

NEUMANNSTYRES

TYREGENERAL

★★★★★

DRIVING THE

RURAL GUARDIAN

WWW.RURALGUARDIAN.COM

JULY 2026

TO EVERY FARM IN THE SOUTH ISLAND

FREE
- AND -
ONLINE

WINTERING WELL

Plucks Engineering Generational Rollers of Choice Since 1966

Proud to see our rollers from the 1960's, 1970's, and 1980's being passed down to the third generation of ownership and still being used today.

Triple drum extra wide = triple treat!



2nd hand trade-ins welcome

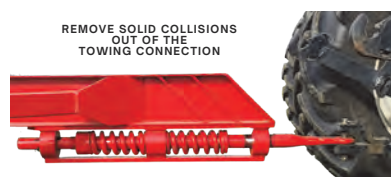
TRADEIN AND TRADEUP AND OFFSET
THE COST
OF A NEW ROLLER



10 YEAR WARRANTY
ON ALL NEW ROLLERS

PLUCK'S
ENGINEERING LTD. SINCE 1966

Spring loaded drawbar, optional
extra for a new or current roller!



REMOVE SOLID COLLISIONS
OUT OF THE
TOWING CONNECTION

VINEYARD ROLLER

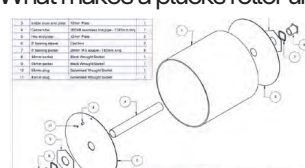


FRAMES ARE
NEARLY FLUSH SO
NOTHING CATCHES
THE CROP

Diameter, when size matters!



What makes a plucks roller unique?



Its what's inside that you cant see
that counts!

Reduce tractor hours & time in the cab!

Double roller towing frame



2 MINUTES TO FOLD OUT
2 MINUTES TO FOLD INS



Are you comparing like for like when getting a quote?

CALL 0800 758 257



80 Bridge Street, Rakaia

PLUCK'S
ENGINEERING LTD. SINCE 1966

CONTACTS

News tips

M: 022 1299 496

After hours news tips

E: claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz

Advertising

Call: 022 472 4100

Email Kim Gavin at:

kim.g@theguardian.co.nz

Missed paper

Call 03 3077900

MEDIA COUNCIL

This publication is subject to the New Zealand Media Council.

- Complaints must first be directed in writing to editor@theguardian.co.nz
- If unsatisfied, the complaint may be referred to the Media Council, PO Box 10-879, The Terrace, Wellington 6143 or email info@presscouncil.org.nz
- Further detail and an online complaints form are available at www.mediacouncil.org.nz

LETTERS

We welcome your letters and emails, but:

No more than 100 words.

We reserve the right to edit or not publish.

Send all letters to:

Claire.inkson@theguardian.co.nz

WEBSITE

Our stories don't stop at the last page.

The Rural Guardian website is now live at www.ruralguardian.com, bringing digital editions, rural news and features together in one place, anytime you feel like a read.

CUTTING THROUGH THE NOISE ON RURAL WELLBEING

We talk about rural mental health more than we used to.

That is a good thing.

For too long, farmers, growers, contractors and rural families were expected to simply get on with it. To push through the hard seasons, the bad prices, the sleepless nights, the droughts, the floods, the debt, the succession worries, the family pressure, the loneliness, and the weight of being needed by everyone and everything.

So yes, the fact we are talking more openly about mental health and wellbeing in rural New Zealand matters.

But talking is only part of it.

The statistics are still confronting. Hauora Taiwhenua Rural Health Network's 2024 Rural Health Snapshot found the rural suicide rate was 64 percent higher than urban rates. Rural communities also face higher preventable mortality, lower healthcare use, lower vaccination rates, and far greater barriers to accessing care, particularly in more remote areas.

These are not just numbers on a page. They are people. They are families. They are neighbours. They are the ones who always turn up for everyone else, but may be struggling quietly themselves.

And it is not as simple as telling people to "reach out".

That phrase is well meaning, but in rural communities it can be complicated.

Reaching out might mean driving hours to an appointment. It might mean trying to find privacy in a town where everyone knows

everyone. It might mean taking time off farm when there is no one else to do the work. It might mean overcoming a lifetime of being taught to keep your head down and carry on.

It might also mean not knowing who to trust.

The rural mental health space is busy now. There are campaigns, slogans, podcasts, events, speakers, courses and social media pages. Much of it is valuable and comes from a good place. But noise is still noise, even when it is well intentioned.

When people are vulnerable, support needs to be safe, practical and qualified.

Those with lived experience can play an incredibly powerful role in reducing stigma and helping others feel less alone. But lived experience is not the same as clinical expertise. A good story can open a door, but it should not replace proper care. People who claim to be experts, without the training or safeguards to back that up, can unintentionally do more harm than good.

That is why it is encouraging to see initiatives that connect rural people with qualified support in ways that actually fit rural life.

The new partnership between Farmlands, Rural Support Trust and ignite is one example. It gives farmers and growers access to free mental health support through a platform that offers online and in-person options, helping remove some of the barriers of distance, cost and time away from the farm.

What I particularly like about this approach is that it recognises that wellbeing is not one single thing.

Mental health does not sit in a separate box from physical health, financial pressure, relationships, sleep, nutrition, movement, purpose or community. It is all connected.

When someone is under pressure for long enough, it shows up everywhere. In the body. In the mind. In the way we eat, sleep, move, work, parent, communicate and cope.

That is why looking after ourselves cannot be treated as a luxury, or something we get to once the work is done.

In farming, the work is never really done.

There will always be another job, another bill, another weather event, another animal needing attention, another person depending on you.

But valuing yourself enough to take time for a walk, a proper meal, a conversation, a doctor's appointment, a counsellor, or simply a pause, is not selfish. It is maintenance.

We accept maintenance as essential for machinery, vehicles, water systems, fences and stock. Yet too often, the person holding the whole operation together is the last thing to be serviced.

That has to change.

Farming Through the Fog, our annual mental health feature, was created because rural people deserve space to speak honestly about the hard stuff, without shame and without being reduced to statistics.

It is not about portraying farming as bleak. Rural life can be deeply rewarding, grounding and full of connection. But it can also be isolating, relentless and heavy. Both things can be true.

We owe it to our communities to keep having these conversations, but we also owe it to them to make those conversations useful.

That means pushing for better rural health policy. It means recognising rural communities have unique needs. It means funding services that can reach people where they are. It means supporting local Rural Support Trusts and other trusted providers. It means being careful about who we platform as experts. And it means remembering that wellbeing is not just crisis response. It is prevention, connection and daily care.

The fog does lift.

But for many people, it lifts faster when someone walks beside them who knows the terrain.



A Kilworths Insurance Plan will minimise risk in the areas of:

- Farmers & Rural Risk Protection
- Personal Risk Protection
- Business Risk Protection
- Kiwisaver

For over 50 years we've been bringing a personal approach to insurance and investment. Your security is assured with the best products available for your situation.



We provide comprehensive options to protect your family, farming & business operation – and we can work with you to establish a funding solution for succession of the next generation of family members.

If you would like help and advice tailored to your situation then contact us today.

PH: 03 307 8000 | Level 2, 73 Burnett St, Ashburton

Scott Kilworth: 021 228 0016 | kilworths.co.nz/insurance/rural-insurance



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.

NEUMANNSTYRES

TYREGENERAL



FOR ALL YOUR TYRE REQUIREMENTS

Darfield Tyres
03 318 8201

**Methven Tyre
& Hire**
03 302 8411

**Tyre General
Washdyke**
03 683 9055

**Tyre General
Oamaru**
03 433 1015

**Tyre General
Cromwell**
03 445 0746

**Alexandra
Tyre Centre**
03 440 2070

**Southland Tyre
Centre Invercargill**
03 218 6904

**Tyre General
Motueka**
03 528 1020

Tyre General Nelson
03 539 6408

**Tyre General
Blenheim**
03 577 9980

**Tyre General
Amberley**
03 314 9168

**Tyre General
Rangiora**
03 310 6689

**Tyre General
Christchurch**
03 348 8422

**Neumanns Tyre
Services Ltd**
03 308 6737

**General Tyres
Dunedin**
03 455 2005

**Tyre General
Temuka**
03 615 8736

South Island Wide 24hr - Ph 0800 484 725

**BUY
3 TYRES**

**AND GET THE
4th FREE**



**Buy any 3 Tractor
or Implement
Tyres and get a
4th FREE!**



* Valid 1-31 July 2026
* Value of free tyre up to the lowest
price of purchased tyres.



Gabi and Doug Michael, celebrating open day at Gladfield Malt in front of a brand-new harvester. After some dry weather, "bringing out the harvester is a sure-fire way to get some rain," says Doug. PHOTOS AMY RIACH



Brain Watson, director of the Good George Brewing company, spoke at the open day, proud to announce that he buys grain "exclusively from the best: Gladfield only."



Brian Watson, testing out the new harvester, and loving it.



Prime Minister Christopher Luxon attended the celebrations at Gladfield this week, offering his congratulations to Dunsandel maltsters Doug and Gabi.



From left, local guests Patrick Stack, Colin Hurst, Mark Currie, and Andy Thompson, celebrate with a beer and a chat.



Guests John Grigg and Graham Wells, enjoying beer made from Gladfield grain.



Selwyn MP Nicola Grigg introduced the Prime Minister, offering her own congratulations to Doug and Gabi Michael.

Prime Minister backs maltsters in Dunsandel



Amy Riach

Prime Minister Christopher Luxon has offered his congratulations to Dunsandel maltsters, attending a celebratory Open Day at Gladfield Malt in June.

"I think it's really exciting," Luxon said. "We have really talented people here, who take our products to the world."

The future of New Zealand-grown grain was celebrated in style, as Doug and Gabi Michael of Gladfield Malt opened their doors to growers, brewers, industry leaders, and the Prime Minister.

Held at the Malting plant in Dunsandel, the event brought together 300 arable locals to celebrate an increasingly important message: backing New Zealand-grown grain.

Developed by the Foundation for Arable Research (FAR), the 'NZ Grown Grains' trademark launched late last year, and Gladfield Malt have just gained their certification.

Speaking to the crowd, Prime Minister Christopher Luxon congratulated the industry on creating a trademark that would help distinguish products made from New Zealand-grown grain, and "create new opportunities" for growers and processors alike.

"This new development around New Zealand grain, I think that's really so important," Luxon said.

"We've seen the power of that being unleashed in the way that we can market our products, and so to Doug and Gabi, I just want to say, congratulations."

"It really is about us having a mindset that says that we're going to go out there and happen to the world, rather than have the world happen to us, and we can do extremely well for ourselves, our kids, and our grandkids," he told the local crowd.

The trademark initiative is designed to identify products made from 100% New Zealand-grown grain, helping local consumers support local growers.

Visitors spent the day touring the maltings, catching up with fellow growers, and sampling beers supplied by many of Gladfield's brewing customers.

Of course, they also got the chance to race in 'The Great Gladfield Shovel Off', competing in teams of two to shovel 250kg of grain onto a scale, as quickly as possible.

Even Christopher Luxon gave the competition the old college try.

With 18 seconds on the clock, he fell just short of the winning team, but that didn't stop him from sticking around to mingle with his fellow competitors; talking everything farming with Gladfield guests, and sharing in the evening's barbecue.

For Gladfield co-owner Gabi Michael, the launch represents a significant milestone in a long-term campaign to strengthen domestic grain production, "a seal of approval" for Gladfield Malt.

Gabi told the Guardian, the Gladfield goal was to reassure Mid Canterbury growers that they remain committed to sourcing locally.

"We want to get the growers in here and say we're not going to buy any barley from overseas. We're here, we're supporting you," she said.

The open day also provided an opportunity to reconnect an industry that has faced significant challenges in recent years, "bringing growers off the farm, and into the same room again."

"It's been a tough season for most of our growers," she said. "Nothing like a party!"

Of course, hosting the Prime Minister was a very welcome bonus, but Gabi said bringing people together was what mattered most.

"We haven't had an open day for the growers for a long time. It allows them to see where the barley goes, how we make the malt, and just bring people together."

Gabi's husband, Doug Michael, opened the event, and delivered a characteristically candid speech and outlined the true importance of malted grain.

"If we run out of beer, I reckon the whole world would go batshit crazy overnight," he laughed.

"Raise a toast to all the farmers, all the barley growers, the maltsters and the brewers. Without us, civilisation is dead."

But behind the humour was a serious message about recognising the value of New Zealand's primary industries.

"We need to bring back sociability, and we need to bring back the ability to celebrate our successes," Doug said.

Growing up during the difficult farming years of the 1980s, when drought, high interest rates and sweeping economic reforms placed enormous pressure on rural communities, Doug said

the lessons he learned then have shaped both his life and the business.

"The harder you work, the luckier you get," he told the Guardian. "And if you don't push your own barrow, no other bugger will!"

Gladfield, which began more than two decades ago as a small family operation, never intended to become one of New Zealand's best-known malt producers.

"It was never supposed to get as big as this," Doug said. "But here we are."

He credited much of the company's success to his wife and business partner. "Gabi's the brains of the outfit," he said.

There's no question that the pair have worked hard to get to where they are.

"It's a real Kiwi story, all hard work and Number 8 wire," said guest Suzanne Wilson.

"They absolutely deserve this. They've worked bloody hard."

In the early years, Gladfield identified a gap in the market: for premium malt made from locally grown barley.

And while the company enjoyed early success, it has also faced its share of setbacks, learning perseverance the old-fashioned way.

"We had ups and downs, swings and roundabouts, interruptions," Doug said.

"We had Covid, we had the Ukraine war. We had a whole bunch of things happen, but consistently there was a small group of people who pushed ahead and forged ahead with this idea to develop something to boost the grains in New Zealand."

That vision eventually became the New Zealand Grown Grain trademark.

"What we needed was an identity," Doug said.

"We needed a brand. We needed something that would show the consumer that this product is different because this product is made from New Zealand-grown grain."

Ivan Lawrie, FAR general manager, said Gladfield's growth had been built on a commitment to quality rather than volume.

"The growth of Gladfield has come from not chasing volume or competing on price," he said.

"It comes from a clear philosophy of producing high-quality malt and adding value at every step."

At a time when rising input costs, tighter margins, and greater production risks are affecting farmers, Lawrie said Gladfield's efforts to support growers through the supply chain were particularly significant.

"What I really respect about Gladfield is the way you've responded to challenge, not by ignoring it, but by working hard to support growers and looking for ways to return value through the supply chain."

The company's top brewing partners were also on hand to showcase products made from Gladfield malt, and the message was clear: New Zealand-grown grain has a story worth telling, and now it has a trademark to tell it.

The newly launched trademark is expected to appear on an increasing number of products over coming months, helping consumers identify beer and other grain-based products made from New Zealand-grown ingredients.

And if Doug Michael's sentiments are anything to go by, that is worth celebrating.

From navigation to irrigation – AI-powered water management

AMY RIACH

A brand-new venture for GPS signals: moonlighting for a water management system on New Zealand farms.

Using artificial intelligence and satellite technology, a new research project designed to measure soil moisture may help Kiwi farmers make informed decisions about when and where to irrigate.

Researchers at the University of Canterbury (UC), are developing a system that aims to provide real-time information about moisture levels across entire paddocks, helping farmers save on water use, and respond to increasingly variable weather conditions.

The project, led by Professor Matthew Wilson and PhD student Xander Cai, of UC's Geospatial Research Institute, is focused on addressing one of agriculture's ongoing challenges: accurately measuring how much water is available in the soil.

"Water is one of the most critical and constrained resources in agriculture," Wilson told the Guardian.

"Right now, farmers are often making decisions based on limited or incomplete data. This project is

about giving them the information they need to use water more efficiently and sustainably."

The research team is developing the ANZ Soil Moisture Data Assimilation System (ANZ-SMDAS), which combines data from ground-based sensors, satellite signals, and advanced artificial intelligence models, to monitor soil moisture.

Unlike traditional soil monitoring methods, which rely on sensors installed at fixed points in the ground, the new system is designed to provide a more comprehensive picture of conditions across an entire field.

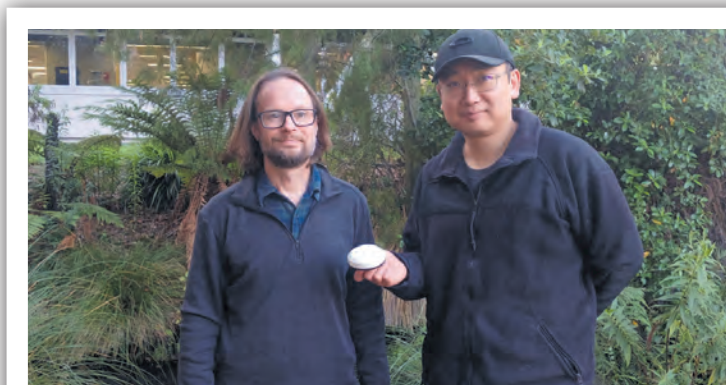
"Relying on ground sensors alone introduces significant limitations," Wilson said.

"They can certainly be helpful, but they have a fixed location, so their coverage is limited, they need installation, and require disturbing of the soil to do that"

"It's a bit of a leap to say that one measurement at that precise location of the sensor is representative of a whole field," he explained.

The innovative, AI-driven system uses existing signals from global navigation satellites such as GPS in a new way.

