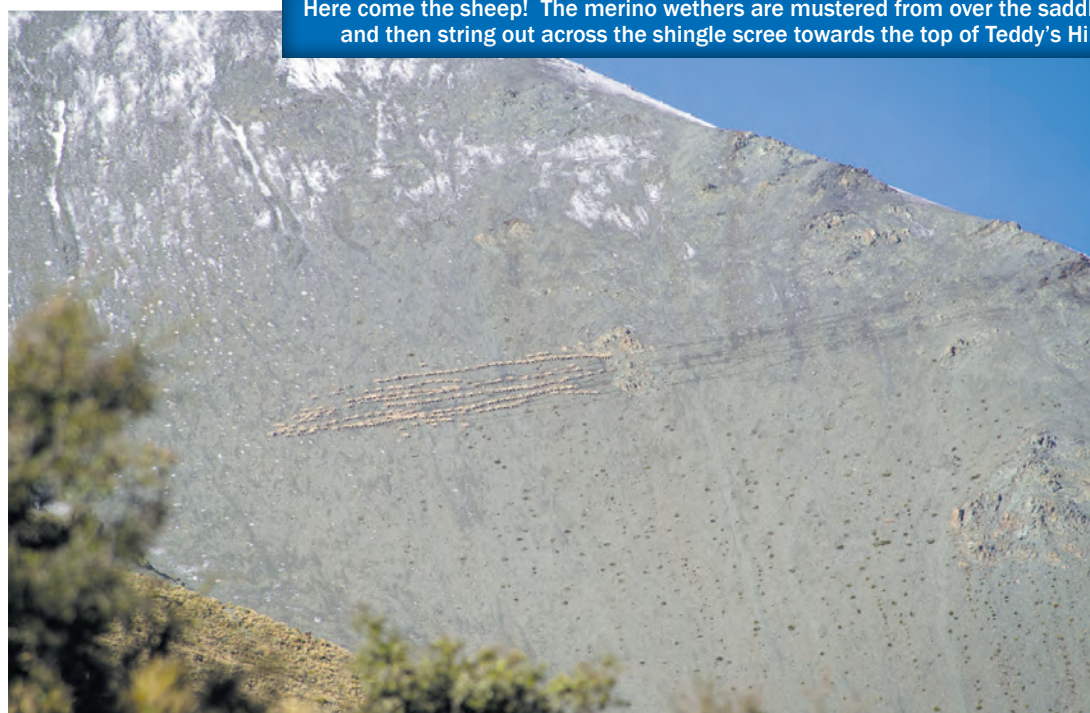
Each night, the team returns to the hut, and each morning starts the same way, with Philip Todhunter up at 4am cooking breakfast before the day begins again.

The crew included the team pictured, alongside Todhunter, owner of the station, and a solid team of dogs who more than earned their keep.

See more of Annas work at [musterannamunro.co.nz](http://musterannamunro.co.nz)



Every dog team needs a beardy!  
PHOTO ANNA MUNRO



Here come the sheep! The merino wethers are mustered from over the saddle and then string out across the shingle scree towards the top of Teddy's Hill.

Robbie Harper sets off on his beat, heading for the top of Teddy's Hill.



Sam Rasmussen climbing high above Lake Stream.



The mustering team at smoko spot for Day Two Lake Heron Autumn Muster — from left Kate White, Katja Etherington, George Bagley, Robbie Harper, Izie Inglis, Sam Rasmussen and Ailie Jaine.



Sneaking in for a wee lunchtime snuggle with George Bagley.



Robbie Harper checks his beat for wethers on the way down the faces to lower country.



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Taskforce Skim patrols the competition lanes during New Zealand's inaugural Stone Skimming Championships at Lake Hāwea. PHOTO DEANNA GERLACH



Women's Open winner Abbey MacDonald in action during the championships at Lake Hāwea. PHOTO DEANNA GERLACH

# Stone cold competition at Lake Hāwea



Competitors William Porter and Jeremy Smith embrace the spirit of the event in matching flame outfits. PHOTO CLAIRE INKSON



**Claire Inkson**

RURAL EDITOR

An icy start on the shores of Lake Hāwea did little to deter the crowds gathering for the inaugural Aotearoa Stone Skimming Championships.

The event, held on May 16, was presented by Novus Glass supporting Melanoma New Zealand.

Wrapped in puffer jackets and beanies, spectators lined the lake edge while competitors, some in flamboyant costumes and armed with names like "Fat Boy Skim", prepared to battle it out for the national title.

And while stone skimming might be a much-loved Kiwi childhood pastime, make no mistake, this was a serious competition.

The winners will now head to Scotland in September to represent New Zealand at the World Stone Skimming Championships, becoming part of the country's first-ever "Black Rock" team.

Hosted at Lake Hāwea Station's private lakeside venue known as The Hide, the event drew around 150 competitors and another 300 spectators for a day that mixed genuine sporting intensity with plenty of humour, community spirit and lakeside chaos.

Stone skimming as a sport is gaining traction worldwide, with competitors judged on both distance and accuracy. To qualify as a legal skim, the stone must bounce at least twice and remain within the designated lane before its final distance is measured.

By the end of the day, Queenstown's Abbey MacDonald had claimed the women's title and the furthest skim of the competition after launching an astonishing 72-metre throw during

pool play, outperforming more than 120 male competitors in the process.

In the men's final, The Rock Drive host Jay Reeve stunned the field with a 51-metre skim to take the title in dramatic fashion after another competitor's longer throw veered out of bounds on its final skip.

For organiser Richie Laming, seeing the idea finally come to life was surreal.

"By four o'clock, with history being made and crowning the first-ever female and male stone skimming champions in New Zealand, we could have around 350 people here," he said during the event.

"You see the gathering, the hot tubs, the braziers, the grandstand, the launch pad, the stone selection area. It's all been brought to fruition. It's overwhelming, but also really good to see it in reality."

The idea for the championships was sparked after last year's bizarre cheating scandal at the World Stone Skimming Championships in Scotland unexpectedly pushed the niche sport into global headlines.

Laming realised New Zealand, despite generations of Kiwis growing up skimming stones at rivers and lakes, had never hosted its own national competition.

"We're a land of water, we're a land of beautiful geology, and we've got stones at our disposal," he said.

"We almost have an innate investment in stone skimming."

And yes, organisers took cheating seriously.

A dedicated anti-cheating team dubbed "Taskforce Skim" inspected competitors' rocks, while each stone was photographed before competition began.

Despite the serious judging process, the atmosphere remained relaxed and unmistakably Kiwi.

Competitors travelled from around the country, with some treating the event like elite sport and others simply embracing the absurdity of it all.

Among them was Aucklander Craig Jackson, who won his place through a radio competition after submitting a comedy video involving gumboots, mud, AI-generated explosions and a custom song called Skippy Jackson.

"I would like to be a representative sportsman for New Zealand wearing the black blazer," he laughed.

"And if it has to be as a black stone skimmer, then so be it."

Alongside the competition itself were food trucks, luxury sheepskin bean bags, hot tubs, live commentary, novelty events and free skin cancer checks from Melanoma New Zealand's mobile clinic.

The fundraising partnership with Melanoma New Zealand was a natural fit, organisers said, particularly given how much time rural New Zealanders spend outdoors.

"That's another added layer of alignment for us," Laming said.

"We often associate melanoma with blue skies, crystal-clear water and summertime. But as farmers, we're spending long hours out in that sun every day. Lake Hāwea Station is a farming business, so that connection is very real for us."

Melanoma NZ chief executive Andrea Newland said the concept immediately stood out.

"The word that popped into my head was 'epic,'" she said.

"It's such a quintessentially Kiwi thing to do. It made sense with our cause and our brand, beautiful countryside, the outdoors, because that's very relevant when you're talking about skin cancer."

On the day, nurses carried out 89 free skin checks, identifying 13 suspicious lesions, including two suspected melanomas.

Newland said events like this helped start important conversations.