"Those signals are used for



Professor Matthew Wilson (left) and researcher Xander Cai, holding the prototype sensor, which will be mounted to a pole above fence height and linked to a computer system which runs the AI technology. PHOTOS AMY RIACH

navigating, of course, that's what everyone is familiar with, when you're doing your satellite navigation in the car; we are using those same signals but in a completely different way," Wilson said.

The technology analyses satellite signals that bounce off the land surface. Changes in the reflected signals reveal how much moisture is present in the soil.

"What we're most interested in is the change in that signal that occurs as a result of soil moisture," he said.

"We are able to compare the direct signals and the affected signals, and the differences between them change depending on the moisture of the soil, all based on signals that already exist."

Professor Wilson described the approach as using "signals of opportunity", repurposing existing satellite transmissions rather than relying on expensive dedicated satellites, or radar systems.

The physical sensor itself is expected to be relatively simple, consisting of a GPS antenna

mounted on a pole, connected to a solar-powered computer and cellular communication system.

Artificial intelligence running on the device will process data before transmitting it for further analysis.

"We're pulling together data from lots of different sources, including other satellite information, that would allow us to predict moisture beyond that physical location of the sensor," Professor Wilson said.

"The sensor itself is measuring about 100 by 100 metres, and the data assimilation will allow that to be expanded far beyond that location."

Researchers believe the system could benefit a wide range of agricultural sectors, including dairy, grazing and cropping operations.

"Better soil moisture data means better decisions," PhD student Cai explained.

"For dairy farmers, it can help optimize pasture growth. For cropping systems, it can improve irrigation timing and reduce water

waste. Ultimately, it supports both productivity and sustainability."

Wilson said irrigation management is likely to be the primary use of the technology, but the information could also help guide decisions about fertiliser application and overall farm management.

"There is the ability to have quite precise irrigation in terms of the hardware for irrigating, but there isn't always the data to feed into that," he said.

"The idea is to provide that information to those systems."

The project comes as farmers in New Zealand and Australia face increasing pressure on water resources due to climate variability and more frequent drought conditions.

Wilson and Cai are collaborating with the University of Newcastle, and Monash University in Australia, as well as the Soil Cooperative Research Centre.

Prototype sensors are expected to be deployed on farms in New Zealand and Australia later this year, with field trials planned around September and October.

"We're looking to deploy prototypes on-farm in New Zealand and Australia this year," Wilson said.

The three-year project is currently in its early stages, with researchers expecting initial outputs from the system within the next two to two-and-a-half years.

"We're not just developing a new technology, we're building a system that will be publicly accessible and can be used day-to-day by farmers," said Wilson proudly.

"The goal is to deliver practical tools that make a real difference on the ground."



Boraman Consultants

Irrigation measurement & monitoring specialists

What we do:

Hydrology & Open Channel Measurement
Flow Meters Installation & Verification
Water Quality Sampling & Programs
Effluent Monitoring Pond Leakage Tests
Soil Moisture Sensor Installation & Service

What we sell:

Flow Meters
Data Loggers & Telemetry
Soil Moisture Sensors Probes & Strips
Weather Stations & Rain Gauges
Automatic Irrigation Gates

03 688 5539

free consultation
www.boraman.co.nz

Women in Seed Forum draws 120 to Christchurch gathering



Claire Inkson
RURAL EDITOR

More than 120 women from across New Zealand's seed and arable sectors gathered in Christchurch for the annual Women in Seed Forum, a day focused on leadership, innovation, wellbeing, business and connection within the industry.

Hosted by Seed and Grain New Zealand on May 28, the event brought together women working across the sector for a programme spanning agritech, artificial intelligence, financial wellbeing, entrepreneurship and leadership.

Seed and Grain New Zealand director and past president Charlotte Connoley said the purpose of Women in Seed was to grow knowledge while creating stronger connections across the industry.

"Women in Seed enables a collective of talented leaders and influential women in the seed industry to come together, to be themselves, to be inspired and energised, supporting each other to continue to thrive and contribute in our own extraordinary way," she said.

Connoley said the continued growth of the annual event showed just how important connection and support networks were for women working across the industry.

"The attendance numbers at this event show women really crave this connection, this network and this opportunity," she said.

"What's really special is seeing those relationships and networks evolve. In those early years, or if it's your first time attending, it can feel a little daunting, no different to walking into any industry conference.

"But now people walk in and immediately recognise familiar faces. Every year you meet someone new, strengthen connections and grow those networks further."

Connoley said those support systems were particularly important given the pressures many women were currently carrying both at work and at home.

"Women are often the cheerleaders. They're the fabric of home life as well as playing significant roles within the industry, so having a space like this where people can connect and support each other is really valuable."

Seed and Grain New Zealand chief executive Sarah Clark said the forum had become an important way of connecting women across the wider seed and grain sector, particularly in an industry still largely dominated by men.

"The agriculture sector is still male dominated," she said.

"Currently women make up about 35% of the food and fibre workforce, with higher female representation in support, advisory, science and value-chain roles."



Sarah Adams, of Gallagher, speaks during the annual Women in Seed event in Christchurch on May 28.
PHOTOS CLAIRE INKSON



More than 120 women from across New Zealand's seed and arable sectors attended the annual Women in Seed Forum in Christchurch.



Seed and Grain New Zealand director and past president Charlotte Connoley with guest speaker David Birkett.



Financial adviser Amy Po-Ching speaks on financial literacy and wealth building for women during the Women in Seed event.



Seed and Grain New Zealand chief executive Sarah Clark said the future for female representation in the industry looked positive, with strong numbers of women now entering agricultural education and graduate programmes.

Clark said while more women were now leading farming businesses and sitting on governance boards, there was still work to do across the wider sector.

"There remains a gap in gender diversity on agricultural governance boards," she said.

"There's an opportunity there for the wider agriculture industry to enable more participation from women; and an opportunity for women to step into those roles."

Clark said the future looked positive, with strong numbers of women now entering agricultural education and graduate programmes.

"Women are now well represented and often dominate in agricultural education," she said.

"Fifty-six percent of tertiary agriculture students were female, and in some graduate programmes more than 60% of applicants are women, indicating a strong incoming pipeline."

She said Women in Seed helped create both confidence and connection within the industry.

"There's a community of women doing important work in their companies, for the seed and grain industry and the NZ economy," she said.

"I think the day reminds women to know their value and what they bring to the table."

Clark also reflected on how much the event itself had grown since launching in 2019.

"The first Women in Seed forum was held in 2019, with 40 attendees," she said.

"And here we are seven years later with over 100 attendees, bringing inspiration, education, personal and professional development opportunities, and connection to our community."

The day featured a diverse lineup of speakers from across business, technology, finance and agriculture.

Gallagher's Sarah Adams spoke on agritech innovation and leadership, drawing on more than 25 years in agricultural business development and her work helping lead Gallagher's eShepherd technology platform from concept to commercial reality.

AI Forum New Zealand executive director Madeline Newman explored the growing role of artificial intelligence and emerging technologies, encouraging attendees to think about how AI would continue shaping industries and business decision-making into the future.

Financial adviser Amy Po-Ching focused on financial literacy and wealth building, particularly for women navigating careers, family life and long-term financial planning.

Linden Leaves founder Brigit Blair shared the story behind building one of New Zealand's best-known wellbeing and skincare brands, reflecting on entrepreneurship, purpose-led business and growing an internationally recognised company from New Zealand.

The final keynote of the day came from leadership speaker and media strategist Cassie Roma,

whose presentation centred on confidence, resilience, identity and navigating change.

Federated Farmers arable chairperson David Birkett stepped in at short notice after scheduled speaker Hamish Marr became unwell following overseas travel.

Birkett's presentation quickly became one of the major talking points of the day, offering a frank overview of both the opportunities and pressures currently facing New Zealand's arable sector.

He said resilience and diversification would be critical to the future of the industry, particularly following two extremely difficult seasons for many growers.

"The last two seasons have probably really highlighted that while those crops are higher value, they also become associated with a higher risk," he said.

"What we do every day is basically manage the risk that we have in front of us, whether that's from a weather point of view, market point of view or international factors."

Birkett said New Zealand's arable industry remained globally important, underpinning much of the wider agricultural sector through seed, feed and crop production.

He warned however that increasing imported feed use and continued dairy conversions were placing pressure on the sector.

"We used to be about 200,000 tonnes of imported feed into New Zealand. We're now four to four and a half million tonnes this year,"

he said.

"That's \$2 billion going out of our economy that could be circulating around the New Zealand agricultural economy."

He also raised concerns about the loss of quality arable land and infrastructure as more farms converted to dairy production.

"What we're seeing this time around is a significant loss of good land and good arable growers too."

Despite the challenges, Birkett said New Zealand remained well positioned internationally due to its climate, expertise and reliability of production.

"The Northern Hemisphere is really starting to struggle for production," he said.

"With our good water, good skills and good farmers and agronomy knowledge, we are able to keep that reliability as high as possible."

Birkett also challenged the industry to rethink some long-standing systems and structures, saying parts of the sector had changed little in decades.

"We've been operating the same system of production and procurement for about 40 years now," he said.

"Forty years is a long time in this day and age."

He said bringing more women into leadership and decision-making roles would help drive fresh thinking across the industry.

"I think women coming into the industry bring a different and newer look at the way in which the industry can develop and what a new system might look like."

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 swarms 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. "The slugs like nothing 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 assess 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.

For more information on Ironmax Pro, talk to your local technical merchant or contact Alex Easton, UPL NZ Regional Manager Upper South Island, at 027 578 0016.



The planet's favourite slug bait

Ironmax Pro®: Powerful But gentle on the earth

Ironmax Pro is next gen science that's building on the toughness of **Metarex® Inov**. And it's a great fit for all farming and growing practices – conventional, sustainable, regenerative, and organic.



IRONMAX PRO®



Talk to your local merchant to find out more.

Registered pursuant to the ACVM Act 1997, No. P009801
See www.foodsafety.govt.nz for registration conditions.
Approved pursuant to the HSNO Act 1996, Approval Code HSR000143
See www.epa.govt.nz for approval controls.
Ironmax is a registered trademark of De Sangosse SAS
UPLCORP.COM

AnnaFit founder recognised for rural health and wellness

CLAIRE INKSON

When Anna King entered the NZI Rural Women Business Awards, she did not quite realise the scale of what she was stepping into.

A client had suggested she apply, and King, founder of Pilates and movement business AnnaFit, decided to give it a go.

"I didn't even know about the Rural Women Business Awards. It was one of my clients who told me about it," King says.

"When I applied, I actually didn't realise how big it was. I just thought, that looks really cool, and off I went."

Now, King has been named winner of the Rural Health and Wellness Excellence category, joining seven other category winners from across New Zealand.

"I couldn't really believe it," she says. "I was kind of like, that's crazy."

For King, the recognition is about more than an award. It is a chance to step back and take stock of a business she has built from a rural hall and a garage into a growing health and wellness brand with two studios, one in Methven and one in Ashburton, as well as an online offering.

"It did take quite a bit of work," she says.

"My business is about working with people, so sitting at a computer and pulling everything together was a massive challenge. But I saw it as a really good challenge to look at my business from every avenue."

King had previously been a finalist in the Ashburton Business Awards, an experience

she says helped fuel her confidence to enter the Rural Women Business Awards.

The application process, and later the interview, gave her the chance to explain what AnnaFit is really about.

"It was really lovely to actually be able to express what I was about and for them to find out about me."

Winning, she says, felt like being seen.

"When you're chipping along doing your thing, you just get on with it. You hope people are getting something from what you do."

"To have someone else look at your business and say, you are doing a good job, we see you, that was really special."

After working for Air New Zealand and struggling with the demands of flying and time zones, King took six months' leave without pay to study full-time as a personal trainer.

She started by running local circuit classes in her garage and the Lauriston Hall.

"It was more for me as well, a bit of connection," she says.

"I grew up on a farm. I know how isolated it can be. It was about bringing people together."

Pilates came later, after the birth of her third child, Ollie.

King says her body was not able to do the things she loved, and there was no one nearby offering the kind of movement support she needed.

"So I thought, we are going to do this, and I'm going to do it to the best of my ability."



AnnaFit founder Anna King has been named winner of the Rural Health and Wellness Excellence category in the NZI Rural Women Business Awards. PHOTO SUPPLIED

"Just because we were working out of a garage in a rural setting, it didn't mean people couldn't have access to the absolute best I could provide."

That philosophy still sits at the heart of AnnaFit.

King says the business has always been driven by a desire to share movement that helps people live better, not just exercise harder.

"It came from a personal need, and then it became, I'm really passionate about what this can do for your body. How can we help as many people as possible?"

AnnaFit now offers reformer and mat Pilates, strength-based movement and on-demand classes. Its clients range from teenagers to people in their 80s, and include both women and men.

While the business has grown, King says the client stories that matter most are often the simple, everyday ones.

"We have amazing clients and amazing stories, but they are very real stories," she says.

"Things like, I can lift my child out of the wheelchair. I can play in the backyard with my grandson. I can play cricket again."

"That's all they wanted to do."

King describes Pilates as a whole-body workout that builds strength, flexibility, balance, stability and core function.

"Pilates is really good at everything," she says.

"If you want to be a runner, you need to run. If you want to be a swimmer, you need to swim. But Pilates supports everything."

She says the right studio and the right instructor are important, particularly for people who may feel unsure, injured, ageing or overwhelmed by the amount of health and fitness advice online.

King says she is also always learning.

"I have studied different styles of Pilates over many years. I have a diploma in clinical Pilates through an Australian education provider, and I am looking at university study next year if I can get entrance."

"For me, it is about continuing to learn and continuing to offer the best I can."

"There is too much information out there, and it is too overwhelming," King says.

Her approach is deliberately simple.

"Do what makes you happy. Keep it simple. Eat in moderation, eat what you enjoy, exercise the way you enjoy, get to bed early and move your body."

"Consistency is the most important thing."

King says women, particularly those in midlife, are often caught between conflicting advice about strength training, nutrition, supplements, menopause and fitness.

She believes there is value in cutting through the noise and helping people find movement they enjoy and can stick with.

"We are really normal humans," she says.

"I'm 49. I eat normal food. I've got a bit of perimenopause and menopause going on."

I'm exercising, I'm getting good sleep, and let's not get too caught up in the noise."

At AnnaFit, King says clients are progressively challenged, but in a way that is safe, supportive and functional.

"We are progressively overloading our clients. They are getting stronger because they keep turning up."

For King, rural access to high-quality health and wellness services matters.

"Just because we are rural doesn't mean we can't have the best."

King will travel to Wellington for the Rural Women Business Awards Gala Dinner at Parliament on July 23, where the Supreme winner will be announced.

She will be joined by two of her instructors, Kristy Gilchrist and Liz Johnson, along with members of her family.

"We just want to celebrate not only me and my achievement, but everyone else in the room," she says.

"To be at Parliament, and to celebrate rural New Zealand women, that is what I'm really looking forward to."

Rural Women New Zealand National President Heather Sorensen says the awards celebrate women building strong, innovative and impactful businesses in rural communities.

"We had a tough job as judges and were extremely impressed with the quality of entrants," Sorensen says.

"It is fantastic to see these dedicated businesswomen from across the country leading such successful enterprises."

Sorensen says the depth of talent among rural women in business continues to impress.

"Going through each application was an absolute privilege and the depth of talented rural women in New Zealand never ceases to amaze me," she says.

NZI EM Agencies and Schemes' Christina Chelley says the awards recognise the vital role women play in the success of rural businesses and communities.

"This year's entries were of an exceptionally high calibre, reflecting the depth of capability in rural, women-led businesses across New Zealand," she says.

Alongside King, the other 2026 category winners are Karen McGrath of Southern Alp Sprouts for Love of the Land, Kate McDonald of Davaar for Creative at Heart, Kathryn Jackson of Career Balance for Innovation, Kylie Dorr of Southern Reproductive for Emerging Enterprise, Millie Aitken of Bar M Custom Tack for Young Businesswoman, Philippa Cameron of What's for Smoko for Rural Champion, and Sonia Minnaar and Liz Henderson of Canopy Camping for Experience Rural.

For King, simply being among them is something to celebrate.

"I'm really excited to celebrate the room, the event, the occasion, and Rural Women New Zealand."

DONAGHYS
150 YEARS
INNOVATING SINCE 1876

Are you rethinking your urea usage?



If urea price increases have you rethinking your nitrogen strategy, now's the perfect time to look at a more efficient system for your farm.

Insulating your on-farm costs has never mattered more... that's where N-Boost® comes in. Farmers using N-Boost® are seeing increased pasture responses from just 40 kg of urea, making every application work harder.

If you're ready to rethink your nitrogen strategy and get more dry matter for your dollar, N-Boost® is worth a serious look. Try a new system and milk the benefits from day one.

To hear from other farmers and explore the science behind N-Boost® visit donaghys.co.nz/performancelab.

Learn more at donaghys.co.nz/performancelab or call 0800 942 006

Victoria Roskam

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 Piarere Young Farmers Club member Victoria Roskam.

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

Piarere Young Farmers, coming up three years. I joined as soon as I was old enough.

2 What has been the highlight for you of joining Young Farmers?

The friendships I have made have been a highlight. I've enjoyed helping with hay and silage jobs alongside other hard-working members and having a good yarn with like-minded people who share a passion for agriculture.

3 What are the benefits and experiences that you feel have helped you most?

Young Farmers have helped me build confidence. It has given me opportunities to learn from experienced farmers, step outside my comfort zone, and meet people who share similar goals and interests.

4 How did you become involved in agriculture?

I was born and bred into it. I am the fourth generation on both my parents' sides of dairy farmers.

5 What is your job now?

I am currently a Year 13 pupil at Matamata College. When I'm not at school, I spend my time helping Dad and my brother on the family dairy farm.

6 Tell us about your role, and what your journey has been like so far?

I have been helping out on the family farm since I was big enough to help. From putting up fences, feeding calves, milking cows and now even monitoring our cows with Halter. I love how no two days are the same and enjoy being outside with the animals.

7 If you are farming, please tell us about your farming operation?

Our family operates a 65-hectare dairy farm in Okauia, milking 210 Jersey cows.

8 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 think the future of farming is bright. Technology is becoming a bigger part of everyday farming and will continue to help improve efficiency, animal welfare, and environmental sustainability. Going forward, I would like to see New Zealand agriculture continue to innovate while ensuring farmers are supported to remain productive, profitable, and passionate about what they do.

9 What are your future plans?

My goal is to study Veterinary Science and work alongside farmers to help improve animal health and farm productivity. I want to use my farming background to support farmers from the ground up.

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

My biggest inspiration in agriculture has been my brother Edward. Growing up, I have always looked up to him and admired his passion for farming. It was really frowned upon by his teachers that he did not go to university. He proved them all wrong, placing in Young Farmer competitions and winning dairy trainee for the Waikato in the Dairy Industry awards. He has taught me a lot about hard work, dedication, and the importance of taking pride in what you do. Whether it's helping on the farm, competing together at Young Farmers' events, or tackling challenges as a team, he has always encouraged me to learn new skills and push myself. It was such a cool feeling to place second with him in the WaiBop fencing competition. His commitment to agriculture has inspired me to pursue a future in the industry and work towards becoming a veterinarian.

About Piarere Young Farmers

Piarere Young Farmers is a welcoming club that provides great opportunities for young people interested in agriculture. It is a place where lifelong friendships are made, skills are developed, and members are encouraged to get involved, give things a go, and have fun along the way.



Nomination —

Victoria is giving her all to Young Farmers despite a brain injury about 15 months ago. Victoria came to our club with her brother and is now a valued member. At only 17 years old she's participating alongside school and supporting those on the committee, including the chairman when she doesn't have to. She took a step outside of her comfort zone and stepped up to compete in the fencing tournament alongside her older brother Ed and they came second! A massive achievement for her considering her journey. She's coming out of her shell and is the life of a fundraising role with her jokes, witty commentary and really great silage cover-hole patching! We can't wait to see how far she goes!

Be Farmstrong Live Well, Farm Well

We know you are the most important asset on the farm, so look after yourself!

Use these questions to lock in small changes that make a big difference. Want to know more? Visit farmstrong.co.nz

Farmstrong is proudly supported by FMG, partnering for the good of the country.

Do you tick the following boxes?

- ☒ Am I getting enough sleep?
- ☒ Am I talking to someone about what's on my mind?
- ☒ Am I eating well and keeping physically active?
- ☒ Am I having down-time to recharge?
- ☒ Do I have a list of what is realistic to achieve each day?

The money conversations rural women need to have

CLAIRE INKSON

When Levridge founder and financial adviser Amy Po-Ching stood in front of a room full of women at the Women in Seed Forum in Christchurch last month, the discussion quickly turned from KiwiSaver and investing to a subject women can feel uncomfortable talking about: financial independence.

But it's a conversation worth having.

Not because all relationships are expected to fail, Po-Ching says, but because life can change quickly leaving women financially vulnerable, often in ways nobody sees coming.

Health issues happen. Businesses struggle. Relationships break down. Partners die unexpectedly. And statistically, around one in three marriages will end in divorce.

For many women, particularly in rural New Zealand, financial vulnerability can build quietly over time.

"A lot of rural women contribute enormous value that isn't always reflected in their own financial position," Po-Ching says.

"They're helping build family wealth through the farm, but they don't always have a clear picture of what they personally own or control."

For many farming families, it happens gradually.

A woman moves onto the farm, career opportunities narrow geographically, children arrive, and over time she becomes more involved in supporting the business and family than building financial security in her own name.

Meanwhile, KiwiSaver contributions slow (or stop altogether), retirement savings stall and assets remain tied up in the farm itself.

"A lot of women are effectively business partners in farming businesses, but they don't necessarily see themselves that way," Po-Ching says.

Importantly, she is careful not to frame the issue as men versus women.

In many relationships, one person naturally takes the lead financially while the other focuses elsewhere. The concern, she says, is when one partner has little visibility or understanding around the family finances.

"If something happened tomorrow, whether through illness, death or separation, would you know where everything is? Would you know how to pick things up?" she says.

"That awareness is really important."

For farming families, the complexity can be even greater, with trusts, ownership structures and succession plans often layered through businesses and generations.

Po-Ching says women should understand exactly what structures are in place, what they personally own and what retirement planning looks like for them individually.

"We often see people in farming communities reach retirement with huge assets in land, but very little cashflow," she says.

"Everything gets poured back into the farm, machinery, improvements, expansion, but ideally people should also be building assets outside the farm where possible."

That idea alone can feel intimidating for many women, particularly when it comes to investing.

"A lot of women find investing scary because it feels unknown," Po-Ching says.

"The more knowledge people have, the more confidence they gain."

She encourages women to start small, listening to podcasts, reading books and learning the basics gradually.

Platforms such as Sharesies and managed funds have made investing more accessible than ever before, allowing people to begin with relatively small amounts.

Po-Ching explains shares as buying ownership in a company, while bonds are effectively loans made to businesses in exchange for fixed returns.

"Bonds are generally lower risk with steadier returns," she says.

"Shares tend to move around more, but over the long term they generally offer stronger growth."

The key, she says, is understanding timeframes.

"Shares should generally be viewed as long-term investments, seven to 10 years or more," she



Amy Po-Ching says financial confidence starts with understanding your position, knowing what you own, what you owe and where you want to go financially. PHOTO SUPPLIED

says.

"You need enough time to ride out the ups and downs."

KiwiSaver also remains one of the simplest starting points for many women, although Po-Ching says rural and self-employed women should understand their options properly.

For employees, KiwiSaver includes employer contributions and government incentives. For self-employed people, managed funds outside KiwiSaver can sometimes offer more flexibility while still allowing long-term investing.

But above all, Po-Ching says the biggest mistake women make is waiting.

Many women wish they had started earlier, she says,

but it is never too late to begin understanding your financial position and making a plan for the future.

"People in their thirties and forties say they wish they'd started 10 years ago. People in their fifties and sixties say the same thing," she says.

"But today is the best time to start."

Her advice is simple.

"Understand your financial position. Know what you own, know what you owe, know how your family's wealth is structured, and don't be afraid to ask questions," she says.

Po-Ching also recommends starting with the free DIY financial planner available on the Levridge website as a way for women to begin understanding their financial position and goals.

"Financial confidence starts with clarity."

For Po-Ching, whose own life has included building and selling a successful financial planning business, divorce, chronic illness and single motherhood, financial literacy is about much more than growing wealth.

"The biggest transformation is confidence," she says.

"When women know they are going to be financially okay, it changes how they approach life, relationships and decision-making."

Disclaimer: This article contains general information only and does not constitute personalised financial advice. Readers should seek professional advice specific to their individual circumstances before making financial decisions. The DIY financial planner and more information be found at www.levridge.co.nz

acl
Plumbing & Gas

Complete water treatment solutions.

Reliable water treatment for rural Canterbury.

• **UV DISINFECTION**
Chemical-free protection for bore water

• **NITRATE REMOVAL**
Safer drinking water for Canterbury homes

• **WATER SOFTENING**
Stop scale damage and hard water

• **IRON REMOVAL**
Eliminate stains, odours & metallic taste

• **REVERSE OSMOSIS**
Ultra-pure drinking water at home

• **WATER TESTING**
Certified sampling & lab reporting

• **SYSTEMS, PARTS & FILTERS**
Supply, install & servicing

• **IQP BACKFLOW TESTING**
Fast compliance certification

• **WATER TREATMENT SPECIALISTS**
Tailored solutions for every property

• **CERTIFIED PLUMBERS**
Trusted local water experts

FOR ALL
YOUR
PLUMBING
NEEDS

FULL SERVICE PLUMBING, RENOVATION,
AND WATER TREATMENT NEEDS.

Cnr Range & Robinson
Streets, Ashburton



BOOK TODAY
308 4039

www.ashcon.co.nz

To repair or replace?

As the financial year draws to a close, now is often the time to revisit that to-do list, and those jobs you've been putting off all year start getting another look. Whether it's a tractor that has become increasingly temperamental, a set of yards that have seen better days, or a project that's been sitting on the wish list for months, the question is often the same: should I repair what I already own, or replace it altogether?

The Investment Boost has added another layer to these decisions, with some vendors promoting the incentive as a 20% discount. While the impact on your tax position is important, the first question when considering a significant purchase should be: how will this improve my business?

Remember, you're not spending a dollar to save a dollar. For a Company in New Zealand, when spending a dollar, you're saving twenty-eight cents. Accountants have a reputation of being naturally conservative, but we're not saying don't spend that dollar! We're simply encouraging you to consider your options. Before signing on that dotted line, remember that not every dollar needs to be spent on new kit. In some cases, repairing your existing

equipment may achieve a similar outcome, at a lower cost and a comparable tax benefit.

In my world (the world of rural accounting that is), not all spending is treated equally. New assets (including those that qualify for the Investment Boost) will be capitalised, and the cost will be claimed over time through depreciation. Some costs, however, are incurred to restore an existing asset to its previous condition, and these are often fully deductible. You know better than us the condition of your gear, and how much you have already spent on it in the past, so perhaps the upgrade is justified, but new isn't always better.

The government introduced the Investment Boost in May 2025 as a tax incentive. It allows businesses to claim 20% upfront of the cost of new (key word!) capital items. However, to claim the 20%, you still need to pay 100% of the cost — the \$100,000 investment doesn't suddenly cost you \$80,000 because of the Investment Boost.

In addition to this, the item is still recorded on your fixed asset schedule at \$100,000. The investment boost simply accelerates the depreciation you're able to claim - the original cost doesn't change, nor does the total amount of depreciation you will

claim over the life of the asset. This is something to keep in mind, as the tax benefit you've received up front may affect the tax treatment when the item is eventually sold.

It's easy to focus on the new purchase, but what happens to the item you're replacing? Are you keeping it, trading it in, selling it? All these options can have different tax consequences, so make sure you've considered both sides of the

transaction before you make your final decision.

I can appreciate the lure of the Investment Boost, but it shouldn't drive your decision. Repairing your existing items remains a valid option, and generally these costs are 100% deductible. The ideal scenario is that you had budgeted to complete upgrades anyway, so the incentive only strengthens the case — but don't just buy new

items with the intention of saving tax. The best investments should first make sense for your business, and then make sense for tax.

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.*



**GARY McCORMICK
TRANSPORT LTD**



- **Open top bins for property and garden clean ups, perfect for moving off the farm.**
- **Bins already on a number of farms in the area and casual hire available**
- **Household and/or Garden waste Drum empty service**
- **Regular Rubbish Removal Service, with many local companies hiring our Front Loader Bins and using our Cardboard Recycling Cages**

All provided by a Company based in Tinwald.

Gary McCormick Transport Ltd
PO Box 5044, Tinwald, Ashburton 7741 | Phone: 3072100 | Fax: 3072101

ALPS
CONTINUOUS SPOUTING



We pride ourselves on our workmanship & the quality continuous spouting product we offer. Less joins reduces the risk of leaks.

10 YEAR LEAK FREE GUARANTEE

Call Ben
03 308 4380 or 027 390 1027

www.alpscontinuousspouting.com

Beneath the stars at Lynton Downs



Claire Inkson

RURAL
EDITOR

There is a quiet kind of magic about Lynton Downs.

Maybe it is the stillness of the hills. The creak of an old homestead staircase. The sight of sheep moving through the paddocks beneath mountain ranges that seem to rise straight out of the earth.

Or perhaps it is the feeling that this is a place layered with stories.

Built in the 1860s and added onto over generations, Lynton Downs has stood watch over inland Kaikōura for well over a century. The weatherboard homestead, complete with its distinctive turret and sprawling gardens, has weathered changing owners, farming seasons, earthquakes and family life.

Today, Lynton Downs remains owned by the Rickman family, who purchased the station in 1958. Rachel and Kurt Bartrum have spent the past 17 years farming the property and acting as custodians of its historic homestead, while quietly building a farmstay experience, grounded in both luxury and authenticity.

The 3,500-hectare property runs Romney sheep, Angus cattle and forestry across the rugged inland Kaikōura landscape.

"We feel incredibly privileged to be part of this property's history and preserving it for the future," Rachel said.

"Lynton Downs is a very special place for a lot of people."

The couple began the farmstay in 2014 after Rachel, who has a kindergarten teaching background, began looking for something she could do from home while still supporting Kurt and family life on the farm.

At the time, the East Wing of the homestead was sitting largely unused except for occasional visits from the Rickman family, while The Quarters, once home to shepherds and musterers, had become little more than a storage space.

"We cleaned out years of stored antiques, junk and even bees living in the walls," Rachel laughed.

From there, the farmstay gradually grew into what is now a sought-after rural retreat attracting both international and domestic visitors.

Today, guests can stay either in the historic East Wing apartment within the original homestead or The Quarters, a restored cottage-style space overlooking the surrounding farmland and hills.

Many arrive from Europe through tourism operators specialising in smaller, experience-led accommodation, away from busy tourist centres.

Others simply stumble across it while looking for something slower and more grounded than the typical holiday stay.

And that slower pace is exactly what many guests seem to remember.

"We'll have guests from places like Singapore where they're raising children in apartments overlooking concrete buildings," Rachel said.



Lynton Downs homestead sits beneath the towering inland Kaikōura ranges, surrounded by mature trees, gardens and rolling farmland. PHOTOS SUPPLIED



The Bartrum family (from left) Billy, Shannon, Henry, Poppy, Rachel and Kurt Bartrum at Lynton Downs, where farming, history and hospitality come together beneath the inland Kaikōura ranges.

"Then they come here and their kids are feeding pet lambs, collecting eggs and picking apples from trees.

"You realise how special things are that you probably take for granted."

Unlike heavily curated tourism experiences, the Bartrums have deliberately kept the farmstay connected to the reality of daily farming life.

Guests might watch working dogs move stock, wander down to the woolshed, walk through native bush gullies alive with birdsong, or simply sit quietly beneath the trees with a cup of tea.

"We don't do a staged show-farm experience," Rachel said.

"We just share what's naturally happening on the farm at the time."

That openness extends to the food baskets left in the accommodation too, often stocked with preserved fruit from the property, home baking and seasonal produce from the garden Rachel lovingly maintains herself.

"The garden is probably my therapy really," she said.

"When we arrived, it hadn't been loved for a long time, and after the earthquake we had to redo large parts of it again."

The 2016 Kaikōura earthquake left significant damage throughout the property and homestead.

At one point the family became trapped upstairs and had to escape through a bedroom window into

the garden below.

"We'd actually practised what to do with the kids," Rachel said.

"So, they kind of knew the plan."

Large sections of the home were eventually stripped and rebuilt, though great care was taken to preserve the original character and footprint of the house.

Today, alongside the farmstay itself, the Bartrums are continuing to evolve the experience through environmental restoration projects, native planting and a new partnership with Moana Skies.

The collaboration allows guests to experience Kaikōura's internationally recognised dark skies from the farm itself.

"We've got a site up on the property with virtually no light pollution at all," Rachel said.

"The skies up here are pretty incredible."

The couple have also fenced waterways, expanded native planting and are developing additional walking tracks through regenerating bush areas on the property.

For Rachel, however, perhaps the most rewarding part has simply been seeing people reconnect with a version of rural New Zealand that feels increasingly rare.

"We get busy doing the farming side of things," she said.

"So, it's actually really nice seeing people slow down and truly take it all in."



The Quarters blends rustic charm with modern comfort, offering guests a peaceful farmstay retreat in the heart of the high country.



Inside The Quarters, cosy cottage-style living spaces offer a relaxed and authentic taste of rural New Zealand.

Wita Svensson

WHERE AND WHAT ARE YOU FARMING?

I'm not farming, although based in Canterbury, a lot of my family and friends are. I'm a Registered Nurse.

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

She is a 2021 Mazda BT50 XTR 4x4 (Australia Model)

She's called "Kaldr" (old Norse — loyal wolf/hero)

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

The 9 inch touchscreen with wireless Apple CarPlay and the roof bar that makes the Ute look sexier!

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

Coldplay & Calvin Harris are always on my playlist!

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

Can't go wrong with Beef Jerky/ Biltong to snack on during a road trip.

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

Fishing rods and camping stool are always in the back tray, and a dog bowl in the backseat for my dog Badger.



LUSHINGTON'S

inspirational garden center

NOW
\$54.99ea
WERE \$65

CROQUELLA APPLE

Compact, dwarf apple – perfect for pots and small gardens.

ROSES

Beautiful blooms for every garden.

OVER 170 VARIETIES!

PORTUGUESE LIUREL STANDARDS

Evergreen standards for formal gardens and entrances.

BUY OVER 2 PAY \$79.99ea

QUALITY PLANTS
EXPERT ADVICE

CAFÉ & GIFTWARE
TO INSPIRE

LOCALLY OWNED
& OPERATED

NEW WINTER MENU!