"There's no reason we can't have fun while getting these messages out there," she said.

"For farmers especially, prevention and regular skin checks are so important. A lot of people



Abbey Cameron, Melanoma NZ chief executive Andrea Newland, Kate Fullar and Alison Wheatley-Mahon from Melanoma New Zealand at the event's free skin check station. PHOTO CLAIRE INKSON

Competitors take to the water at Lake Hāwea Station during the inaugural national championships. PHOTO DEANNA GERLACH



Men's champion Jay Reeve and Women's champion Abbey MacDonald celebrate after earning their place at the World Stone Skimming Championships in Scotland. PHOTO DEANNA GERLACH

A competitor launches a skim during the championships at Lake Hāwea. PHOTO CLAIRE INKSON



Sarah Gamble, Mia Gamble, Lily Gamble and Lucy Ward cheer on competitors from the sidelines. PHOTO CLAIRE INKSON



Cathy Pollock and Daren Tatum warm up in the hot tub while taking in the action at Lake Hāwea. PHOTO CLAIRE INKSON

find melanoma themselves first. Early detection really is everything.”

Melanoma New Zealand will also have a strong presence at Fieldays this year, with two mobile skin check vans onsite and nurses offering free skin checks and advice throughout the event.

For Laming, though, the biggest success was seeing people brought together around something simple.

“There’s a whole bandwidth of New Zealand society here today,” he said.

“Farmers, corporate people, serious stone skimmers, families. Everyone’s here together.”

And it seems this may only be the beginning.

Laming said he hopes to grow the championships beyond Lake Hāwea in future years, with regional qualifying events potentially taking place around the country in the lead-up to the national final.

“Lake Hāwea will always be the home of stone skimming in New Zealand,” he said.

“But we’d love to see regional competitions and age-grade events develop as well. We think this could become something really special.”

And judging by the crowds gathered along the lake edge, the inaugural event may have skipped far further than anyone expected.

**The results of the finals were:**  
**Open Female Category**

- 1st Place:** Abbey MacDonald — 42m
- 2nd Place:** Marg Spite — 35m
- 3rd Place:** Emily Inglis — 30m
- Open Male Category**
- 1st Place:** Jay Reeve — 51m
- 2nd Place:** Olie Fey — 48m
- 3rd Place:** James Acfie — 46m



Event organiser Richie Laming at Lake Hāwea ahead of New Zealand’s first national stone skimming championships. PHOTO CLAIRE INKSON



Craig Jackson competed during the championships after winning his place through a radio competition. PHOTO CLAIRE INKSON

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# Are we regulating away creativity?



**Eva Harris**

I had the great pleasure of seeing Split Enz in all their quirky glory on May 4. There was something deeply inspiring about watching a group of 70-year-olds prancing around in flamboyant suits, playing the spoons and hammering piano keys with chaotic enthusiasm. Their complete indifference to what anyone else thinks produces music that is brilliantly creative, slightly unhinged, and timeless — as the audience's replacement hips could attest.

What struck me most was the contrast with the twenty-somethings' opening act. Technically, they were exceptional: polished, precise and flawless. But despite all that talent, something felt missing. The performance was enjoyable, yet strangely restrained...almost joyless.

It made me wonder whether the difference lies not in talent, but in the way generations have been raised. Talent may be innate, but genius is cultivated through experience, freedom and risk. Split Enz emerged from a New Zealand where the Kiwi "number 8 wire" mentality was alive and well. Children were free to roam the streets until dark, didn't

need to wear seatbelts, fell out of trees and learned resilience by trial and error. They could experiment, make strange music they liked, perform songs that failed spectacularly. They learnt from audiences who sometimes rewarded them with applause, sometimes with flying pints. Failure was not catastrophic; it was simply part of the process.

Today, younger generations are raised very differently. Children are kept safe indoors, encouraged to "be sensible" and constantly reminded to think of their futures. Their schedules are tightly managed, their risks carefully minimised and their mistakes heavily scrutinised, often publicly on social media. Increasingly, failure is treated not as a learning opportunity but as something dangerous to be avoided at all costs, often more by anxious adults than by the children themselves.

Is it any surprise, then, that much modern creativity feels technically perfect but emotionally hollow?

Our parenting culture reflects something larger in society. Over the past four decades, we have layered regulation upon regulation in an effort to reduce harm and eliminate risk — environmental management is also a great example of this. Many changes were necessary and well-intentioned, but somewhere along the way, we seem to have developed a zero-tolerance attitude toward mistakes. We have become so risk-averse that we often prioritise avoiding failure over enabling innovation.



The problem is that innovation requires failure. Creativity requires boredom, intuition and experimentation. Genuine progress requires people (and councils) who are willing to try something uncertain without knowing exactly how it will turn out. Planning matters, of course, but no framework can anticipate every eventuality. The best we can hope for is try, review, improve. When systems are designed to eliminate every possible mistake before a project even begins, creativity is smothered long before

anything meaningful can emerge, or worse — nothing happens at all.

As New Zealand enters another era of local government reform and environmental regulation change, we need frameworks that provide boundaries while supporting innovation. We should be spending more time and money on achieving tangible outcomes, and less on endless processes, paperwork and bureaucracy — a reality I recognise even within my own profession.

So, with another election approaching I acknowledge our

much-loved musical pioneers, Split Enz, and wonder — do we stick with *The Devil You Know* and maintain the *Straight Old Line* so we don't *All See Red*? Or is it *Time for a Change* for our *Poor Boy*, Christopher Luxon? Perhaps this coalition can survive at least *Six Months* in a *Leaky Boat* and prove it is a *Hard Act to Follow*. At the very least, we need politicians prepared to cut through *Stuff* and *Nonsense* so *History Never Repeats*.

**Eva Harris is Principal Environmental Advisor for Enviro Collective**

# No medals for struggling alone



**Amy Riach**

The recipient of the country's highest honour for bravery has something to say about arable farming, and last month, he visited Ashburton to deliver the message.

Willie Apiata, the only living recipient of the Victoria Cross in New Zealand, was recognised for carrying a wounded soldier to safety under fire in Afghanistan, and now he has delivered a series of talks to Canterbury farmers.

His memo was simple. "Don't be a dick, ask for help."

Apiata was clear. Whether on the battlefield or on the farm, resilience is a skill, and it takes a village.

"Going into battle, dragging soldiers off a field, doesn't sound all that relevant to a farmer in Canterbury. But resilience certainly is," said Anna Heslop, communications manager at Foundation for Arable Research (FAR).

Coordinated by FAR, Rural Support Trust, and Ministry for Primary Industries, Apiata visited Dunsandel, Ashburton, and Timaru "in recognition of a particularly difficult season," Heslop explained.

While many farmers are

receiving high prices for milk, meat, and wool, arable farmers are the exception, managing the additional struggles of bad weather and rising costs.

"Everyone is recognising that things are hard right now," Heslop told the Guardian.

And in difficult seasons, said Apiata to farmers in Dunsandel, "asking for help is about making yourself a better person."

The event was a confidential service, designed to provide farmers and industry-facing professionals with the space to share and connect.

"A problem shared is a problem halved," Heslop said.

On the first of three evenings, in the Dunsandel Rugby Clubrooms on April 28, Apiata spoke from an armchair, and farmers in attendance exchanged their own stories.

"The event was all about getting people off the farm, getting them talking to their neighbours and the people down the road, and just remembering that they're not alone. Everybody's going through some version of the same thing."

For Canterbury farmers, hearing from someone who had gone through such uniquely challenging experiences, "everybody could relate to something," Heslop said.

"Everyone was totally impressed by him as a speaker, as he was prepared to talk about fallibility."

From a veteran soldier, to a community of veteran farmers, Willie Apiata reminded everybody, "be kind to yourself."

'MC for the night, Rod Hansen of BDO Christchurch (right) with Willie Apiata, who delivers a valuable message of resilience to Canterbury farmers.'