FRESH, SEASONAL & DELICIOUS

Suppliers to

Main South Road, Tinwald
033086858
www.lushingtons.co.nz

OPEN 7 DAYS

What is a risk?



Eva Harris

A frighteningly long time ago, I subscribed to a weekly newsletter that provided updates on the latest science and innovations in the food safety space. One issue reported new research confirming the potential exposure risk of *Campylobacter* from raw eggs as 1 in 20,000. Given how dangerous I thought raw eggs were at the time, the information was a revelation. My immediate reaction was, "I'd have to eat 20,000 eggs before I got sick, therefore eggs are safe."

Then my boss said, "You wouldn't think that if you were McDonald's."

It got me thinking about how our experience and context influence our perception of risk and the actions needed to mitigate it. As we move into a world of national

risk-based freshwater farm plans, we need a way to objectively assess environmental risk and determine appropriate mitigations. Otherwise, we risk leaving too much open to individual interpretation.

The key benefit of a risk-based approach is that it creates an opportunity to really look under the 'lid' of a farm and ensure time and resources are invested for maximum bang for buck. It targets effort towards those activities most likely to have the greatest impact. An iterative *plan-do-check-act-review* system provides the structure to implement improvements over time while also holding farmers accountable. It is easy to see why the farming community promotes these farm plans as a practical way to support improved environmental outcomes.

The challenge is that this approach is *hard*.

It is hard for paper-pushing bureaucrats to wrap their heads around a biological system managed by variables no one can control, such as the weather. It is hard for farmers to understand what is enough and

not feel as though they are chasing shifting goalposts. It is hard for experienced and knowledgeable advisors not to focus on the areas they know best while overlooking the parts they are less familiar with.

The process requires more time, labour, skills, and experience than will likely be available when it is rolled out on a national scale.

Inevitably, users of the system will want consistency, direction, and guidance. Communities want assurance that environmental outcomes are being achieved, and regulators will respond by creating checklists and minimum standards that can be universally applied. It

will look like action is being taken. Farm plans and audits will become tick-box exercises. Minimum standards will become inflexible and, in many cases, require people to do either too much or too little to achieve the outcomes the process was designed to deliver.

And no meaningful improvements will actually be made.

The conflict is not about what we want to achieve, but how we achieve it at scale. We want the flexibility to make day-to-day farming decisions that address environmental risk in ways that fit our individual circumstances. At the same time, we want a system

that is cost effective, simple, consistent, and fair.

In reality, nuance and choice within a regulatory framework require good systems, capable people, and trust from regulators who understand that meaningful change takes time. If we want to go down that pathway, we need to demonstrate the hard way can work effectively in practice. If we want a simple system instead, we need to accept the rules created will inevitably disadvantage someone.

Eva Harris is Principal Environmental Advisor, Enviro Collective



Let winter be winter



LEANNE BLAKELOCK

The mornings are slow to lighten. The grass slows. Trees stand bare against grey skies. The ground is heavier underfoot, and evenings draw us indoors earlier.

Across many dairy farms, cows are dry and calf sheds are empty between seasons. Elsewhere, there are wintering animals arriving, stock to feed and mud to manage. But winter carries a different rhythm.

The natural world does not apologise for this. It contracts and gathers itself before the next burst of growth. Paddocks are not embarrassed by reduced output. Trees do not try to hold their leaves through winter to prove a point. A dairy cow is dried off so she can reset before another season begins.

Nature understands that there are seasons for output and seasons for replenishment. We are not always as good at granting ourselves the same permission. Only humans would look at a season designed for restoration and wonder how to make it more productive.

Perhaps winter is not a problem to overcome, but a rhythm we are meant to follow.

I have been reading Oliver Burkeman's *Four Thousand Weeks*, named for the confronting idea that an average human life contains only about four thousand weeks. At first, it sounds like a call to arms. Time is limited. Fit more in.

There is truth in that. There are seasons when we need to push. Proverbial hay must be made while the sun shines. Some things matter enough to require effort and a

willingness to keep going. *Four Thousand Weeks* offers a deeper and more truthful statement. We will never complete everything on our to-do list.

Imagine a farmer in 1750. Their life was not easy, and there is no need to romanticise it. But time was experienced differently. Work followed daylight, weather, animals and the task at hand. You milked until the milking was finished. You cut hay when conditions were right. You chopped enough wood before dark.

There was no illusion that the list would one day be complete. A person moved with the season rather than treating every hour as a container to fill.

Modern rural life still follows those rhythms, but we also live with smartphones, emails, deadlines, compliance calendars

and electric light, allowing us to push days beyond their natural edges. The message is relentless. Do more. Answer faster. Optimise everything.

Even rest can become another task. Walk briskly, track your steps and heartrate. Listen to something useful. There is nothing wrong with active relaxation, but sometimes we need something slower.

A fire. A book. A cup of tea going cold beside us. A meal that takes time. A conversation that meanders. An early night. An afternoon with nothing to show for it. Rest in all its delicious ordinariness. The old-fashioned luxury of doing nothing and the discipline to do so. Everything that winter, in all its slower hibernation and replenishment era, invites us to do.

A life of four thousand weeks is

too short to drift through without intention, but it is also too short to spend permanently rushing, physically present and mentally elsewhere.

Perhaps the wisdom is in knowing the season we are in and giving ourselves permission to live accordingly.

Winter is an invitation to soften. To let shorter days be shorter days. Spring will come. The grass will lift its head, the days will lengthen and the next rush of life will arrive soon enough.

For now, perhaps we can enjoy winter slowly. To follow the light and to let winter be winter in our lives.

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

Carters Creek group marks three years of community action



WILLY LEFERINKS

It's amazing to think that the Carters Creek catchment group is now three years old.

One of the more recent achievements of the group has been looking after a council reserve area next to the creek on Melcombe Street, gradually planting it out to reduce sediment and pollutants entering the creek. A nearby local in his eighties wandered over to tell us recently that he enjoys visiting the site. The area is no longer an eye sore and he feels we are doing a good job protecting the creek. He likes to help out by putting plant guards back on the natives when the wind blows them off. Enhancement of the creek, in his opinion, has made the Melcombe Street reserve a more attractive place for the many people who use this area for dogwalking and exercise.

On our third anniversary, a bunch of keen volunteers returned to Melcombe Street to top up the natives and to weed areas needing attention. Led by local Leen Braam and his wife Lianne, another 250 plants were dug in. Carex Secta were dominant, but we've also added new Cionochloa Rubra, Anemanthele Lessioniana,

Chionochloa Flavicans and Carex Testacea plants.

What we've found since taking over the site a year ago is that some species are doing better than others. The creek's banks are steep and very stony as our volunteers discovered when digging in the new plants, especially on the back of this prolonged dry spell. But the creek itself provides freshes (natural irrigation) during heavy rainfall and one year in there's been good establishment, particularly on the northern banks. It's been disappointing to see a few gaps where plants have died or perhaps been removed by those wanting a free native plant to take home, but we're hoping over time the mix of species will harden up and bed in providing solid riparian protection.

Thanks also must go to local Councillor Phill Hooper who joined the planting event. As well as digging in plants, Phill took wonderful video that we could share. We had a couple of new faces from the Lake Hood community turn up. Residents around the lake are aware that Carters Creek is one of the contributors to the lake's water quality problem, so helping with efforts to minimise pollution upstream is a good motivator.

Members of the Carters Creek catchment group are talking to the residents' association at Lake Hood about ways we can better integrate our efforts and collaborate on future planting projects. Our group has not only been active planting. Two years ago, we encouraged more than 100 submissions from the community which led ECan to set aside funding in their long-term plan for flood mitigation. We have also been successful in advocating for drain cleaning and monitoring of potential pollution sources in the catchment.

If you want to know more about the group or get involved, we welcome hearing from you. The catchment group covers an area from 7km above Tinwald, including rural properties through Tinwald itself, covering farming and lifestyle properties downstream and finishing at the Lake Hood community where the creek enters one of the canals. If you live anywhere in the catchment, you are eligible to join.

You can get in touch with myself (021796037) or our facilitator Janine Holland on jrholland@xtra.co.nz or 0274604940.

**Willy Leferinks is
Carters Creek Catchment
Group chairperson**



Rural Guardian recognised at national awards

Rural Guardian has been named runner-up for Best Magazine at the 2026 New Zealand Community Newspapers Association Independent Better Newspapers Awards.

Judges described Rural Guardian as "superbly on target for its farming audience", praising its "great editorial and advertising content", interesting cover subjects and strong use of photos.

It is a proud moment for our small team, and one we do not take for granted.

Independent journalism only exists because of the communities behind it. For Rural Guardian, that means the readers who pick us up each month, the advertisers who continue to back local storytelling, and the many rural people who trust us to share their stories.

So, quite simply, thank you.

Thank you for reading, supporting, advertising, contributing ideas, sending in stories, and allowing us to keep shining a light on rural New Zealand.

It is a real privilege to tell these stories, and this recognition belongs as much to our community as it does to us.

nz community
newspapers
Association

Independent Better Newspapers

2026 Awards

RURAL GUARDIAN

**Runner-Up
BEST MAGAZINE**

David Mackenzie
President - New Zealand Community Newspapers Association Inc.

On the tools: Mt Hutt College builds a new pathway for hands-on learning



Amy Riach

Learning doesn't always happen inside the classroom. At Mount Hutt College Methven, that's the whole point.

And a brand-new building, taking shape on the edge of the school grounds, is challenging the idea that education belongs behind a desk.

The Ōpuke Innovation Hub, a purpose-built trades and agriculture facility, is still in the final stages of construction, but it is already transforming the way local students participate, both in school, and within the wider community.

"We're most looking forward to having more engaged students, who are loving school," said Vocational Pathways Academy Co-Ordinator, Amy Honeywell.

"What we're seeing now is that kids are wanting to come to school, kids are staying after school to continue working on projects.

It's real engagement, and it's real passion."

Fostering that passion, in students who aren't normally keen on school, has been a project years in the making.

"It's been a long time coming," Honeywell explained. "At least five years from the initial conception, through to working alongside the community, planning, and then changing our planning, and planning some more!"

What began as an optimistic idea has quickly become one of the most ambitious education projects in the district, driven not by government funding, but by a community determined to create new opportunities for its young people.

Project coordinator Shane Stockdill, or 'Stocky', as he is known, said the feedback from the community, and the support from local businesses, has been "really, really fantastic."

Stockdill, whose family has farmed in Methven for generations, still remembers feeling disconnected from his own traditional schooling.

"We weren't model students, we weren't great students, but we weren't overly disruptive students.

We just had the question of, why are we doing this? For example, algebra. What use is algebra ever going to be to me in the workplace?"

But practical learning changes that.

"If you can find a practical understanding of why you do need algebra, or trigonometry, or biology, if you can find the reason why, and then translate that back to why you're learning it, you're going to have a student who's much more engaged," Stockdill said.

"Kids are usually disruptive because they're bored, or because they're not engaged. So if we can 'un-bored' them and engage them, you can really get a connection."

For many students, he explained proudly, the Hub has become exactly that.

"We've found an on-switch for them, and that's what this was all about."

For vocational students, like Year 12 Pieter Struwig, the hands-on learning approach has been a game changer.

A future builder, Struwig said, "it's just really good not having to be in a class, here you're actually physically doing it."

The practical nature of the class helps subjects like maths suddenly make sense.

"With maths, you're sitting in class, thinking in your head what you're going to be doing, but here you're physically doing the equations in a real-world situation," Struwig said.

"It's a lot easier to do maths that way, for me, than on a desk."

Most importantly, he enjoys it.

"It's good to actually work with your hands. I'm loving it a lot."

That connection between classroom learning and real-life application was one of the driving motivations behind the Hub.

Built by the community, for the community, the Hub was still a pipe-dream back in 2021, when the Covid-19 Lockdown hit, and Mt Hutt College began their first community survey.

More than 1,000 responses poured in from local residents, businesses and industry leaders, helping shape the school's future direction.

Principal Jack Saxon said the feedback was "invaluable," directing the project at every stage.

"We used that Covid period, while our head students were all home in isolation, to really canvas the community," he explained.

"That's the one really unique thing about this project: it's not just a school that has come up with an idea. The idea had its genesis with the community, and the entire program has been informed by community partnership."

Honeywell explained, that consultation highlighted two key priorities.

"The community really wanted us to strengthen our current agriculture programme and provide provisions for trades education," she said.

"So we've really honed into that, and we're really focused on not just providing those things, but really preparing kids for the future."

The goal is not to train students in one narrow profession.

"It's not about trying to develop a whole lot of mini-builders," she laughed.

Instead, students are exposed to a wide range of practical skills, which can easily be applied across multiple industries.

"We're trying to give them a taste of as many different trades as possible, and skills that are transferable across all of the trades."

Ultimately, she says, the Hub is about helping young people find direction.

"We're helping them to become work-ready, real-world candidates, with skills that are desirable for employers."

And perhaps even more importantly: helping students



Year 12 student Cody Ramsey-Turner, with one of many pest traps he is busy making for the local area. PHOTOS SUPPLIED



Trades teacher Alex Roberts, giving a demonstration on the power saw.

"develop a passion and find their pathway. Find their jam!" she said proudly.

For Methven, that vocational priority made perfect sense.

"My own background is farming," Stockdill said, and through that lens, he saw "enormous potential" sitting right on the school's doorstep.

"Methven in particular has got a lot of agriculture and trade-related industry right here on our back door. But we weren't tapping into any of that," he said.

"We had so much potential to tap into, but we needed classes and a home base to be able to do that."

Now that is exactly what the Hub has provided, and the response from local industry has exceeded expectations.

In fact, the project has raised well over \$500,000 through grants, donations and fundraising efforts.

With no Ministry of Education funding, support has come instead from community organisations, charitable trusts, businesses, and generous locals who believed in the vision.

"The community support has been quite humbling really," Stockdill said.

Step into the Hub, and the newly-fledged trades programme, and it quickly becomes clear this is not school as many people

remember it.

Students don't simply walk in, and sit down. They wear personal protective equipment, follow workplace safety procedures, and operate as though they are on a professional job site.

"It would be no different to any real-world work site," Stockdill said.

"They come in the entry door, there's a QR code, they have to scan in for the day, they wear their PPE. It really is just a simulated workplace."

Students also complete first aid training and workplace health and safety qualifications alongside their practical projects.

Year 11 and 12 students can earn NCEA unit standard credits through the programme, with the course occupying the equivalent of two subjects and offering double the credits.

Places are limited. Students must apply and attend interviews, much like they would when applying for a job.

Currently, there are two trades classes of just 12 students each.

"They really need to want to be there," Honeywell says.

"They have to be engaged, they have to be focused, they have to work together as a team."

The approach appears to be working. Already, the programme

has seen its first graduating student accepted into an apprenticeship.

The projects students are working on aren't hypothetical exercises, they're real jobs, with real clients, and real expectations.

Year 11 students are currently designing and constructing a market cart; and they started from zero, leading the planning, quantity surveying, welding, and working alongside engineers.

Industry professionals regularly visit the Hub, introducing students to specialist skills, including plumbing and electrical work.

Meanwhile, Year 12 students are undertaking an even larger challenge.

Two shipping containers, donated by Bradford Building, are being transformed by Mt Hutt students into fully functional site facilities.

One container will become an office block, the other will become a toilet and amenities block, and once completed, both will be donated back to contractors for use on worksites.

As Saxon said, the projects expose students to a remarkable range of trades.

"They're working on a staffroom, they're working on an ablution block, and between those they've got almost every trade available ticked off," he said.

FARMING THROUGH THE FOG



Survey seeks to understand wellbeing needs of women in farming

CLAIRE INKSON

Women working and living on farms across Aotearoa New Zealand are being urged to take part in a national survey researchers hope will help fill a long-standing gap in rural wellbeing data.

The Health and Wellbeing of Women in Farming survey is being run by researchers from Massey and Lincoln universities and is open to women who work and/or live on-farm.

Massey University's Nicky Stanley-Clarke says while rural mental health has become a much more visible issue in recent years, the experiences of women in farming households, businesses and communities are still not well understood.

"Historically, farming has been very gender based," she says.

"The farmer is often seen as the man, and a lot of the attention around rural mental health has quite rightly focused on men because the suicide statistics are terrible.

"But we don't know a lot about what is going on for women."

Stanley-Clarke's interest in farming household wellbeing began in 2016 during the dairy farming crisis, when concerns were growing around farmer mental health.

At the time, she wanted to understand not only how farmers themselves were being affected, but how that pressure was impacting everyone else in the

farming household.

More recently, she and Lincoln University's Jorie Knook and Dan Smith have been researching the mental health and wellbeing of agricultural students, many of whom will go on to work in the rural sector.

Their work has highlighted the need to better understand women's experiences across farming life.

Stanley-Clarke says those experiences can be very different.

Part of that comes from traditional gender roles and the language of farming. Part of it comes from the way women are positioned within farming families, businesses and rural communities.

Overseas researchers have referred to this as the "triple burden" carried by many farming women.

That can include responsibilities on-farm, caring for family and home, and, for many women, off-farm work as well.

On top of that, women are often deeply involved in community roles.

"They have all these different roles and demands," Stanley-Clarke says.

"And often, women come last on their own list."

She says while women are frequently told to "take time out" or "look after themselves", that advice can feel unrealistic when they are already stretched across farm, family, work and community responsibilities.

"They already know that," she says.

"The question is, how can they practically do that when they are carrying so much?"

The survey is designed to capture the experiences of a broad range of women connected to farming.

That includes women who are the farmer, women helping on-farm, women doing the books, women living on farms, women whose partner works on-farm, and women who may not describe themselves as farmers but are still part of farming life.

"If you have some association with a farm and farming, we want to know about your experience," Stanley-Clarke says.

"We want to know what you like about it, what is challenging about that experience, and what you would like in response."

A key aim of the research is to create baseline data.

Stanley-Clarke says there are organisations doing valuable work to support rural women, including Rural Women New Zealand and Dairy Women's Network.

But when organisations apply for funding, develop services or advocate for better support, they are often asked to provide evidence.

"They're asking to see data," Stanley-Clarke says.

"So we want to say, here's your data."

"We want this information to support industry and other organisations, so they can say, 'We know from this study that women have a need in this area.'"

She says the survey is intended to be practical, not research that sits on a shelf.

"We like to do research that matters," she says.

"We want to share it back with women in farming, essentially."

The need for data is also a barrier for researchers themselves.

Stanley-Clarke says funding in the tertiary sector has become harder to access, particularly in areas where there is not already

baseline data showing need.

"It's chicken and egg," she says.

"You need the data to get the funding, but you often need funding to do the research properly."

The survey is currently being done without specific funding, with researchers hoping it will help build the evidence needed for further work.

The response so far has been encouraging.

Stanley-Clarke says the team has been overwhelmed by the support from rural organisations and farming women around the country, with hundreds already engaging with the survey.

"That response tells us there is a need," she says.

The New Zealand survey is adapted from a women-in-farming study carried out in the United Kingdom last year, which attracted around 2000 responses.

The Massey and Lincoln team have adapted it for the New Zealand context.

Stanley-Clarke says the survey is just the beginning.

The researchers hope it will help identify where more work is needed, while also recognising the strengths and resilience that already exist in rural communities.

She says women's experiences in farming are still shaped by gender.

Research with agricultural students has shown male and female students can have different experiences from the beginning of their farming careers, including during work placements.

Women can still be dismissed on-farm because they are not seen as "the boss", even when they are the primary farmer.

"That still happens," Stanley-Clarke says.

It can be particularly difficult for women who are isolated, who have moved to a farm because of their partner's work, or who are away from their usual support networks.

For dairy families, moving day can mean shifting into a new house, children changing schools, and the whole family adjusting to a new community, all on top of the demands of the farming business.

Stanley-Clarke says those experiences need to be better understood.

"We know rural mental health has often been male-focused, and there are reasons for that," she says.

"But women occupy different spaces in farming households, businesses and communities.

"If we can amplify women's voices and get their experiences heard, we can support women better in those roles."

The anonymous survey takes about 15 minutes to complete.

It includes questions related to wellbeing and mental health, which may be distressing for some participants. Participants do not have to answer every question and can stop the survey at any time.

The survey has ethical approval from Lincoln University and Massey University Human Ethics Committee.

Participants can also enter the draw to win one of four \$100 Swanndri vouchers.

The survey closes on 15 July.

"We would love as many women as possible to take part, to have a say, and to know that their experiences are valued," Stanley-Clarke says.

SURVEY DETAILS

Who can take part:

Women working and/or living on-farm in Aotearoa New Zealand

Time: About 15 minutes

Privacy: Anonymous

Closing date: 15 July

Survey link: https://lincoln.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3ki2yj3KW6pflGy



TE KUNENGA
KI PŪREHURŌA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

MASSEY
UNIVERSITY

Health and Wellbeing of Women in Farming



LINCOLN
UNIVERSITY
TE WHARE WANAKA O AORAKI

Are you a woman working and/or living on-farm in Aotearoa New Zealand? If so, we would love to hear from you!

Our survey:

- Takes about 15 minutes to complete
- Is anonymous
- At the end you can enter the draw to win one of four \$100 Swanndri vouchers
- Has ethical approval from Lincoln University and Massey University Human Ethics Committee

The survey includes questions related to your wellbeing and mental health.

This may be distressing for some participants. You are not obligated to answer every question and can halt the survey at any time.



Scan the QR code



https://lincoln.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3ki2yj3KW6pflGy

New partnership takes rural wellbeing support beyond the counsellor's chair



Claire Inkson
RURAL
EDITOR

A new partnership between Farmlands, Rural Support Trust and digital wellbeing platform ignite is set to make it easier for farmers, growers, farm workers and their families to access mental health and wellbeing support, without leaving the farm gate.

Announced at the Rural Industry Leaders Dinner on the opening night of Fieldays 2026, the three-year partnership comes as the Government's draft Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2026-2036 identifies rural communities as a group experiencing poorer mental health outcomes.

The partnership will provide more than 1500 free sessions through ignite, connecting rural people with vetted professionals online, by phone or in person.

While counselling and psychology support will be available, the service goes wider than traditional mental health care, offering access to career coaches, dieticians, financial mentors and other wellbeing professionals.

For Rural Support Trust chairperson Michelle Ruddell, that broader approach is what sets the partnership apart.

"That's the beauty of it, and that's what this is aiming to do," she says.

"It's aiming to get that professional support to farmers and growers who traditionally don't engage with those services easily.

"This isn't just about getting to a counsellor or psychologist. It's about that holistic view where you might need business coaching, financial mentorship, a dietician, a counsellor or a psychologist."

Farmlands chief executive Tanya Houghton says rural communities should not have to face tough times alone.

"At Farmlands we know rural never rests, and rural communities shouldn't face the tough times alone," she says.

"We're proud to be there when support matters most.

"Our shareholders are farmers, growers and their families. Standing alongside them when life gets hard is what a co-operative does."

Houghton says the barriers to mental health support in rural New Zealand are real, from distance and cost to time off farm and the discomfort of sitting in a waiting room where everyone knows your name.

"With ignite's technology, farmers choose how they get support: in person or online, wherever they are. Even if that's the middle of a paddock.

"Our rural community doesn't clock off. This partnership is about making sure support is there when and where farming families need it."

Ruddell says the funding Farmlands has committed will enable Rural Support Trust to extend its reach into rural communities.

"Ignite is a digital health and wellbeing platform, and Rural Support Trust exists to support our farmers and growers and our rural communities with mental health and wellbeing support.

Ruddell says rural people can face very real challenges when trying to access support, including distance, cost, time off farm and privacy concerns.

"This partnership breaks down the barriers and enables rural people and rural communities to access mental health and wellbeing services from the privacy of their own home."

The first three sessions are free.

Rural people can access the service directly through the Rural Support Trust website, or with the support of a Rural Support Trust facilitator.

Ruddell says someone may be working with their local facilitator and together identify that they would like to meet with a counsellor, for example.

"Together online you can go in, read the bios of the counsellors that are there and pick someone based on that information.

"Then you can look up when they're free to see you and how you want to interact with them. You put in a few details, confirm the appointment, and it lets you know that you've just booked in for your first of three free sessions."

Those who want to continue



The new Rural Support Trust, Farmlands and ignite partnership will give farmers, growers, farm workers and their whānau access to free wellbeing support from wherever they are. PHOTOS SUPPLIED



after the three funded sessions can do so at their own cost.

Ruddell says people do not need to be referred by a facilitator to use the service.

"If you need a helping hand, we are there, but otherwise you can jump on the Rural Support Trust website, follow through on the 'I need some professional help' pathway, and it takes you through to a three-step guide on how to book the session."

Users can choose someone based on their needs, read provider profiles and select whether they would prefer to meet online, by phone or in person.

"They can actually find someone that's local to them," Ruddell says.

"It could be on the phone, it could be in person or it could be online."

Rural Support Trust operates across 14 regions, providing free and confidential one-on-one support to farmers, growers and rural families.

Ruddell says mental health is one of the top three reasons people contact the trust.

"The mental health of our rural sector is impacting on the day-to-day operations of our businesses.

"The pressures of rural life come in peaks and troughs, and mental

health is one of the top three reasons why people reach out for support at Rural Support Trust.

"This partnership is going to enable Rural Support Trust to connect our people going through tough times with professional help when they need it."

She says the ignite platform will not replace the role of Rural Support Trust facilitators, who are known for meeting people where they are, but it gives them another practical option to offer.

"It's another tool in the toolkit for our people to use."

Sessions are available through ruralsupport.org.nz.

ALL AGRI NZ

All Agri NZ
0800 255 2474

All Farm Engineering

All Farm Engineering
03 303 7999

Alps Continuous Spouting

Ben Kruger
Alps Continuous Spouting
021808739

ANDY'S PAINT & DECORATING
Town & Country • Interior & Exterior

Andy's Painting
& Decorating
027 435 4646

**ASHBURTON
LONG RUN IRON**

Ashburton Long Run Iron
Call Andrew
03 308 1850

Rural realities behind mental health pressures highlighted in new submission

CLAIRE INKSON

Rural Women New Zealand is calling for stronger rural-focused mental health support, warning that distance, workforce shortages, poor connectivity and stigma continue to prevent many rural New Zealanders from accessing help before reaching crisis point.

The organisation submitted on the Draft Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2026–2036 last month, using the submission to highlight the lived realities facing rural communities across the country.

Rural Women New Zealand Health Policy Action Advisory Group convenor Bronwyn Main said the organisation felt strongly that rural voices needed to be part of the national conversation.

“Our focus is rural. Our members are rural, our families are rural, our communities are rural,” Main said.

“Mental health and wellbeing is vital to all things rural. We hear the stories from our members all the time, and part of what we do is advocate for them.”

Main said one of the biggest misconceptions policymakers continue to have is treating rural New Zealand as simply an extension of urban areas.

“People think rural is just out of town with bigger paddocks, but they don’t understand the realities,” she said.

“For many rural people, getting to a doctor is at least an hour away. Then you’ve got poor roads, weather events and huge distances on top of that. Accessing healthcare isn’t simple.”

The submission outlines how travel time, fuel costs, time away from work and childcare pressures all become barriers to seeking support. Main said many rural people delay getting help because the process is so difficult and disruptive.

“A doctor’s appointment isn’t just popping into town. It can mean half a day off work, organising childcare, travel time and fuel costs,” she said.

“People think, ‘I’ll be right.’ They try to deal with things internally until it gets really bad.”

The submission also points to a

shortage of rural-specific mental health understanding within the healthcare system.

“There’s a lack of understanding about what rural life actually looks like,” Main said.

She said local community networks often become the first line of support.

“Talk to the local schools, the volunteer fire brigade, the rural delivery drivers. They know what’s happening in the community.”

While telehealth - healthcare delivered remotely by phone or video - has improved access in some situations, Main said connectivity issues remain a major challenge for many rural communities.

“Not all rural communities have reliable connectivity. Weather can affect service, and some people still have to drive to the top of the farm or sit outside schools to get reception,” she said.

Despite this, she said telehealth still provides an important point of contact for isolated people.

“It gives people a way to reach someone and realise they’re not on their own.”

The submission also raised concerns around firearms licence holders potentially avoiding conversations about mental health due to fears around losing access to firearms needed for farming work.

“Firearms are a necessity on many farms,” Main said.

“We need more awareness and more open conversations, so people don’t feel ashamed to ask for help.”

Main said rural organisations including Rural Women New Zealand, Rural Support Trust and Farmstrong play a critical role alongside the formal health system.

“We’re the on-the-ground foot soldiers,” she said.

“We can provide real-time information about what’s happening in rural communities and connect people with support.”

Looking ahead, Main said awareness around rural mental health is improving and communities are becoming more open to talking about wellbeing.

“People are talking about mental health more openly now. Communities want to be involved



Bronwyn Main, convenor of Rural Women New Zealand's Health Policy Action Advisory Group, says rural communities continue to face major barriers to accessing mental health support, with distance, workforce shortages and poor connectivity all contributing to people delaying help until crisis point. PHOTO SUPPLIED

and want to support each other,” she said.

However, she believes stronger investment in locally-based services remains essential.

“People need access to qualified support in their own communities, so they don’t feel isolated.”

Willie Apiata wellbeing tour, bringing important conversations to rural communities

AMY RIACH

Rural communities across New Zealand are set to benefit from a nationwide series of wellbeing events, featuring former NZSAS soldier and Victoria Cross recipient Willie Apiata VC.

Hosted by the Rural Support Trust (RST), and backed by a strong coalition of rural industry partners, the events are designed to spark open conversation about resilience, mental wellbeing, and leadership.

Apiata, New Zealand’s only living recipient of the Victoria Cross, will share stories from his military career and personal experiences, and already the events are resonating, said RST community connector Mike Green.

“There’s a real authenticity and humbleness to Willie. He doesn’t stand on stage pretending to have all the answers. He shares his experiences in a very genuine way, and that’s what people connect with,” Green said.

“He has a lot of mana, and you can see the impact that has on people in the room.”

The free events are aimed at farmers, growers, and rural professionals, providing an opportunity to connect away from the farm.

The wellbeing tour began in Canterbury, and the first of Apiata’s talks, held in Timaru, Ashburton, and Dunsandel in April, attracted strong attendance, and enormously positive feedback.

Helping pave the way for a national rollout, the tour is expected to include around 40 events nationwide.

Upcoming events are planned for Taranaki in July, followed by Otago and Southland, before the tour moves through Gisborne, Wairoa and Hawke’s Bay in August.

Events are also expected to be held in Nelson, Marlborough and other regions during September, and Green said, “this is a national conversation, that no one is having.”

“Everyone faces challenges

at different times, and no one’s immune from them,” he said.

“When people hear someone like Willie talk openly about his own challenges and how he’s worked through them, it helps. It gives people permission to talk about their own struggles and seek help if they need it.”

He said, one of the greatest benefits of the events is the opportunity they create for people to reconnect.

“It’s not only reducing the stigma. It’s also bringing people together in a room. Isolation is one of the bigger things we have to deal with now,” Green said.

“In the old days, neighbours would work together, move from farm to farm helping each other out, then share a barbecue afterwards. Nowadays a contractor often comes in, does the job and leaves, and you may never even see them.”

And as rural communities have changed, many traditional meeting places, and social connections, have diminished.

“The local footy club, the local store, a lot of those community touchpoints have disappeared. People are busy, but it’s important to make time to look after yourself and stay connected,” Green said.

National Rural Support Trust chairperson, Michelle Ruddell said the events are all about strengthening communities through connection.

“Rural people are incredibly resilient, but that doesn’t mean they should have to carry everything on their own,” Ruddell said.

“I am really proud of the number of organisations getting behind our wellbeing event series. Strengthening our rural communities by supporting their wellbeing is something that belongs to all of us, and that’s why it is so pleasing to see the collaboration for these events.”

The events are free to attend, and recommended for anyone aged 16 years and over, with opportunities for informal conversations open before and after each session.



The free events, “I’m good...are you?”, are aimed at farmers, growers, and rural professionals, providing an opportunity to connect off the tools and away from the farm and feature former NZSAS soldier and Victoria Cross recipient Willie Apiata. PHOTO SUPPLIED

“These events are about bringing people together and reminding people that support exists,” Ruddell said.

Ashburton Painters & Decorators Limited

Ashburton Painters & Decorators Limited
027 282 8908

ASHBURTON U-HIRE

Ashburton U-Hire
03 308 8061

ANZCO FOODS

Anzco Foods Canterbury
03 302 7699

BRADFORD

Bradford Painting Ltd
03 308 9039

braidedrivers
COMMUNITY TRUST
ASHBURTON

Braided Rivers Community Trust
03 307 5911

Opening the Gate Early

Why rural wellbeing support needs to feel practical, private and easier to access

CLAIRE INKSON

For years, rural New Zealand has been told to “speak up” and “reach out” when things get tough.

But for many people living and working in the country, asking for help is rarely that simple.

Isolation, workload pressure, financial stress, relationship strain and the deeply ingrained culture of simply “getting on with it” can all become barriers long before someone ever reaches crisis point.

That is where Fiona McCracken believes things need to change.

After years working across counselling, addiction services and national workplace wellbeing

programmes, McCracken recently launched Wayleggo Support NZ, a service designed to connect rural New Zealanders with counsellors who understand farming life.

Much of her previous work involved Employee Assistance Programmes, often known as EAP services, which provide workplace-funded counselling and wellbeing support for staff.

While common in larger corporates, McCracken said rural businesses and farming families often miss out on those kinds of support systems.

“A lot of those services are built around large organisations, and rural people can fall through the cracks a bit,” she said.

The name Wayleggo itself comes from a stock command familiar to many farmers and dog handlers, calling a working dog back to regroup with its shepherd.

McCracken said that idea sat at the heart of the service.

“It’s about stepping away from whatever is weighing you down, clearing your head, regrouping and working out the next step,” she said.

Raised in the Wairarapa and surrounded by rural communities for most of her life, McCracken said the idea behind Wayleggo was to create support that felt approachable, practical and grounded in the realities of country life.

“Rural people are not short on



Fiona McCracken launched Wayleggo Support NZ to help make rural wellbeing support feel more approachable, practical and easier to access for farming communities.

PHOTO SUPPLIED

Wayleggo through the website or by email, have an informal conversation about what is going on, and are then matched with a counsellor suited to their needs.

Importantly, those counsellors have a rural lens.

“They may have grown up on a farm, live rurally, or have strong ties to the sector,” McCracken said.