PHOTO SUPPLIED



# More than being seen

LEANNE BLAKELOCK

There is a concept in leadership that most people need to “see to be.” Before we can imagine ourselves in certain spaces, we often need to see someone else stand there first.

For me, that moment was spring 1999. I was a university commerce student in Wellington when Theresa Gattung became chief executive of Telecom. At the time, Telecom was one of the largest companies in New Zealand.

Suddenly, a woman was visible at the head of corporate New Zealand. I remember thinking, if she can do that, then perhaps I can too. The glass ceiling suddenly became the floor.

That is the power of visible leadership at its best. Not visibility for its own sake, but visibility backed by credibility. It creates a path others can imagine themselves walking.

Recently, I had the privilege of hearing Dame Theresa Gattung speak. It reminded me why visibility in leadership matters. Visible leaders show others what is possible. They make ambition feel more available. They give the next person permission to think, “Maybe I could do that too.”

We do need to be careful; visibility is not the same as credibility. That distinction matters more now than it perhaps ever has. A generation ago, many credible leaders became visible because they had first come through long pathways of service, governance, business, community contribution or formal development. Their visibility was often the public expression of work already done.

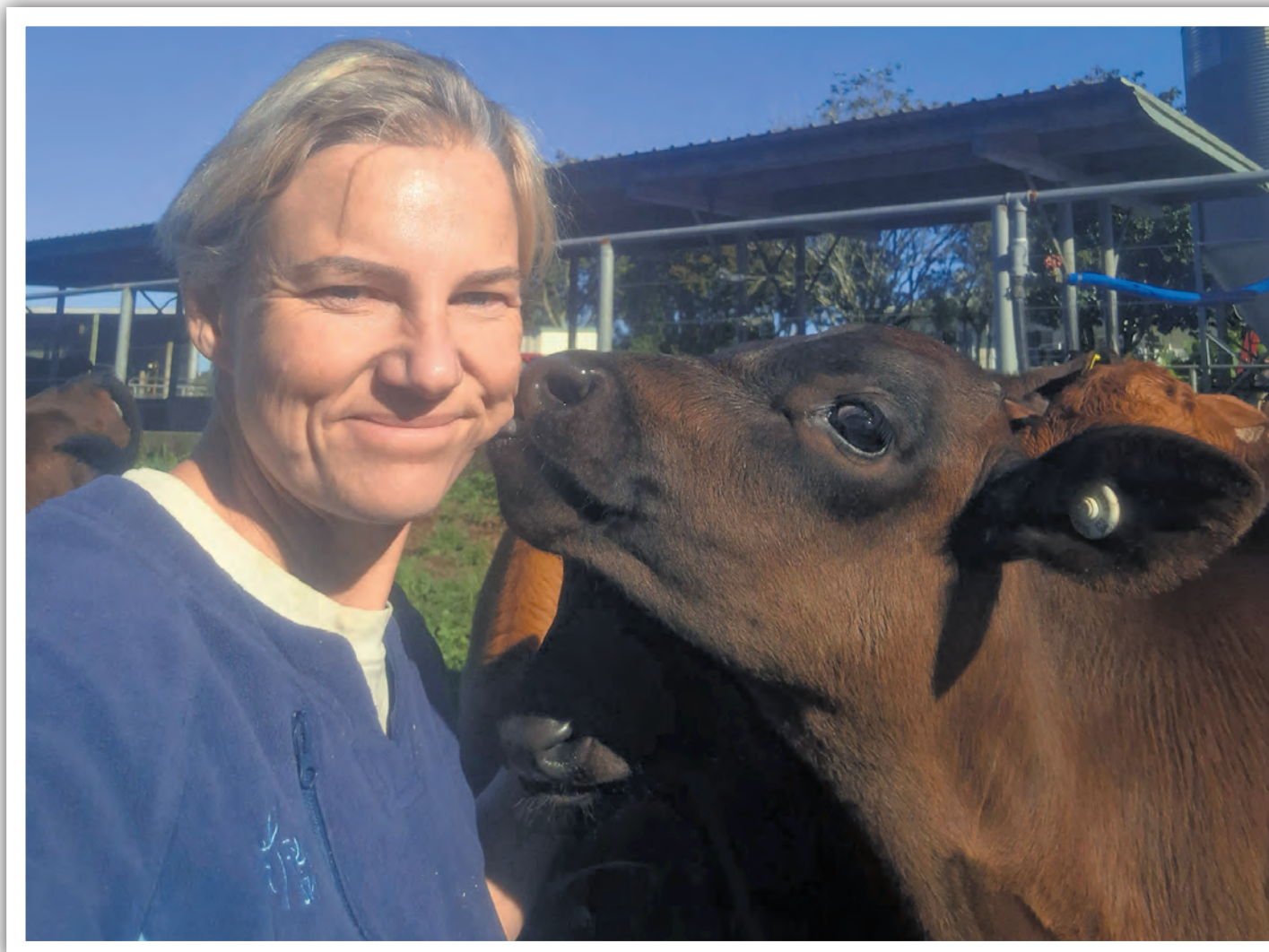
Today, visibility has never been easier to create. A social media presence, a good photograph, confidence on camera, a polished biography and the right language can all help people become known. And visibility itself is not the problem. Done well, it can connect people, share ideas, build trust and create opportunity. Visibility is easy to notice. Credibility often takes longer to understand.

Credibility is built through judgement, responsibility, humility, courage, practical wisdom and the willingness to keep learning. It is built through the things people do long before public recognition arrives.

That is why I find myself thinking about leadership pathways in agriculture, especially as funded development programmes across the sector become harder to access or begin to wind down.

Formal programmes are not the only way credibility is built. Of course they aren't. But they have often provided something important. They have helped people invest in their own development before they were widely seen. They have created structure, challenge and confidence. They have helped people who were already capable begin to understand where that capability might take them.

Without those pathways, we risk making



visibility carry too much weight in deciding who gets opportunity.

So perhaps the question is not whether visibility matters. It does.

The better question is how we make sure credibility is recognised before visibility becomes the only thing we can see, especially if formal development pathways become harder to access.

Because agriculture needs both. Credibility gives leadership depth. Visibility gives leadership reach.

The opportunity is to bring more people into that journey by backing their credibility before their visibility has fully arrived. Because “see to be” today should mean more than seeing someone’s name, face or profile. It should mean seeing the pathway, the work and the support that helped them get there, so others can find their own way forward too.

Thank you, Dame Theresa Gattung. For reminding us that ceilings do not become floors by visibility alone, but by credible leaders who make the climb feel possible for those still looking up.

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



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# Riding the land at Awapiri

Awapiri's bike tracks have grown from practical farm access routes into a low-key tourism venture attracting riders keen to experience high country farming up close. PHOTOS SUPPLIED



**Claire Inkson**  
RURAL EDITOR

There are easier ways to farm than how Eric and Sally Smith do it at Awapiri Station.

But easier isn't the point.

Set deep in the Awatere Valley, Awapiri stretches long and narrow across high country, climbing from valley floor to hilltops where access is often old-school.

Here, farming still happens largely on foot, on horseback or, increasingly, by mountain bike.

"We're quite a simple operation really," says Eric.

Simple, but not small. The Smiths run around 4,700 Merinos and 140 cattle across more than 7,000 hectares, much of it steep, native country.

It's a system built around wool, with most of their clip heading into a long-term Icebreaker contract through Zentera (formerly New Zealand Merino) - a natural fit for a property where the environment favours fibre over finishing.

"It just doesn't justify a lot of labour," Sally says. "We've still got a mortgage, so you've got to be careful where you spend your money."

That thinking shapes everything at Awapiri. Labour is minimal. Vehicles are used sparingly. Much of the work is done the old way, with horses still heading into the back blocks three times a year to bring wethers home along a historic pack track.

It's a long way from their previous role managing Mt Arrowsmith Station in Mid Canterbury, where intensity was higher and scale demanded more inputs.