“People don’t want to spend half the session explaining what mustering is or why they can’t just leave the farm for half a day.”

Currently, sessions are online, allowing people to access support from wherever they are, whether that is home, the tractor or the wool shed.

McCracken said she is also hoping to secure funding and sponsorship support from agribusinesses to help keep session costs as accessible as possible for rural people seeking help.

For McCracken, one phrase sits at the heart of the service: opening the gate early.

“It’s about not waiting until things become a crisis,” she said.

“Counselling does not have to be a last resort. It can be preventative.

It can simply be a chance to clear your thinking, check in with yourself and work through what’s stacking up before things get too heavy.”

While much of the national conversation around rural mental health has focused on men, McCracken said rural women also carry enormous emotional pressure, often quietly.

“Women are often holding families together emotionally while also helping run farms, raising children and managing everything else that comes with rural life,” she said.

“There are a lot of women who are struggling but still just getting on with it.”

Although Wayleggo is still in its early stages, McCracken hopes the service can become another trusted pathway within the wider rural wellbeing network, alongside organisations like the Rural Support Trust, Surfing for Farmers and other community initiatives.

“I genuinely believe any door is the right door,” she said.

“If somebody comes to us and another service is a better fit, we’ll help connect them. The important thing is simply that people know where to start.”

And for McCracken, that is ultimately the goal.

“To make support feel easier, less intimidating and more normal,” she said.

“So people feel able to open the gate early instead of waiting until everything falls apart.”

For more information visit www.wayleggonz.co.nz

NEED A HAND?

Farming can be tough. Long hours, financial pressure, isolation, weather events and uncertainty can all take a toll. Reaching out is a sign of strength, not weakness. If you or someone you know is struggling, these services are free and confidential.

Rural Support Trust

Supporting farmers, growers and rural communities across New Zealand.

0800 787 254

(0800 RURAL HELP)

www.rural-support.org.nz

Need to Talk?

Free call or text counselling service.

Call or text 1737 anytime to speak with a trained counsellor.

www.allright.org.nz/campaigns/need-to-talk

Lifeline Aotearoa

24/7 confidential support.

0800 543 354

Text HELP to 4357

www.lifeline.org.nz

Farmstrong

Wellbeing tools and practical support created specifically for farmers and growers.

www.farmstrong.co.nz

Depression Helpline

Support, advice and information around depression and anxiety.

0800 111 757

Text 4202

www.depression.org.nz

Shakti Crisis Line

Multilingual helpline for migrant or refugee women living with family violence.

0800 742 584

Healthline

Free health advice from registered nurses.

0800 611 116

Youthline

Support for young people and their families.

0800 376 633

Text 234

www.youthline.co.nz

Suicide Crisis Helpline

Support for people feeling suicidal or worried about someone else.

0508 TAUTOKO (0508 828 865)

Rural Women New Zealand

Connection, advocacy and support for rural women and families.

www.ruralwomennz.nz

Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand

Mental health information, resources and wellbeing tools.

www.mentalhealth.org.nz

Supporting Families in Mental Illness

Support for families and whānau supporting someone experiencing mental distress.

www.supportingfamilies.org.nz

Shine

Confidential domestic abuse support.

0508 744 633

www.2shine.org.nz

Are You OK?

Information and support around healthy relationships and family violence.

www.areyouok.org.nz

The Lowdown

Mental health support and information for young New Zealanders.

Text 5626

www.thelowdown.co.nz

Mental Hunts

A grassroots initiative creating conversations around mental health, firearms licensing, hunting and rural wellbeing.

Founded by hunters with lived experience, Mental Hunts advocates for practical support, understanding and reducing stigma around mental health in rural New Zealand.

www.mentalhunts.co.nz

Wayleggo

Online counselling and support platform helping rural people access professional counselling services in a practical and approachable way.

www.wayleggo.co.nz

In an emergency or if someone is in immediate danger, call 111.

resilience,” she said.

“They’re often short on support that actually fits their lives.”

One of the biggest barriers, she believes, is not just geography, but culture.

“There’s still a strong ‘just get on with it’ mentality in rural New Zealand,” she said.

“A lot of people think they have to wait until things are really bad before they talk to someone. They’ll say things like, ‘I’m not as bad as the neighbour down the road,’ or they think they should just push through it.”

There can also be concerns around stigma, confidentiality and how reaching out for support might be perceived within small rural communities.

“People worry about privacy. They worry about being judged. Some still fear they’ll somehow get labelled if they ask for help.”

Wayleggo’s approach is built around trying to remove some of those barriers.

Rather than acting as a counselling clinic itself, the service works as a connector, matching people with counsellors who understand rural life and helping coordinate the process.

“One of the biggest challenges when people are already overwhelmed is simply knowing where to start,” McCracken said.

“You jump online and there are hundreds of counsellors listed. That can feel impossible when your head is already full.”

Instead, people contact

Cartwrights Insurance and Mortgage
03 307 9700

DAM Doors and More Limited
027 516 7104

Dominator Canterbury
03 308 5560

EA Networks
0800 430 460

Elgin Transport
0274 856 759

MentalHunts aiming to break down barriers around mental health and firearms



Claire Inkson
RURAL
EDITOR

For MentalHunts co-founder Glen Thurston, the conversations around mental health and firearms legislation is deeply personal.

The father, builder and passionate hunter has spent much of his life navigating depression, burnout and alcohol abuse. Those experiences eventually led him to launch MentalHunts alongside videographer and storyteller Ned Brannigan.

Together, the pair are working to create a platform focused on mental health education, support and firearm safety within New Zealand's hunting and rural communities.

Brannigan, whose documentary and video work has often centred around mental wellbeing, first connected with Thurston through the "Turn the Corner" project, a campaign highlighting suicide and mental health struggles within the construction industry.

The resulting documentary went on to receive multiple awards throughout New Zealand and helped spark wider conversations around mental health, particularly within traditionally stoic communities.

Now, through MentalHunts, the pair hope to tackle what Thurston believes is one of the biggest barriers preventing some firearms owners from seeking help early: fear.

"I think society often treats mental health as one single thing, when really it's a huge spectrum," Thurston said.

"Someone experiencing grief, anxiety, burnout or depression is very different from someone who is violent or poses a genuine risk to others.

"The concern is that people can start believing that simply admitting they're struggling mentally will automatically make them unsafe or cost them their firearms licence. That's not necessarily true, and it's why education is so important."

Thurston's advocacy journey began after his own experience with the mental health system in 2019, following a medically supervised attempt to come off antidepressant medication.

During that process, his firearms licence was revoked, something he said had a major impact on both his personal wellbeing and perspective.

"That's when I realised how many people in rural and hunting communities might avoid seeking help because they fear losing their firearms licence," he said.

"I decided I wanted to fight for change and better understanding around the issue."

Thurston is careful to stress the conversation is not about opposing firearm safety measures.

"Public safety absolutely matters, and there are situations where people should not have access to firearms," he said.

"Nobody is arguing against that. But at the same time, we need a system that encourages people to seek help early, rather than creating fear around asking for support."

MentalHunts has since grown into a charitable trust and online community, sharing stories from people with lived experience through YouTube videos, surveys and educational content.

A key focus now is the launch of MentalHunts 101, a new programme combining mental health education with practical guidance around firearms legislation and support pathways.

The programme aims to help people better understand what actually happens if someone seeks help for mental health concerns, while also teaching families and communities how to recognise warning signs and support others safely.

"A lot of people are genuinely confused or frightened by the legislation," Thurston said.

"We want people to understand that getting support for mental health does not automatically mean losing their licence."

"There needs to be balance."

The initiative has been developed alongside health professionals and advisors, including Te Anau-based rural mental health counsellor Kathryn Wright, whose research has focused on barriers preventing young rural men from seeking

Glen Thurston in the mountains that became a turning point in his own mental health journey. PHOTOS SUPPLIED

help.

Thurston said the wider goal was to normalise conversations around mental wellbeing within often stoic rural and hunting communities.

"Everyone struggles at some point," he said.

"That should be seen as normal, not something to hide."

His passion for the issue has also been shaped by the outdoors.

After leaving his former business and moving rurally, Thurston worked on a high country station in the Cardrona Valley, something he describes as life changing.

"Being outdoors, learning new skills and getting away from the pressure of life made a huge difference," he said.

"Hunting and being in the hills gives people space to think, reset and disconnect from stress."

MentalHunts first gained national attention through Thurston's "Turn the Corner" challenge, where he climbed Corner Peak at Lake Hāwea 53 times in 53 days to highlight the suicide rate within New Zealand's construction industry.

"It wasn't about fundraising," he said.

"It was about starting conversations."

While the topic remains delicate, Thurston believes avoiding the conversation altogether only increases the risk.

"If people avoid doctors or mental health services because they're worried about punishment or losing their licence, that creates a much bigger long-term issue," he said.

"What we're trying to do is create better understanding, better education and more trust, so people feel safe enough to reach out before they reach crisis point."

People can learn more about MentalHunts, follow upcoming workshops and view resources through the organisation's Instagram, Facebook, YouTube channel and website.

Glen Thurston speaking at the NZDA conference as part of ongoing conversations around mental health, firearm safety and help-seeking within the hunting community.



MentalHunts co-founder Glen Thurston says the outdoors can provide space to reset, reflect and reconnect.



GARY McCORMICK
TRANSPORT LTD

Gary McCormick
Transport
03 307 2100

GLUYAS
MOTOR GROUP
ASHBURTON

Gluyas Motor Group
03 307 7620

GUNDRY PLUMBING
SERVICES LTD

Gundry Plumbing
0274 846 000

HANHAM
CONCRETE

Hanham Concrete
03 308 4816

Iconic
CAR CARE

Iconic Car Care Ltd
027 333 3687

Caring for the Carers:

The Mental Health Cost — and Gift — of Rural Volunteering

KATHRYN WRIGHT

In rural areas, volunteering is more than community spirit. It's the mechanism that keeps towns functioning. Volunteers run the fire brigades, staff the fundraisers, organise sports teams, check on neighbours, and generally hold the social fabric together. Much of this work is unpaid, unrecognised, and undervalued — a pattern that emerged strongly in the early findings of my recent research on rural wellbeing.

Volunteering is often talked about as a positive force for mental health. And it can be. But in rural communities, where the same small group of people carry most of the load, volunteering can also become a source of stress, exhaustion, and burnout. If we want rural communities to thrive, we need to talk honestly about the wellbeing of the people who hold everything together. We need to care for the carers.

How volunteering supports mental health

Many participants in my research described volunteering as one of the most meaningful parts of their lives. It offered connection, purpose, and a sense of belonging — all powerful protective factors for mental health.

Volunteering can:

- reduce loneliness
- strengthen social networks
- create a sense of contribution and identity
- provide structure and routine
- offer opportunities to learn new skills
- build confidence and self worth

In small towns, where social opportunities can be limited, volunteering often becomes the main way people meet others and feel part of something bigger than themselves. For some, it was the reason they stayed in their community.

And the benefits extend beyond the volunteers themselves. Many rural mental health initiatives — from community gardens to youth programmes to neighbour checking networks — are volunteer driven. These projects create spaces where people feel seen, supported, and connected. They

reduce isolation, offer practical help, and build the kind of informal support systems that keep people afloat long before they ever reach a crisis point.

In other words: volunteers don't just help. They create the conditions for good mental health across the whole community.

But that makes it even more important that their wellbeing is protected too.

When volunteering feels like pressure

There is another side to this story — one that rural communities often avoid talking about.

Volunteering can become overwhelming when:

- the same people are asked again and again
- roles expand beyond what was originally agreed
- volunteers feel responsible for the wellbeing of others
- there is no one to hand tasks over to
- stepping back feels like letting the community down

Many participants described feeling guilty for wanting a break, or ashamed that they were exhausted. Women in particular

spoke about being pulled into both formal volunteering and the invisible emotional labour that keeps rural life functioning: checking on neighbours, organising meals, supporting families in crisis, and holding social networks together.

This work is vital — but it is also draining. When volunteers are stretched too thin, the mental health benefits of volunteering can flip into stress, resentment, and burnout.

Burnout in rural volunteers often looks like:

- emotional exhaustion
- withdrawal from social events
- irritability or resentment
- feeling trapped in roles they can't step back from
- losing the joy that once motivated them

These are not personal failings. They are signs that the load is too heavy — and that the carers need care.

How volunteers can protect their mental health

Volunteers often look after everyone except themselves. A few small shifts

can make a big difference:

- **Set boundaries early.** Saying no is not selfish — it's sustainable.
- **Share the load.** If you're leading a group, bring in co leaders before you're overwhelmed.
- **Take real breaks.** A weekend off from volunteering is maintenance, not failure.
- **Protect the parts you enjoy.** If you love the hands on work but hate the admin, ask someone else to take that part.

Caring for yourself is not stepping back from the community — it's ensuring you can sustainably stay part of it.

How communities can support their volunteers

Burnout is not an individual problem. It's a community level issue.

Communities can help by:

- **Widening the circle.** Stop relying on the same few people. Ask new residents, younger people, or those who haven't been approached before. Or step up yourself if you haven't already.
- **Valuing invisible work.**

Meals delivered, rides given, emotional support offered — these are forms of volunteering too.

- **Making roles flexible.** Short term, task based volunteering attracts people who can't commit long term.
- **Sharing roles.** Two co chairs are better than one exhausted one.
- **Recognising volunteers.** Feeling appreciated protects mental health.

These will help to keep these crucial roles sustainable.

A call to care for the carers

Volunteers are the backbone of rural New Zealand. They strengthen mental health — their own and everyone else's — simply by showing up. But they cannot keep giving endlessly. The wellbeing of rural communities depends on the wellbeing of the people who hold them together.

If we want strong, resilient communities, we must care for the people who care for us.

*Kathryn Wright
Registered Counsellor MNZAC
www.kathrynwright.co.nz*



JACOB HOLDAWAY CONTRACTING
ASHBURTON

Jacob Holdaway Contracting
027 422 5464

Lynda Stevenson
CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS

Lynda Stevenson
Chartered Accountant
03 307 2022

MALCOLM LOVETT AUTOMOTIVE LTD

Malcolm Lovett Automotive
03 308 9109

Mark Love Contracting Ltd

Mark Love Contracting Ltd
0274 332 261

MCM

MCM
Mid Canterbury Motors
027 227 7553

Howdy: The dating app tackling rural loneliness, one farmer at a time

CLAIRE INKSON

If you've spent any time on modern dating apps, chances are you've seen it all before. Dead pig photos. Fish photos. Gym selfies. Bios demanding "someone who doesn't take life too seriously". Conversations that start with "hey" and end in ghosting. Now imagine trying to navigate all of that from the middle of rural New Zealand, where your nearest neighbour could be kilometres away and your social calendar largely revolves around the local rugby club, A&P show or whether it's finally rained.

That's exactly the gap Australian farmer Mia Ryan believes she's filling with Howdy, a dating app designed specifically for rural and regional communities, which recently launched in New Zealand. And unlike many tech startups, this one wasn't born in a shiny city office.

It started with a young woman sitting in the sand after being bucked off a horse.

"I just wanted an app where I could jump on there and meet a farmer," Ryan says.

The 24-year-old, who lives in regional New South Wales and studies agriculture and international business online while running the app, says she found traditional dating platforms frustrating, shallow and disconnected from country life.

"Country people are just different," she says.

"You can't really put your finger on it, but they are."

The more she spoke to others living remotely, the more she realised the problem extended far beyond awkward first dates.

Loneliness, isolation and a lack of connection were coming up repeatedly, particularly among people working in agriculture and rural industries.

Then she looked deeper into rural mental health statistics.

"They were pretty shocking," she says.

"I sort of felt like I couldn't not do something about it."

Howdy launched in Australia in 2024 and has already attracted more than 30,000 users. Now the app has expanded across the Tasman, partnering with New Zealand Young Farmers as part of the launch.

Unlike traditional dating apps built around endless rapid-fire swiping, Howdy encourages users to slow down and actually read profiles properly.

Ryan says that matters more than people realise.

"You catch yourself dismissing people so casually on other apps," she says.

"It becomes really shallow."

The app also removes one of the biggest frustrations for rural users: geography.

Most mainstream dating apps only show people within a relatively tight radius, not particularly useful when your "local" could still be two hours away.

On Howdy, users can widen their search across all of New Zealand and Australia.

And surprisingly, distance does not seem to scare people off.

Ryan says more than three-quarters of the app's success stories involve couples living more than 300 kilometres apart.

"Not every match will be just down the road," she says.

"But that's part of the appeal."

That might sound strange to city users, but for rural people used to travelling for work, stock sales, sports tournaments and field days, long-distance relationships are often simply part of life.

Ryan believes another reason the app works is because people have to pay to use it.

While many mainstream dating apps offer free access, Howdy is subscription-based, something Ryan says was intentional from the start.

"There's intent behind it," she says.

"The people on there actually want to meet someone."

She says while there was initial pushback from users used to free apps, the paid model tends to weed out people who are only casually scrolling or looking for entertainment.

"This is for people dating with a purpose," she says.

The app also takes a surprisingly firm stance on ghosting.

When two people match, one person must send a message immediately rather than simply collecting matches and disappearing into the void.

There is even a built-in "It's not you, it's me" feature designed to

soften the sting of rejection.

"It just takes away that horrible guessing game," Ryan says.

Ryan says modern online dating etiquette has also changed dramatically, particularly when it comes to talking to multiple people at once.