"We learnt what we were capable of," Sally says. "But it's not something you can sustain long term."

Their children grew up in that environment. Most of

their childhood was spent at Arrowsmith, a busy, full-on period that shaped both family and farming life.

The move back to Awapiri came through succession, after the loss of Sally's father.

The couple took over the farm, running the operation in a way that works with the land, rather than against it.

"You've got to farm to your environment," Sally says. "That's the only sustainable way."

Now, succession is on the horizon again. Their son Alex is keen to return to the farm, and decisions being made today are already being shaped with that in mind.

"We're starting to think about what it looks like for the next generation," Sally says.

That thinking is part of what has driven diversification.

Awapiri now offers accommodation in the old shearers' quarters and has opened up its network of farm tracks to visitors on bikes, creating a low-key tourism arm that fits around the farming operation.

What started as a practical way to get around the property has become a point of difference. Riders can follow four-wheel drive tracks through the station, stay in huts, and experience high country farming up close.

"It's about creating options," Sally says. "You can't just rely on farming alone anymore."

It's not polished tourism. The old shearers' quarters are still exactly that. The huts are basic. But that's part of the appeal.

"A lot of people get a lot out of that," Eric says.

For the Smiths, it's also about telling the farming story in a way that sticks.

"You can talk all you like," Eric says. "But when people come here and see it, they understand it."

That connection works both ways. Having visitors on farm has made them more aware of what they have.

"You do take it for granted sometimes," he says. "But then you stop and look around and think, yeah, this is pretty awesome."

Alongside that, the couple have

Visitors to Awapiri can stay in backcountry huts scattered through the station's rugged high country landscape.



Eric and Sally Smith at Awapiri Station in the Awatere Valley, where they run a low-input Merino farming operation focused on wool, resilience and working with the land.



continued refining how they farm the land itself. After years focused on scrub control, they began using Optimise fertiliser pellets around 2017, following soil testing across the property.

“The big thing is you’re putting on exactly what you need,” Eric says. “You’re not carting a whole lot of bulk you don’t require.”

The pelletised system allows them to target nutrients more precisely, while also lifting soil pH through the inclusion of lime. Over time, they’ve tailored applications to suit different areas of the farm.

“It’s more about what the soil is asking for,” Sally says. “Not just guessing and throwing fertiliser on.”

That same measured approach carries through the rest of the business.

Genetics are selected for resilience rather than extremes.

Footrot is managed through a combination of breeding and practical management. Native areas are largely left to regenerate, with stock naturally avoiding much of the rougher country.

With grandchildren now coming out to the huts and the next generation not far away, there’s a sense things are starting to come full circle at Awapiri.

The system will evolve, as it always has.

But the core of it stays the same: low input, practical, and built around the country it sits on.

Awapiri Station in Marlborough’s Awatere Valley has been in Sally Smith’s family since 1966.



Awapiri Station owners Eric and Sally Smith are balancing high country farming with diversification and planning for the next generation.



Awapiri’s Merino wethers are mustered through steep high country where access still relies heavily on horses, bikes and footwork.



Merino sheep being moved through Awapiri’s rugged backcountry, where much of the station remains unfenced native terrain.



Horses remain an important part of life at Awapiri, used to access remote huts and muster stock through the station’s backcountry.



Before returning to Awapiri, Eric and Sally Smith spent 10 years managing Mt Arrowsmith Station in Mid Canterbury.

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Marty (left) and Ollie Ashby on farm at Fernside, where irrigation has underpinned the shift to a modern dairy system. PHOTO CLAIRE INKSON



Attention to animal health and consistency has been key, with in-shed mineral systems supporting the herd year-round.



Allflex collars in use across the herd, part of a system that has reduced stress and improved decision-making at mating.



Marty (left) and Ollie Ashby, balancing experience with new approaches as the farm transitions through succession.

# Built on water, carried forward



**Claire Inkson**  
RURAL EDITOR

Marty and Jo Ashby have been farming at Alkington, just out of Fernside, long enough to see the industry change more than once.

What sits there now, a 172-hectare milking platform running around 600 cows, didn't start out that way.

Like much of North Canterbury, the turning point came with water. "When irrigation came in through Waimakariri Irrigation Ltd, that was the game changer," Ashby says. "We couldn't have been milking cows here without it."

The block had been part of a wider operation, used as support land, before the decision was made to convert in 1999. It was the era when irrigation opened the door for dairy expansion across the region, and the Ashbys stepped

through it.

More than two decades on, the system has grown into a fully integrated operation. The milking platform is backed by lease land and runoff blocks, with young stock and wintering all managed in-house.

"We ringfence the whole thing," Ashby says. "It's all part of the same system."

The farm is now tracking toward the mid-300,000 kilograms of milk solids this season, but numbers aren't what he talks about first. It's the system behind them that matters.

## Tech, but not at the expense of instinct

Ashby isn't one for jumping on every new bit of tech, but he's not ignoring it either.

"We're not early adopters, but we don't want to be last," he says.

Allflex collars and auto-drafting have replaced the old routine of tail paint and walking rows to pick heats. Irrigation runs off the phone, backed by soil moisture monitoring.

But he's clear it doesn't replace judgement.

"It's information that assists

you," Ashby says. "You still look at the paddock."

That thinking runs through the whole place. Even pasture measurement is done in a way that forces staff to learn what they're seeing, not just rely on a number.

"They'll write it down," he says. "So, they know what 3000 kilos of dry matter looks like, not just what the machine tells them."

It's a balance between technology and stockmanship, and one he's deliberate about keeping.

## Taking the guesswork out

Where tech has eased pressure in the shed, minerals have done the same at calving.

Ashby has been using Vitalise for several years now, delivered through a mineral dispenser attached to the grain auger, alongside calcium, magnesium and rumen support.

The decision came off the back of years dealing with the same issues most dairy farmers face.

"At calving time, things can get interesting if you haven't got your magnesium and calcium right," he says.

Weather plays a part, intake

can vary, and traditional methods don't always land where you want them to.

Since moving to an in-shed system using Vitalise, the difference has been noticeable.

"It's very rare that we get down cows now," Ashby says. "It just takes the guesswork out of it."

Rain or shine, the cows are getting what they need every day. Later in the season, rumen support is added to keep things ticking over.

It's not complicated, but it's consistent. And that's the point.

## Family, and what comes next

The next shift at Alkington isn't around infrastructure or production. It's people.

Both of the Ashby sons are involved in the business. Ollie is now contract milking, with three staff, while Toby works alongside Jo with young stock and calves.

It's the early stages of succession, though Ashby is quick to laugh off any suggestion he's stepping away anytime soon.

"We're talking about it," he says.

Like most farming families, it's happening gradually.

There are differences though,

particularly in how the next generation views regulation.

"They just see it as another card you've got to play," Ashby says.

## Keeping perspective

After more than 30 years in dairy, Ashby has seen enough cycles to know not to get carried away.

That includes the recent Fonterra payout, often labelled a "windfall".

"It's not really that," he says. "It's a redistribution of capital."

For the Ashbys, the decision was straightforward.

"We paid down debt."

It's a practical response, and one he suspects is common across the sector, regardless of how it's portrayed.

"We've got no development plans right now but while there are no opportunities in front of us at the moment, you can't stop looking for them. Sometimes you've just got to create an opportunity" he says.

That same grounded approach runs through everything at Alkington.

From irrigation through to the way technology is used, to the shift into the next generation, it's been about making decisions that stack up over time.



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# Country pubs matter — and it's not just the beer

KATHRYN WRIGHT

In rural New Zealand, we often talk about rural infrastructure: good roads, reliable services, decent connectivity. But there's another kind of infrastructure that rarely makes it into policy documents, yet quietly underpins rural wellbeing every day — the country pub.

And let's be clear from the start: this isn't about alcohol. It's about connection. It's about having a neutral, welcoming place where people can turn up without needing a reason, a roster, or a role. In my preliminary PhD findings, country pubs consistently emerged as one of the most important forms of rural social infrastructure we still have.

## A steady place in an unpredictable world

Rural life is full of variables — weather, markets, stock, distance, labour shortages. Against that backdrop, the pub offers something rare: predictability. It's a place where people know what to expect. Young Farmers meetings. Locals gather for quiz nights, meat raffles, or a simple Friday evening catch up. These routines aren't trivial; they're the glue that holds

social life together.

For some, the pub is part of their daily or weekly ritual — a way of signalling that they're still connected, still part of the community. These small acts of showing up matter more than we often acknowledge.

## Publicans: the quiet community builders

If pubs are social infrastructure, then publicans are the ones who make that infrastructure work.

My research showed that the atmosphere of a pub depends almost entirely on the people behind the bar. A good publican doesn't just serve drinks. They create a sense of safety and belonging. They notice who's had a rough week. They greet newcomers in a way that eases the awkwardness of walking into a room where everyone knows everyone.

Some publicans even time events around the farming calendar — putting on music afternoons or special meals during calving and lambing, when people are exhausted and least likely to reach out. These gestures aren't just hospitality; they're acts of care that strengthen the social fabric.

When publicans are warm, engaged, and community minded, the pub becomes a hub. When they're dismissive or uninterested, the whole place can feel unwelcoming. People notice. And they vote with their feet.

## Belonging — and the sting of not belonging

Pubs can be powerful sites of belonging, but they can also highlight who feels like an insider and who doesn't. Many newcomers describe the challenge of walking into a pub where the "locals' table" is an unspoken but very real social boundary. Some find farming talk a helpful bridge; others feel like outsiders for some time before experiencing acceptance. The pub becomes a mirror of the wider community — its warmth, its hesitations, and its blind spots.

## When a pub closes, something bigger closes with it

Pub closures hit rural communities hard. People talk about them not just as businesses shutting down, but as losing a central meeting point that has anchored the community for

decades. In some places, locals have even discussed pooling money to buy the pub collectively — a sign of how deeply these spaces matter. In fact we already have examples of this happening.

When a pub disappears, the loss isn't just social. It affects community cohesion, local identity, and even economic activity. The absence is felt in ways that go far beyond the bar.

## For those who can't or won't go to a pub

It's important to acknowledge that pubs don't work for everyone. Some people don't drink. Some can't afford to go often. Some simply prefer quieter or more neutral spaces.

That's why alternative meeting places matter too:

- **Coffee carts or cafés**, which offer low pressure, daytime connection.
- **Community halls**, which can host shared meals, workshops, or casual drop ins.
- **Sports clubs**, which provide structured but social environments.
- **Libraries and council spaces**, where people can gather without spending money.
- **Pop up events**, like farmers'

market mornings or rural networking breakfasts.

These spaces don't replace pubs — but they complement them. Together, they create a more inclusive landscape of connection.

## A call to value what we already know

Country pubs are not perfect, and they cannot meet every social need. But they remain one of the few places in rural life where people can simply turn up and feel part of something. In a time when rural mental health is under strain, when volunteer fatigue is rising, and when many communities feel the diminishing of shared spaces, pubs continue to do quiet, essential work.

If we want strong rural communities, we need to recognise and support the places that help us stay connected. Sometimes that starts with nothing more than a warm greeting, a shared table, a bowl of hot chips, a lift home, and a space where everyone feels they can walk through the door.

A shout out to all the great publicans out there.

*Kathryn Wright is a registered counsellor  
www.kathrynwright.co.nz*

# Lifestyle

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## THE HOMESTEADING REVIVAL

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Laura MacDonald of The Kiwi Country Girl baking fresh sourdough at home on the family's Waikato lifestyle block. PHOTOS SUPPLIED

Laura MacDonald at the family's garden shed on their Waikato lifestyle block.



# Back to Basics:

## Why homesteading is finding a new generation



**Claire Inkson**  
RURAL EDITOR

There is a loaf of fresh bread cooling on the bench, children collecting eggs outside and herbs growing in pots by the door.

For many New Zealanders, that kind of life once felt old-fashioned. Now, amid rising food prices and growing interest in slower, simpler living, homesteading is making a comeback.

But according to Waikato mum Laura MacDonald of The Kiwi Country Girl, modern homesteading is less about perfection and more about practicality.

"I think that homesteading at any level is going to make a difference to easing the pressure of rising food costs," she said.

"And not necessarily suddenly running out to start milking a cow and growing all of your own food. Starting in your kitchen with the basics is always the best place to start."

MacDonald grew up on a farm and says rural living has always been part of who she is.

"I grew up on a farm so it's really all I've ever known. I lived in town when I was at university and then in the UK for a couple of years, but I think I always knew I would end up back on the land."

Today she lives with husband Josh and their four children - Sadie, Macey, Finn and Monty - on a one-hectare lifestyle block in Waikato, where the family raises chickens, pigs and lambs while growing much of their own food.

The property sits alongside Josh's family farm and over the past 12 years the couple have slowly built the life they once imagined.

"When we first moved back to NZ after living overseas we ended up where we are now ... and we just slowly started figuring it out," she said.

"We started with chickens and a small veggie garden and it quickly expanded to a larger garden, pigs and preserving some food, and over the last 12 years we've just kept learning and adding new things along the way."

MacDonald first began sharing

that journey online through a blog called The Weekend Homesteader, later rebranding as The Kiwi Country Girl, documenting the successes, failures and lessons learned along the way.

What began as simple posts about gardening and learning to live off the land gradually evolved into recipes, preserving, homemade pantry staples and eventually a thriving online community.

"I started sharing more made from scratch recipes and it grew from there along with our family," she said.

"The community that has built up alongside my website, membership and social media platforms is incredible. Lots of us on the same journey together and now that we are more seasoned homesteaders, lots of newbies too."

Importantly, MacDonald is quick to remove some of the polished social media gloss often associated with homesteading culture.

"So much didn't work!" she laughed of those early years.

"We went in with a lot of confidence and more time than we have now, but not a lot of knowledge, so we made a lot of mistakes and learnt a lot along the way."

That realism is part of what resonates with followers increasingly searching for practical ways to reduce supermarket spending.

MacDonald says one of the biggest misconceptions is that self-sufficiency has to happen all at once.

Instead, she encourages people to start small.

"Have a look in your pantry and see what you are buying that you could make instead," she said.

"Things like spice mixes are a really great place to start and save you a huge amount of money."

Her second piece of advice is simple: grow something.

"Grow a few herbs or salad greens, even in a planter box."

And third?

"Get chickens! They are the ultimate homestead animal in my opinion - easy care, and they turn food waste into delicious fresh eggs!"

For the MacDonald family, homemade basics now make up a significant part of their household food supply.

"Making bread and bread products like pizza bases, bagels, English muffins and sourdough, homemade yoghurt, spice mixes

Laura and husband Josh with their children on the family property, where chickens, gardens and homegrown food are all part of daily life.



Laura and Josh MacDonald with children Sadie, Macey, Finn and Monty at their Waikato lifestyle block home.

Laura and her daughters harvesting produce together in the family tunnel house.



Josh MacDonald and the couple's children move stock on the family farm, where the next generation is growing up close to the land.

and baking like muesli bars, crackers and other baking," she said.

"We save a lot of money at the supermarket because we are mostly buying ingredients rather than ready-made food."

One recent calculation particularly stood out.

"I worked out the other day that to make a batch of my bagels (8 bagels) cost \$1.08 cents in ingredients as opposed to \$8 to purchase 8 bagels from the supermarket."

Still, MacDonald is careful not to oversell the lifestyle as a quick fix.

"A lot of the time things can be expensive to set up," she said.

"By the time you build a garden, fill it with good soil and compost, buy seeds/seed raising equipment and tools etc, your set up cost can be quite high, but once you are established you can keep your costs really low."

Nor is it necessarily about saving time.

"I don't think time-saving is really something that you strive for when you are homesteading," she said.