While that can feel strange for people new to dating apps, she says honesty matters far more than pretending otherwise.

"I think everyone knows now that people are usually talking to more than one person," she says.

"But once things start getting serious, you need to communicate that properly."

She believes one of the biggest mistakes people make is spending too long messaging before actually meeting.

"You can almost talk yourselves out of it before you even get to the first date," she says.

"You already know how many siblings they've got, when their birthday is and what their favourite colour is."

Instead of building anticipation, Ryan says endless texting can remove the natural flow of a first meeting.

"If the date gets a little awkward, you've already used all the easy conversation starters," she says.

Her advice is simple: stop overthinking and meet sooner.

Ryan says plenty of rural users are still making the classic dating app mistakes, particularly when it comes to profile photos. Her advice is simple:

Limit fishing photos to one.

No heavy filters.

And avoid dead animals entirely.

"No one wants four photos covered in blood," she laughs.

Selfies, she says, are another common mistake.

"I don't care who you are, nobody looks as good in a selfie as they do in a candid photo," she says.

Instead, Ryan encourages users to prop their phone up somewhere, film a quick video outdoors and take still images from it afterwards.

"It looks more natural and less staged," she says.

And authenticity matters.

The polished gym selfies and heavily edited photos common on many dating apps are noticeably absent from Howdy, replaced instead with photos of people sitting in tractors, standing in paddocks or leaning against farm



Howdy founder Mia Ryan launched the rural-focused dating app after struggling to meet like-minded people while living and working in regional Australia. PHOTO SUPPLIED

bikes with dogs nearby.

"Just be yourself," Ryan says.

"The nicest profiles are usually just normal people."

Ryan also has strong views on first dates.

Forget the high-pressure dinner reservations or late-night drinks.

"I don't love nighttime first dates because I think they add unnecessary pressure," she says.

Instead, she recommends keeping things simple and low-key, particularly for rural people already juggling busy, unpredictable lives.

Coffee, lunch or even a walk tends to work far better than an elaborate evening out.

"It's easier to actually talk and properly get to know someone," she says.

And when much of rural life already revolves around weather, stock, harvest and long workdays, perhaps there's something refreshing about a first date that doesn't feel overly complicated.

The other major difference, Ryan says, is that rural people genuinely understand each other's lives.

Farm work doesn't stop at 5pm. Cows get out. Harvest runs late. Rain changes everything.

Trying to explain that to someone completely disconnected from rural life can become exhausting.

"You don't just clock off and stop thinking about it," Ryan says.

That shared understanding, she believes, is what makes the platform resonate so strongly.

And while romance may be the headline, Ryan says many users are simply looking for connection in any form.

Friendships, networking and

social support are becoming unexpected byproducts of the app.

At one event in Australia, Ryan says a man in his forties approached her emotionally after struggling through drought and isolation on a remote property.

"He said some days he didn't know if he could keep going," she says.

"But that night he'd got the numbers of five women and finally felt hopeful again."

Moments like that, Ryan says, remind her the app is about much more than dating.

"It's just another tool in the toolkit," she says.

While romance might be the reason many people initially join, Ryan says plenty of users end up forming friendships and connections that go far beyond dating.

Sometimes there is no romantic spark at all, but there is still common ground, shared experiences and someone who genuinely understands rural life.

"In rural areas, people can feel really isolated socially, not just romantically," she says.

"Even just having someone to talk to who gets the lifestyle can make a huge difference."

For some, that connection may turn into a relationship. For others, it might simply mean friendship, community or the reassurance they are not the only person feeling alone out there.

And in rural communities where loneliness often sits quietly beneath the surface, perhaps that matters more than any perfect match ever could.

Howdy is available now on both the Apple App Store and Google Play.

MORRISONAGRI
MAINTAINING A HEALTHY FLOW

Morrison Agri
0800 577 583

mtf finance

MTF Ashburton
03 307 1521

NEUMANNSTYRES

Neumanns Tyres
03 308 6737

g

Ashburton Guardian
03 307 7900

Pool & Pump world

Pool & Pump World
03 308 2245

Rural Support Trust regional spotlight: South Canterbury

What are some of the biggest challenges currently facing rural people in your region?

Like many rural communities across New Zealand, South Canterbury is navigating a combination of rising costs, climatic and political uncertainty, workforce challenges, and the increasing complexity of farming. While these pressures are not new, the cumulative effect can be significant, particularly when combined with the normal demands of family, business, and community responsibilities. This has been especially evident for many arable farmers, who have faced a particularly challenging season due to difficult weather conditions and ongoing cost pressures.

Over recent years, our rural communities have been deeply affected by the unexpected loss of a number of valued members, leaving many people carrying grief, sadness, and unanswered questions. The impact has been far-reaching, reminding us that even in strong communities, grief can be carried quietly and for a long time.

What kinds of conversations or support requests is your team hearing more often lately?

Our work spans a wide range of issues, but the most common conversations relate to mental wellbeing, financial pressure, employment challenges, and succession.

Increasingly, we are seeing people dealing with multiple pressures at once. Often it is not one single issue that prompts someone to reach out, but an accumulation of challenges that eventually become overwhelming. We are also seeing greater willingness from people to seek support earlier, which is encouraging and reflects a growing understanding that asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

What community events, initiatives



Two events that stand out this year for our South Canterbury branch were our evenings with resilience expert Dr Lucy Hone and Victoria Cross recipient Willie Apiata.

or projects have helped bring people together recently?

Two events that stand out this year were our evenings with resilience expert Dr Lucy Hone and Victoria Cross recipient Willie Apiata.

Following the tragic losses across our region, Dr Lucy Hone shared practical tools and insights to help people navigate grief and adversity, while building the confidence to support those around them. The overwhelming response highlighted a real need for these conversations and reminded us that resilience is not something we build alone; it grows through connection, understanding, and having people around us who care. Lucy's message gave people hope that resilience is a set of skills that can be developed through practice and drawing on our strengths. She

encouraged people to focus their attention on who and what matters most, and reminded us that while we cannot always control our circumstances, we can choose how we respond.

In April, Willie Apiata spoke to a different audience, following a particularly difficult season for arable farmers. While his story of bravery in Afghanistan was remarkable, what resonated most deeply was his humility and honesty about pressure, trauma, and healing. Willie spoke about staying connected to your people, your animals, and the moments that shape you. He encouraged people to notice when something has changed in a friend, reach out with kindness, and ask for help when needed.

Both events reflected a simple but powerful truth. Rural life has always been about community

being each other's strength and support. Following the losses, we witnessed neighbours, friends, businesses, schools and community groups quietly step forward with meals, practical help, and acts of kindness. It was a reminder that resilience does not come from any one individual. It comes from the village around us.

The challenge for all of us is to invest in those relationships before we need them. When we intentionally build strong connections and support networks, we are far better placed to face the inevitable challenges that life and farming will bring.

Do you have any upcoming events, workshops or initiatives you would like to highlight?

The conversations we are having

and the experiences of recent years have reinforced the importance of creating opportunities for people to build relationships before they need to rely on them. Rural communities are often at their strongest when people know one another, trust one another, and feel comfortable reaching out when times are tough.

In response, SCRST is investing in activities that bring people together in a relaxed and informal way. Upcoming initiatives include skiing, golf, bowls, and other opportunities, designed simply to help farmers spend time together, strengthen existing relationships, and form new ones. While they may not look like traditional wellbeing activities, these shared experiences help create the networks of friendship, trust, and mutual support that communities draw on during difficult times.




Rakaia Dairy Services
027 438 2180




**Ryal Bush Transport
Ashburton Ltd**
03 307 8136




South Pacific Seeds
03 302 8115




**Tavendale + Partners
Limited**
03 308 4188




Turley Farms Ltd
021 342 553

Rural Support Trust Regional Spotlight: Southland

What are some of the biggest challenges currently facing rural people in your region?

The most significant challenges for rural people in Southland in this last quarter are mental health pressures, followed by employment issues and family relationship stress, with additional strain coming from exhaustion/overwhelm and professional relationship difficulties.

What kinds of conversations or support requests is your team hearing more often lately?

Our team is increasingly hearing support requests around mental health concerns, work related stress, family dynamics, and people feeling overwhelmed or burnt out, alongside more targeted conversations about professional relationship tensions, drug and alcohol use, and anger or grief-related challenges.

What community events, initiatives or projects have helped bring people together recently?

The ConnectHER pilot, funded

by MPI through Rural Women New Zealand, is currently being piloted in Southland and Wairoa. It's designed as a navigation service to improve access to health and social services for rural women. The service offers short-term practical support to help women connect with the right services, information and resources at the right time. The pilot finishes at the end of June unless additional funding is found.

This service is for all rural women in Southland and aims to strengthen access to care, education, and community connection. A key component also involves gathering feedback from women about their experiences with health and social services and identifying local barriers. These themes and case studies will be shared with government agencies to help inform future service delivery.

Recent events:

- 19th May Pink ribbon Dessert night Riverton
- 26th May Textured Paint & Sip evening Wyndham
- 17th June 7pm Women's Health evening with Leonie Rae, Riverton Cafe 102

Do you have any upcoming events, workshops or initiatives you would like to

highlight?

Yes, we are currently promoting the **GrowUSwell Rural Men's Wellbeing Programme**, a practical, down to earth series of workshops designed specifically for rural men working in farming, contracting, horticulture, forestry, transport, and the trades. Delivered in partnership with the Rural Support Trust and part funded through the National Rural Wellbeing Fund, the programme supports men to build stronger stress mindsets, improve resilience, deepen connection, and gain practical tools to support their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of their mates.

GrowUSwell consists of three interactive group based workshops facilitated by Samantha McBride

(BSc Hons, Health Coach, PhD student) and focuses on mental fitness, managing pressure and decision making, and strengthening confidence and peer support. The programme has already been successfully delivered in Southland with strong engagement and positive long term feedback from participants, including farm owners who have described it as one of the most valuable wellbeing courses they've attended.

Skiing for Farmers — Southland RST will be hosting a 'Skiing for Farmers' event at Coronet Peak on Sunday 28th June. This wellbeing event is supported by Beef & Lamb NZ and gives farmers an opportunity to enjoy a day off farm with their families and connect with other Southland farmers.

A free BBQ lunch is also being providing by Catalyst Performance Agronomy.

Willie Apiata Evening — On the 24th of July in Winton, Southland RST will be hosting an event with Willie Apiata (who served in Afghanistan and was a recipient of the Victoria Cross, the highest and most prestigious decoration awarded to service personnel for valour in the presence of the enemy). This free event is for local farmers and growers and is supported by National Event Partners and local sponsorship. It will be an engaging evening that provides attendees with the opportunity to hear Willie Apiata's story, strengthen connection with the rural community, and support meaningful conversation around resilience, service, and wellbeing.



MENS WINTER WORKSHOPS

WELLBEING & PERFORMANCE
FOR RURAL MEN

GROW
US
WELL

PRACTICAL
TOOLS.
BETTER YOU.
STRONGER
TOGETHER.

GORE	Mon 11am - 2pm	JUN 8 JUL 6 AUG 3
MOSSBURN	Tue 11am - 2pm	JUN 9 JUL 7 AUG 4
NORTH OTAGO (OAMARU)	Tue 11am - 2pm	JUN 16 JUL 14 AUG 11
WANAKA	Wed 5.30 - 8.30pm	JUN 17 JUL 15 AUG 10

COME TO ONE
OR COMMIT TO
ALL THREE
HEARTY FEED
INCLUDED

BOOK YOUR SPOT NOW
LINK IN BIO OR CAPTION



UPL
New Zealand

www.uplcorp.com/nz



Vision Insurance

03 307 1990



Rhys Wade
Wades Waste Services

027 842 0373
wadeswateashburton@gmail.com



Wrights Dry Cleaners

03 307 8360



Rainer Irrigation Ltd

03 307 9049

Winter sun, mountain air and good company. Farmers gathered at Ohau for a well-earned break on the slopes as part of Skiing for Farmers, one of many events helping bring rural communities together through winter. PHOTOS SUPPLIED



Rural Support Trust Regional spotlight: Otago

What are some of the biggest challenges currently facing rural people in your region?

The windstorms in South Otago late last year really highlighted how important it is for rural people to be prepared for emergencies - having a plan as to how you are going to look after your people and animals in an adverse event, while at the same time looking after your own wellbeing, is something we would really like rural people to take some time to think about, plan for and communicate with their team and family and for members of the wider community who may need extra support.

Those in horticulture, particularly cherries, also have had a challenging season due to variable weather. Pasture cover is also a challenge in some areas at the moment. So, we really encourage anyone who is having a tough time and needs extra support to reach out to us at the Trust.

What kinds of conversations or support requests is your team hearing more often lately?

We are hearing a lot from people who have challenging situations relating to farm/family succession. In these situations, communication really is the key and planning far in advance before the 'crunch time' will help ensure that everyone is on the same page and there are no surprises.

What community events, initiatives or projects have helped bring people together recently?

We had a great response to our free haircuts for farmers at the Wanaka Show and some good conversations with people there.

Do you have any upcoming events, workshops or initiatives you would like to

highlight?

We have a heap of different events coming up over winter, with Skiing for Farmers at Ohau and the Southland Trust is hosting the Coronet Peak event this year. We also have Willie Apiata speaking in Balclutha and Poolburn in late July - he has some really impactful stories around resilience and looking after your mates so we

really hope that rural communities in those areas will get a lot out of those events.

We have also partnered with Grow Us Well who are offering a series of Mens Winter Wellbeing workshops in North Otago and Wanaka aimed at giving blokes practical strategies to stay on top of things and feel their best.

All the details will be shared on

our social media pages Facebook Instagram and national website Events | Rural Support Trust NZ

We love supporting local initiatives so if anyone in a rural Otago community has an idea for an event that would help increase connection in their local community let us know by giving us a call or emailing otago@ruralsupport.org.nz



**Automotive
Diagnostics &
Servicing**

**Automotive Diagnostics &
Servicing**
03 308 6646

GDC
0800 432 583

**For all your
Earthmoving
Solutions**

P 0800 432 583
E office@gdcgroup.nz
W www.gdc.net.nz



Rural Support Trust regional spotlight: Mid Canterbury

What are some of the biggest challenges currently facing rural people in your region?

Harvest was a particularly tough period for arable farmers in Mid Canterbury with results not as strong as hoped for in a number of areas, yield, quality, mould etc. On top of that, rising fuel costs and recent thefts in rural communities are adding another layer of stress — with many feeling they're expected to keep absorbing these costs, which is making things especially tough. While there are challenges, many farmers continue to demonstrate resilience and adaptability, focusing on what they can control and making practical decisions to navigate current pressures.

What kinds of conversations or support requests is your team hearing more often lately?

Conversations recently have focused on helping people in challenging situations including crop failure, farm succession,

labour constraints, mental health, family estrangement and contract disputes. Many people are still reluctant to ask for help. Often it is only at the prompting of friends and family, who are connected to Rural Support Trust, that they reach out. There is no shame in asking for help and we are gradually seeing greater awareness of the need to take time away from the farm, access counselling support or external advice for your farm business to manage current challenges. We continue to encourage people to seek support early, as often a conversation before challenges escalate can make a significant difference for individuals, families and businesses.

What community events, initiatives or projects have helped bring people together recently?

Bringing Victoria Cross recipient Willie Apiata to the district saw more than 180 farmers and rural professionals join our recent event on resilience and mental health. We also partnered with the Farming Families Charitable Trust,

to circulate 70 movie vouchers to arable families over the school holidays — giving families a chance to step off farm, spend time together, and take a breather. Eighteen local rural women piloted the Inside Out mental health workshop with facilitator Deanne Parkes and we attended events in a support role including the Mid Canterbury Wheat growers competition, Tennis for Farmers and the Methven Men's Health evening. Community connection remains one of the strongest protective factors for rural wellbeing, and these events provide opportunities for people to connect, share experiences and support one another.

Do you have any upcoming events, workshops or initiatives you would like to highlight?

Planning is underway for an initiative that takes social service providers directly into our rural villages and we are investigating the possibility of a Brunch on Us event. We are also keeping a close eye on the El Nino pattern and may activate events in response to this.



Mid Canterbury Rural Support Trust coordinator Duncan Barr



The Willy Apiata wellbeing event held in Dunsandel earlier this year.

PHOTO SUPPLIED

Rural Support Trust regional spotlight: North Canterbury

What are some of the biggest challenges currently facing rural people in your region?

Currently in our region our arable farmers and wine growers are the people who are facing the biggest ongoing challenges.

Our region has also suffered from Adverse weather events in the last 12 months including the flow on effect of the 25/26 summer drought, wind in the Amuri, and floods and heavy rain fall on Banks Peninsula.

A positive outcome of the recent adverse events in the region has been seeing communities come together and offering support to each other, either practical and/or wellbeing.

What kinds of conversations or support requests is your team hearing more often lately?

Support requested from NCRST always varies, reflecting the multitude of challenges that our farmers and growers face.

Our service is confidential and we encourage people to reach out to us on 0800-787-254. We will connect them with one of our facilitators who understand rural life and farming. The trained facilitator will listen; help plan a way forward and connect with professional agencies as appropriate.

What community events, initiatives or projects have

helped bring people together recently?