"It's almost never quicker to make something from scratch than it is to open a packet."

"But the reason for us doing it is not to save time, it's the quality of what we are making and growing, enjoying a slower pace of life and having an appreciation for doing it

or making it yourself."

That slower pace is also central to how the family is raising their children.

"It has always been really important to us that we raise kids who know where their food comes from and how to produce it," she said.

"I think that everyone should have basic skills like knowing how to cook, grow food, care for animals and how to use tools and sew on a button!"

She believes part of the growing appeal of homesteading is that it reconnects people with the rhythms of seasons, food production and family life in a way modern life often doesn't.

"I think it makes you appreciate all of these things more and it gives you a real understanding of working with seasons and nature rather than against them," she said.

"Growing your own food takes time – so much time! From the time you plant the seed to when you actually harvest the food, you are talking weeks if not months, so it gives you a real appreciation for how it happens. Plus, the process really is so magical!"

"The same goes for raising animals for meat. And being able to do it with your family, show your kids the process and then harvest, cook and eat it together really puts into perspective what is truly important."

Gardening has become a central part of family life for Laura MacDonald and her children.



While homesteading has long been associated with rural communities, MacDonald says she is increasingly seeing interest from urban New Zealanders trying to bring pieces of that lifestyle into suburban homes and town sections.

"I think homesteading has always attracted a really diverse group of people, but what I've noticed lately is that more people who live in towns and cities are trying to see how they can bring homesteading practices into their lives, even without living on land

which I think is amazing!"

She believes the movement is being driven by a combination of economic pressure and a deeper desire to reconnect with food, family and a slower way of living.

"I think a lot of people are feeling the pinch and are looking for ways to save some money where they can, but I am also seeing a lot of people who want to get back to a more simple way of living."

For MacDonald, the goal is not perfection or complete independence.

"It's not something that is

achievable overnight," she said.

"But I think if you have that as your end goal, it is absolutely achievable to become mostly self-sufficient, and I love the idea of leaning on your community and small local businesses and growers to fill the gaps where you can't quite get there on your own."

And perhaps most importantly: "Realising that even if you are not quite doing it all on your own, that is not failing!"

Follow Laura on Instagram @thekiwicountrygirl www.thekiwicountrygirl.com

# From lawn to living larder



Holly and Jonah at home in the Waikato with their son Walter, where a simple lawn has been transformed into a thriving kitchen garden.



**Claire Inkson**  
RURAL EDITOR

There is something quietly powerful about turning a patch of lawn into something that feeds you.

Not in a grand, self-sufficient, off-grid kind of way. Just a few raised beds. A handful of herbs. A couple of rows of vegetables. Enough to change how you cook, how you shop, and how you think about food.

That is exactly what Holly van Dam has done.

Through her growing online platform, Grown by Holly, she shares a version of rural life that feels both aspirational and entirely doable. A kitchen garden built from scratch. Home baking, and three-month-old baby Walter on her hip. And a reminder that you do not need to own land, or have all the answers, to get started.

"I turned the lawn into our kitchen garden," she says.

Holly lives on a dairy farm in the Waikato, where her husband Jonah is farm manager. Like many in the industry, their home is tied to the job, which means making the most of what is available.

"You have to make a home for yourself where you land. Wherever you go."

The idea for Grown by Holly began overseas.

"I was living in the Netherlands. Jonah and I were living over there. I was working in a big greenhouse, growing flowers, and I decided that I wanted to come home to New Zealand and grow a ridiculous amount of flowers and sell them through the mail."

Back home, that plan started to take shape. A large plot was prepared on Jonah's family farm, and Holly began documenting what she thought would become a flower business.

Then plans shifted.

"Jonah got offered the dairy

farming job that we're on at the moment, and we fully pivoted. Now we're dairy farming. Then it went into making my home gardens right at our new house."

What followed was not a perfectly mapped-out garden, but something more organic.

"I thought it would be a no dig kind of thing. We didn't dig up the lawn, we just laid soil on top of it."

The result is a kitchen garden that now shapes everyday life - but can be converted back into lawn if the couple move.

"I look at the garden from the kitchen, so when I'm cooking I know there's things in the garden to pick. I can plan my meal around it."

It is a simple shift, but one that changes how food is approached.

"If I was to buy the same quality of produce that I grow, it would be very expensive."

There is also a different kind of value in it.

"I find it really rewarding. If I didn't plant that broccoli plant or seed those seeds, this item would never have existed."

Like most gardens, it has come with its fair share of lessons.

"I've learned that I'm not the boss of the garden. There are so many factors I can't control. You have to surrender a bit."

Some seasons work. Others do not.

"This year I only got two cucumbers, whereas last year I had a huge amount."

Her approach is straightforward. "Just give it a go and you will fail but keep going. You will find success."

And above all, keep it simple. "Don't overcomplicate it. There are no rules."

Her own setup reflects that. Raised beds built from untreated timber, cardboard and compost.

"Four pieces of untreated boxing timber screwed together in a square, with cardboard on the bottom and compost on top. That's all it is."

It does not need to be permanent either.

"If you don't want it to be permanent, it doesn't matter. If you're renting, you can still do it."

For those starting out, she

Holly and Walter on farm. Life and work are closely intertwined in a dairy farming system.



A kitchen garden built from scratch, showing what is possible even on a working farm.



From garden to kitchen. Seasonal produce shapes what is cooked and how meals come together.



Family life at the centre of it all, with the garden and home built around day-to-day living.



A harvest from the garden. What began as a small project has become a steady source of food and flowers.

permanent, it doesn't matter. If you're renting, you can still do it."

For those starting out, she recommends beginning small. Holly uses the Tui gardening calendar for reference, and says, "Start with herbs. They're easy, they grow most of the year in New Zealand, and they're satisfying to use in a meal."

That same practical thinking extends beyond the garden.

### Finding a pathway to farm ownership

Holly and Jonah are preparing to launch a direct-to-consumer meat box business, supplying high quality New Zealand meat to households.

For them, it is more than a side project. It is part of a longer-term plan.

"We won't be able to buy a farm if we continue on the traditional route," Holly says. "We want to be landowners; we want to have our own farm."

With land prices continuing to climb, they see diversification as a necessary step.

"This is hopefully the way that we can do that eventually."

For Holly, it is also about access. It is something she grew up with and does not take for granted.

"The whole of New Zealand should be able to eat high quality meat, considering we are a huge exporter of the highest quality meat."

The aim is to make that standard more accessible, bringing what many would consider "home kill" quality into everyday homes.

### Keeping it simple

Holly's content reflects the same grounded approach as her garden.

"It's my real life, but it's the nice parts of it."

She believes it connects because it reflects a quieter way of living.

"It represents people who are into homemaking or living more simply off the land they have. It's not career driven. It's more simple than that. It's slow, but it's not boring."

There is also a distinctly New Zealand perspective to what she shares.

"There's not a lot of Kiwi creators who live in rural New Zealand, and a lot of rural women don't feel represented online."

For Holly, the appeal of a garden is straightforward.

"It's something real that you can touch. No one is judging your success. It's completely your own."

And for many, that is reason enough to start.

Follow Holly on Instagram @grownbyholly. www.grownbyholly.co.nz

Garden work does not stop. Walter is often along for the ride as Holly tends to the beds.



Flowers from the garden, arranged with Walter close by. Everyday moments are built around what is growing just outside the door.



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# Little House on the Plains



Inside the chicken coop, Emily with one very contented brown shaver hen.

PHOTOS AMY RIACH

Fair is fowl, and fowl is fair! These chickens have a mirror in their coop, and they love to watch their own reflections.



Emily's "tiny dinosaur" does a very good impression of a meerkat!



Amy Riach

It looks like something lifted from the pages of *Little House on the Prairie*.

Or maybe, a scene from *'The Good Life'*. There are chickens scratching in the yard, tomatoes ripening in tunnel houses, herbs hanging to dry in the kitchen, and shelves lined with jars of preserved fruit, pasta sauce, and pickles.

A rescue cat patrols the deck while dogs lounge in the sun, unconcerned by the hens wandering nearby.

But this is not the American frontier. It is suburban Oxford, North Canterbury, where Emily Chapman and her husband Bruce have quietly transformed an ordinary backyard into a thriving

homestead.

At the centre of it all is the Chicken Palace, the "Bruce Original" coop that has become both a practical source of eggs, and the heart of their miniature ecosystem.

As the cost of living climbs and supermarket prices continue to bite, more New Zealanders are looking toward vegetable gardens, preserving, and backyard chickens as a way to ease pressure on household budgets.

But for Emily, the journey into homesteading began from a desire to live differently, and a little more slowly.

Although the Chapman's have turned to homesteading later in life, the dream for Emily was always to turn out "a little like Weezer", from the 1989 film *Steel Magnolias*.

"She's this grumpy old lady, with big unruly dogs, and she's always carrying around bags of tomatoes from her garden. Years ago I remember thinking, 'I want to be just like her.'"

Looking out at the flourishing

backyard, the overflowing pantry shelves, and the beloved hens, it seems she may already be well on her way.

"It's so much fun," she said. "It never really started as a cost thing, I probably didn't realise just how much I could grow."

When the couple first bought their property, the back section was little more than an overgrown paddock. Now, it has been completely remodelled.

"Originally, we had a sheep and a goat that just ate the grass, and they came with the house," Emily laughed. "They were our official lawnmowers, they lived till they were 14, and they were best friends."

But a sheep and goat do not leave much room for a productive garden, and with a few planter boxes and windowsill herbs, Emily was a hobby gardener for many years.

But when Covid hit, Emily decided it was now or never.

"I told Bruce, we're knuckling down. We're really going to do this."

"I think after Covid, you realise

how easily systems are broken," Emily said.

"Everything went to pieces with our supply chains, and I thought, actually, I would like to have our own fruit and veggies and eggs."

It's the eggs, or more accurately, the chickens, that are unquestionably Emily's favourites.

And like any devoted owner, she insists they each have distinct personalities.

Some are named after the sisters from *Little Women*, Amy, Beth and Jo. Others are rescues, taken in after commercial laying operations had no use for them.

"They're not pretty, some of them," Emily said affectionately. "But we really love them."

The dependable brown Shavers, she said, are the backbone of the egg supply.

"The fancy ones are just not as good layers," she laughed. "The brown Shavers are really holding down the fort."

Today, the Chapman's grow their own produce year-round, and with a supermarket on the doorstep, in summer they don't buy groceries

at all.

Even in the winter, Emily said, "we still don't grocery shop very often, because we buy local. We buy from the local butcher, we buy from farmers' markets, we buy flour in bulk. We don't do traditional grocery shopping."

"I'm sure supermarket workers look at my grocery order and think, 'these people are going to get scurvy,' because there's never any fruit or veggies in there," she laughed.

That's because most of it is already growing outside. Even in winter, the garden continues producing brassicas, kale, and salad greens.

Enough potatoes for the year are grown in beds during the warmer months, and Emily's freezers are packed full of berries, grated courgette, and preserved produce from the summer glut.

The kitchen preserving operation has become increasingly ambitious over the past few years, and Emily points to rows of neatly stacked jars filled with tomatoes, fruit, sauces, and pie fillings.



Preserving is well underway! Relishes, jams, and even homemade pasta sauce.



When a dozen eggs sets you back \$10, having fresh eggs waiting in the chicken coop saves both money and time.

"Chunky" the cat, approving books for the shop. She's in charge of most decisions around here.



It's been years since Emily has added fruit or vegetables to the grocery list. Not when there's an orchard just outside the front door. PHOTO SUPPLIED



"We try and grow enough tomatoes, and we do," she said. "I do heaps of jars of tomatoes. Heaps of preserving. My freezers are always just on the edge of too-full, which is a wonderful problem to have."

What began as making basic jams, and perfecting water-bath preserving for apples and peaches, has quickly evolved into a full canning operation; all run from the kitchen counter and supervised by Chunky the rescue cat.

Low-acid foods, like potatoes and meat, which don't survive traditional water-bath preserving, can be stored for winter by pressure canning, which Emily was delighted to test for the very first time this year.

It's keeping her busy, and the summer preserving season is "relentless!"

"February is my busiest month," Emily said. "At the start of summer, you're eating everything fresh because that's what you miss over winter. Then suddenly you realise, actually, I need to start focusing on what we're going to want later."

The result is a pantry that functions like a miniature supermarket, except nearly everything inside was grown, preserved, or made by hand.

"We don't buy pre-made sauces or anything like that," she said. "I wouldn't even buy a jar of pasta sauce anymore."

Instead, Emily grows and dries her own herbs, blending them into homemade seasonings. Sometimes she even makes pasta from scratch.

"I love looking at things and thinking, 'How can I recreate that?'"

There is a deep satisfaction, Emily said, in preparing a meal where nearly every ingredient originated in their own backyard.

"The best thing is if I cook a meal and think, 'Everything except maybe the meat, I've grown or made myself.' That's so cool."

Bruce, meanwhile, is the builder, the problem-solver, and the resident family MacGyver.

"He can build everything," Emily said. "I say, 'I want this,' and he builds it."

That includes the Chicken Palace itself, along with the bookshop that sits at the end of the garden.

The bookshop, called 'Woodside Books', nestled next to the chicken coop selling second-hand novels, is where Emily spends much of her week - editing the community newspaper, or hosting a book club. It's her "sanctuary", with a corner desk and a view of the garden.

It was in the bookshop that Emily found her own Little House on the Prairie Cookbook, and

although it lives in the kitchen, she has yet to try all the recipes.

"It did have blackbird pie in it," she laughed. "We're not committing to that yet."

The homestead extends beyond vegetables and chickens. There are fruit trees, berry cages, compost systems, and even homemade cheese.

In true 'Little House' style, Emily is a big fan of trading with friends, swapping eggs for fresh milk, and making her own cheese.

"Bruce even built me a cheese press," she said proudly. "He loves a project."

Rainwater collection systems now feed the garden during dry Canterbury summers. Kitchen scraps, grass clippings and leaves all go through the chicken yard, where they are turned into rich compost that nourishes the next season's crops.

"It's a little ecosystem in the backyard," Emily said.

Importantly, she is committed to keeping it chemical-free.

"We don't use any spray on the property," she said. "I just don't think we need to. We're not a farm."

That means accepting imperfections, the occasional white butterfly, or chewed leaf, but Emily sees that as part of the trade-off.

"You're not producing for sale, so it doesn't matter."

While homesteading can appear intimidating online, all sprawling rural blocks and self-sufficient influencers, Emily told the Guardian, the Chapman homestead is still achievable in an ordinary suburban setting, and even small-scale gardening can make a difference to expenses.

"When we lived in Auckland we only had a courtyard," she said. "I just had planter boxes with lettuce, tomatoes and herbs. But that was enough."

"I just like knowing I've grown this food," she said. "It's not covered in sprays, and I know exactly where it's come from."

The financial benefits have become increasingly important, however, especially as food prices continue to rise.

"No one can afford waste anymore," she said. "If I buy a chicken, then I make stock from the bones. There's always something else you can do with it."

Still, despite the labour involved, Emily said the lifestyle only works because she genuinely loves it.

"I don't think I'd do this if I didn't enjoy it. It would be a lot of work otherwise!"



What's a kitchen window without a stained-glass chicken? It matches Emily's new chicken tattoo very nicely.



Fresh from the garden vine!



Even the hot-cross buns are made from scratch in the Chapman kitchen, icing and all.



# Chickens show their hidden talents

Can a chicken climb stairs? Do a high jump? Achieve total spherical excellence? Chickenstock 2026 provided an official verdict: yes they can (mostly.)

Not quite Woodstock, and with far too much personality for regular chicken stock, Chickenstock 2026 is Canterbury's "premier poultry athletics event", delivering the kind of passionate crowd usually reserved for international sporting finals.

Organised by Mark Chirside, barista by day, musician by night, and curator of elite chicken athletics on select weekends, the event, held at the Climate Action Campus in Christchurch on May 23rd, was a fundraiser for the Climate Action Campus; and betting on the chickens was not only permitted, but encouraged.

"I love the spirit of competition, and this idea of chicken athletics, the Olympics for chickens, just had me thinking: what can a chicken really do?" Chirside said.

The answer, it turns out, is much more than you might expect, feats usually achieved while ignoring instructions completely.

Families packed in to witness chickens navigate mazes, leap tiny hurdles, pull trays of eggs, and occasionally ignore the tenuous premise of organised competition

altogether.

Organisers had warned spectators there was "a chance the birds would simply not participate in the tasks laid in front of them."

"We had to put the disclaimer in," Chirside laughed. "There's a non-zero chance the chickens won't cooperate."

With 17 entrants, including one chicken who looked suspiciously like a magpie, Chirside was delighted with the turnout.

"I did have 20 backup chickens in case people didn't enter. It would have been more like a WWE wrestling stage thing, but it's so nice that we have real competitors," he laughed.

"It was just really important to me that the event was fun, organised, and that people could come along, laugh, take photos and enjoy a good fair competition with the chickens."

Among the standout events was the egg pull, a feat of strength in which chickens attempted to drag a tray loaded with eggs across the arena.

"My favourite event is the egg pull," Chirside said. "We've basically got a chicken harness attached to a Tonka truck loaded with a dozen eggs to see which chicken can pull the eggs the furthest."

Then came the high jump, where

chickens attempted increasingly ambitious leaps until one competitor emerged victorious, bewildered, or both.

Chicken dressage was mostly an exercise in patience; chickens are not quite so elegant as horses as it turns out, while the stair-climb quickly became one of the marquee events of the day, combining a ten-metre sprint, a staircase challenge, and another sprint to the finish line.

But no competition captured the public imagination quite like the Roundest Chicken category.

Using a target board, and mathematical modelling suggested by one of Chirside's friends, a physics lecturer in Perth, organisers attempted to determine true spherical excellence.

"We can calculate mathematically which chicken is the roundest and most spherical," Chirside explained before the event.

"But every chicken also has to be inspected to make sure it's healthy, you can't just stuff it full of food."

Buddha ultimately claimed the coveted title, despite being a lightweight. She's just 600 grams, and shaped like a feathered soccer ball.

Best in Show honours went to Mazie, whose true athletic prowess clearly impressed judges,

and Hei Hei, who came with her own personal cheer squad, and was declared the people's choice. Possibly due to a disproportionate number of supporters in attendance.

The official weigh-in ahead of the competition had already hinted at the personalities involved.

Hei Hei immediately abandoned the podium "with the energy of a celebrity refusing media interviews", Chirside laughed, while Sunnyside Up openly disputed the judging process by refusing to sit in the middle of the scale.

Tiny lived up to none of the expectations attached to the name, at an enormous 2.35 kilograms, and Princess displayed royal composure.

One of the day's greatest underdog stories belonged to Birdie, technically a magpie, blind in one eye, and still awaiting confirmation as to whether she qualified as "a regulation chicken". Appeal pending.

She was not the only non-regulation bird in attendance, as members of the Christchurch Poultry Club were also there, bringing along show birds for the event.

A cockatoo named Bernie, a goose referred to almost exclusively as "bad goose!", and even a willing turkey were part of

the crowd and keen for the loving attention of families and their children.

Food, coffee and snacks from The Crafted Coffee Company kept crowds fueled throughout the day, while spectators passionately cheered for birds attempting highly questionable athletic feats, with absolute sincerity.

For Chirside, the event also aimed to connect urban audiences with rural life in a joyful and accessible way.

"My background is music and performing," he said. "I've discovered there's always an opportunity for niche culture, whether it's classical music or chickens, to offer something to people outside those communities."

"I think I've got something to offer the poultry and agricultural community by translating it into something that brings together school kids, families, hospitality people, and the poultry community itself," he said.

"Chickens are part of our world. People have pet chickens, people eat chickens, they deserve as much respect as they deserve, none less."

And in the end, that was the magic of Chickenstock: wholehearted enthusiasm for tiny, feathered athletes doing their unpredictable best.



Princess the chicken makes her way through the maze, coaxed by a doting Willem Freed. Bribery is both permitted and encouraged.



Chook Norris, raised by Eloy Alday-McClelland (left) and Harvey Evans, is a school chicken, who lives at the Climate Action Campus where both boys attend.



Not a chicken, but nevertheless, very determined to participate, and quite proud of his ability to take off without warning.

Every true sporting event requires a mascot! This rooster came all the way from Shanghai. Kemper and Georgie, who are driving the chicken-mobile, received him in the post.



Budda the roundest chicken, with her proud owner Tom Burgess.



The tiny raptors, named Noodle and Peaches. No, we can't tell them apart either.



Chook Norris, faithfully adored by Eloy Alday-McClelland.



Willem Freed, a pupil at the Climate Action Campus, and Princess, his champion athlete.



Special Guest Bernie the cockatoo, getting extra attention from spectators Jude Warburton (left), and Kyle Reece-Buck.



Bernie the Cockatoo, with spectator Kate McInnes-Hemsley. She came to watch the chickens, but she might have stayed just for Bernie.



The official cheer squad for Hei Hei! From left, Zac and Ben Zmijewski, Marion Chef, Tara Forstner, Arnaud Heid, and Caroline Halliwell. "Hey hey hey, it's Hei Hei!"



Tiny the pigeon, who is quite happy to spend the day in her pink harness: watching on as other, less refined birds, deign to participate in group athletics.



Maraed Riley, the official portrait-painter of the event, turns chicken photographs into keepsake watercolour painting. She'll even paint a pigeon, or a magpie, but just on the down-low.



Meet Birdie, technically a magpie, blind in one eye, and still awaiting confirmation as to whether she qualified as "a regulation chicken".

# HOLLY'S FAUGLES —

AKA Fake Sourdough Vogels

Recipe courtesy of Holly Van Dam — Grown by Holly

This might be the simplest sourdough recipe you may ever come across, no kneading or folding... you don't even need scales!

## Ingredients:

- 3 Cup — Plain/Bread Flour
- 1 Cup — Wholemeal Flour
- ¼ Cup — Flax Seeds
- ½ Cup — Sunflower Seeds
- ¼ Cup — Chia Seeds
- ½ Tablespoon — Salt
- 1 Tablespoon — Molasses
- ½ Cup — Sourdough Starter
- 3 Cup — Water

## Method

1. Mix all ingredients together in a big bowl really well, I use my hands, it's messy but gets the job done
2. Cover the bowl with a tea towel and let mixture rise at room temp, until it has doubled in size. I leave mine on the bench overnight
3. Pre heat oven to 200C On Bake
4. Tip mixture into a big loaf tin
5. Bake for 50mins
6. Wait until it has completely cooled to slice & enjoy



## QUICK SOURDOUGH STARTER METHOD

(For readers who don't already have a starter)

### Day 1

- Mix in a jar or container:
- ½ cup plain or wholemeal flour
  - ½ cup lukewarm water

Stir well, cover loosely with a tea towel or lid (not airtight), and leave on the bench.

### Days 2-5

Each day:

- Discard about half the mixture
- Add another ½ cup flour and ½ cup water
- Stir well and leave at room temperature

By day 5 the starter should look bubbly, smell slightly tangy and rise after feeding. That means it's ready to use.

To keep it going:

- Store in the fridge once active
- Feed once a week with equal parts flour and water
- Bring to room temperature before baking

A good shortcut if readers don't want to make their own is to ask a friend for some starter, as sourdough bakers usually have plenty to share.



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