North Canterbury Rural Support, in partnership with FAR and MPI On Farm Support, hosted an evening in Dunsandel featuring Victoria Cross recipient Willie Apiata. The event provided arable farmers the opportunity to step away from the pressures of a challenging season, connect with others in the industry, and hear powerful insights on resilience, leadership, wellbeing, and overcoming adversity. The evening reinforced the importance of community connection and reminding farmers that support is available when needed.

Do you have any upcoming events, workshops or initiatives you would like to highlight?

Building on the success of recent community events, NCRST will be in the Hurunui district with another event featuring Willie Apiata VC, aimed at local farmers and winegrowers.

NCRST is also planning a community quiz night in the Selwyn district later this year. The event is intended to offer a relaxed and enjoyable opportunity for people to step away from the demands of farm and rural life, connect with others, and strengthen community networks.

Further details on both events will be announced in the coming months.
For updates, follow www.facebook.com/NorthCanterburyRuralSupportTrust

BAYLEYS



Bayleys Canterbury

03 307 7377

Rural Support Trust regional spotlight: Top of the South



The Bitches Box event in Tākaka.

PHOTOS KRISSY CLOUTMAN

What are some of the biggest challenges currently facing rural people in your region?

One of the biggest challenges is landowners in the Motueka and Wai Iti valleys who had significant damage from the June and July 2025 floods last year. We don't hear much from these people, but some still have a significant hole to climb out of, both financially and repairing damage.

Our rural people currently face the same challenges as most rural people, fuel/production costs, weather events, uncertain markets etc, but for Marlborough there is real concern for viticulture. The viticulture industry is currently battling an imbalance of supply/demand, changing drinking habits and market challenges including significant tariffs into the US market. A lot of traditional farmers in Marlborough have diversified some areas in grapes but sheep+beef prices have allowed them to 'weather the storm' to some degree. There are quite a number of grape growers currently without contracts to wine companies and some of these will need to make decisions as to what options they have for cutting costs and whether there are other options for their land. Hopefully people will seek advice and attend workshops when available to help with this decision making.

What kinds of conversations or support requests is your team hearing more often lately?

We aren't hearing a lot of requests for help. Rather people are hunkering down and coping as best they can.

We have had a few relationship problems to help with lately on the Marlborough side. As growers here are currently under some stress, it's not unusual for family/partner relationships to be put to the test. We've actually had requests from other groups to participate in their events. I think there is definitely more of a focus on wellbeing and looking after yourself and others when times are challenging and it's important that people know where they can turn to for support.

What community events, initiatives or projects have helped bring people together recently?

Recently the Motueka Catchment Group organised a get together for those affected. There was a big turnout of those wishing to discuss what actions can be taken. We had the Bitches Box come to Tākaka in March, supported by Farmstrong+PGGW. This was in recognition of the challenging times this area had with the floods last year. This was a great night with lots of laughs and people out connecting with others.

Groups are working together in Marlborough to support growers with both technical knowledge events, but more importantly opportunities for people to 'connect'. There has been a couple of recent bank financial workshops held. Westpac recently combined with Wine Marlborough to bring John Kirwan



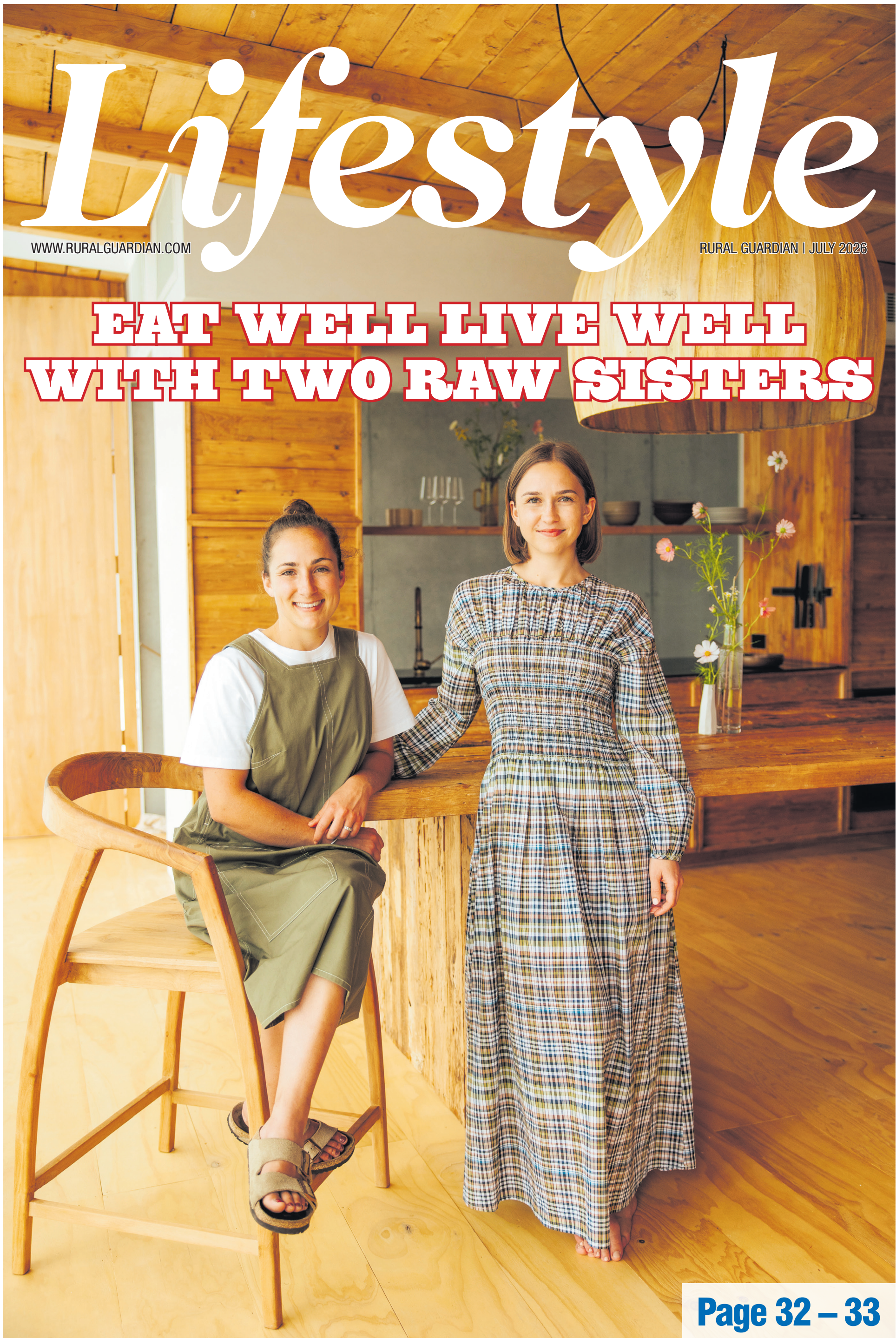
to speak. There was a very good turnout of over 200 people. We provided morning tea and it was wonderful to see people talking and connecting both before and after. Bragato Research Institute and Wine Marlborough are about to do a couple of important 'mothballing' workshops where again we will be present. These are not only great information sharing opportunities but also another good opportunity for connecting. We see benefit in supporting as many of these events as we can so people know we are available to them.

Do you have any upcoming events, workshops or initiatives you would like to highlight?

Willie Apiata VC is coming to the Nelson region on September 22nd followed by Marlborough on September 23rd. We are very excited to be bringing Willie to the Top of the South and have heard great reviews. We are also hoping to work with Wine Marlborough on a couple of social evenings so we encourage people to watch our FB page and keep an eye out in the

Winepress magazine.

During the summer, Nelson has the 'Rural Riders' initiative where farmers/growers get together on their mountain bikes and hit the tracks. In Marlborough we are lucky to have the wonderful 'Surfing for Farmers' where rural folk get together and have the opportunity to get some free surfing lessons followed by a BBQ and social get together. This has been very popular and this year there is a drive to look for further opportunities to increase capacity so more of the viticulture people can be involved.



Lifestyle

WWW.RURALGUARDIAN.COM

RURAL GUARDIAN | JULY 2026

**EAT WELL LIVE WELL
WITH TWO RAW SISTERS**

The sisters say cooking with seasonal produce and using what is already in the fridge or pantry can make healthy eating more achievable and affordable.

PHOTOS SUPPLIED



Simplicity on a plate

How Two Raw Sisters are helping New Zealanders rethink food, wellbeing and the cost of living



Claire Inkson

RURAL EDITOR

For Margo Flanagan, the answer to feeling better was never found in another diet, wellness trend or expensive health hack.

It was found in simplicity. In slowing down. In learning how to use what was already sitting in the fridge. In letting go of guilt around food. In understanding that wellbeing is not about perfection.

At a time when many New Zealand households are feeling stretched financially and emotionally, the message behind

Two Raw Sisters seems to be resonating more than ever.

"We promise to give people simplicity in a world that overcomplicates wellbeing," Flanagan says.

Together with sister Rosa Power, Flanagan has built Two Raw Sisters into one of New Zealand's most recognisable food and wellness platforms, with bestselling cookbooks, a podcast, workshops and a fast-growing app-based community focused on what they call "food confidence".

But behind the polished recipes and vibrant bowls of seasonal food is a story rooted in personal struggle.

Flanagan lives with chronic fatigue and endometriosis, while Power's journey came through elite sport after developing Relative Energy Deficiency in Sport (RED-S) during her years competing for New Zealand.

"Rosa and I both came from very different experiences, but we landed in the same place," Flanagan says.

"My journey was more about being exhausted, overwhelmed and needing simplicity, whereas Rosa's was more about letting go of toxic habits and perfectionism around food and health."

That shared experience became the foundation for Two Raw Sisters.

The pair started with small in-person workshops before growing an online following through their practical, relatable approach to food. Unlike many wellness brands, their messaging has never centred on restriction, or chasing an ideal body shape.

Instead, it focuses on nourishment, flexibility and building confidence around food.

"It's a really confusing time, especially for women," Flanagan says.

"We're constantly being told to do different things, and those 'rules' change every few months.

"One minute it's low fat, then low carb, then high protein, then keto. There's just so much noise."

For women navigating social media, changing beauty standards and the rise of quick-fix wellness culture, Flanagan believes the pressure has become relentless.

"Wellbeing is often perceived as expensive and overwhelming," she says.

The irony, she says, is that many of the habits marketed as "wellness" can leave people feeling worse mentally.

"Rosa and I have both been in those places where you're obsessing over food and your body, and honestly, we were the unhappiest versions of ourselves.

"When your physique becomes the definition of wellbeing but your mental health is suffering, that's not wellbeing."

Instead, the sisters encourage people to reconnect with their own bodies and strip wellbeing back to basics.

"We've forgotten how to listen to ourselves," Flanagan says.

"The voice in your head whispers, it doesn't scream. But we're so busy and distracted that we stop listening."

That message is landing at a time when many New Zealanders are being forced to rethink the way they eat.

Rising grocery prices have seen more families returning to meal planning, seasonal produce and cooking from scratch, something Flanagan sees as both a challenge and an opportunity.

"A lot of our users tell us they halve their grocery bill simply by learning how to use what they already have and reducing food waste," she says.

"Eating well is not expensive. It's

about education and confidence."

That confidence, she says, starts with changing the way people see food.

"We always say everything you need is already in your kitchen. We just help you see it."

A limp bag of carrots, a forgotten can of chickpeas or vegetables sitting in the bottom of the fridge can all become nourishing meals with the right mindset and a few simple skills.

The sisters' philosophy revolves around flexible whole-food cooking rather than strict meal plans or rigid rules.

"If eggplants are too expensive, swap them for broccoli. If cherry tomatoes are out of season, use canned tomatoes instead," Flanagan says.

"It's about understanding that recipes are guidelines, not rules.

"We teach people how to confidently swap ingredients depending on what's affordable, seasonal and already at home."

It is, in many ways, a return to the kind of cooking previous generations practised naturally.

Planning meals. Using leftovers. Cooking seasonally. Making food stretch further.

Flanagan believes many of those practical skills have gradually been lost as life has become busier and families more time-poor.

"There's been this ripple effect where people haven't necessarily been taught how to cook simple food at home anymore," she says.

"That's where education becomes really important."

Part of that education is what the sisters call their "intelligently lazy" system, designed to reduce food-related stress and decision fatigue.

On Sundays, Flanagan spends around 30 minutes preparing breakfasts and snacks for the week ahead, while dinners are cooked with leftovers intentionally

Rosa Power (right) and Margo Flanagan say the idea behind Two Raw Sisters has always been about simplifying wellness and helping people feel good through practical, nourishing food.



planned for lunch the next day.

"That means breakfast and lunch are sorted, snacks are ready, and the only real food decision left each day is dinner," she says.

"It sounds simple, but mentally it makes such a difference."

For Flanagan, cooking has become less of a chore and more of a grounding ritual.

"When people are overwhelmed, food becomes stressful because they're making decision after decision all day long," she says.

"But when you create systems around food, it becomes therapeutic."

She laughs at the idea that wellness has become tied to expensive routines and trends.

"People think wellbeing has to be ice baths, saunas, hot yoga and all these expensive things," she says.

"But some of the most important things are free and actually really simple."

"Thirty minutes of food prep can save you money, reduce stress and free up time for your family or for the things that actually matter."

Importantly, the sisters are also trying to dismantle guilt around food itself.

"All food nourishes us in different ways," Flanagan says.

"A nourishing meal supports you physically, but enjoying ice cream with friends can nourish you psychologically too."

"We really want people to stop labelling foods as 'good' or 'bad'."

That balanced approach appears to be striking a chord with women exhausted by years of conflicting advice and impossible standards.

Interestingly, Flanagan says much of the Two Raw Sisters audience sits in the 30 to 45 and 50-plus age groups.

"Many of these women have spent decades hearing different messages about food and body image," she says.

"They're tired of extremes and they're looking for balance."

The pair's growing online community reflects that shift. Through the Two Raw Sisters app and podcast, followers share recipes, ingredient swaps, struggles and small wins in what Flanagan describes as a deeply supportive environment.

"It's not about perfection," she says.

"It's about starting small and finding what works for your life right now."

For some people that might mean prepping breakfast. For others it could simply be learning to eat without guilt.

"You don't need to overhaul your whole life overnight," Flanagan says.

"Small changes are what actually last."

Despite the growth of the brand, the sisters remain deeply protective of their original values.

"We'll never sell a trend or a quick fix," Flanagan says.

"If something doesn't align with our values, it's an immediate no."

That clarity of purpose has helped guide the business from small Christchurch workshops to a global online platform, and later this year the sisters will release what Flanagan describes as "a big Two Raw Sisters bible," their largest cookbook yet.

Still, she says the most rewarding moments remain the simplest ones.

"We tour around the country and people come up to us saying we've changed the way they think about food and wellbeing," she says.

"That's pretty special."

At its heart, the success of Two Raw Sisters may lie in the fact that their message feels less like another wellness trend and more like permission.

Permission to simplify, nourish yourself and let go of perfection.

And perhaps, in a world constantly demanding more from women, that simplicity is exactly what people are hungry for.



Two Raw Sisters founders Margo Flanagan and Rosa Power believe small, achievable habits around food can make a lasting difference to both health and wellbeing.



MARTIN
WAKEFIELD LTD

ACCOUNTING SERVICES

RURAL BUSINESS SERVICES

- Benchmarking • Bookkeeping/accounting
- Budgeting • Business Start-up
- Cash Flow Forecasting • Financial Planning
- Financing • Monitored Business Performance
- Office Duties • Payroll Services
- Portfolio Management
- Software Solutions • Strategic Planning

WE WORK WITH



Figured



03 687 7122

Level 1, 26 Canon Street, Timaru

Fax: 03 684 8558 • reception@martinwakefield.co.nz

www.martinwakefield.co.nz

Green Orzo Bake with Meatballs

Margo + Rosa's Tips

We love to serve with a drizzle of chilli oil. Make enough dinner for lunch the next day. If you're time poor this will be a game changer for you.

Ingredient Swaps

- Chicken mince for beef, lamb, venison or pork mince
- Use whatever flour you have. Try spelt, white, wholemeal or brown rice flour.
- Parsley for coriander or mint.
- Brown onion for red onion.
- Silverbeet for kale or spinach.
- Parsnip for carrot, potato, kumara or zucchini.
- Thyme for rosemary.
- If you are dairy free, leave out the feta.

Serves 6

Time 50 minutes

Chicken Meatballs

- 500g chicken mince
- ½ cup sundried tomatoes — chopped into small pieces
- 2 cloves garlic — crushed and chopped
- 1 lemon - zest only
- 1 egg
- 3 tbsp flour
- ½ cup flat-leaf parsley — chopped
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- ½ tsp chilli flakes
- ¼ tsp salt

Green Orzo Bake

- 1 brown onion — finely diced
- 2 cloves garlic — crushed and chopped
- 3 stalks silverbeet — thinly sliced
- 1 leek — finely sliced
- 1 parsnip — grated
- 2 sprigs thyme — leaves only, stalks discarded
- 1 cup orzo

- 3 cups vegetable stock
- ¼ tsp sea salt
- ¼ tsp black pepper
- Lemon Dijon Sauce
- 3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tbsp hulled tahini
- 2 tsp Dijon mustard
- 1 lemon — juiced
- ¼ tsp sea salt

To Finish

- 100g feta - crumbled
- ½ cup flat-leaf parsley - chopped

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C fan bake.
2. Combine all of the meatball ingredients in a bowl and mix until combined. Roll into tablespoon-sized balls. Set aside.
3. In a large, deep oven-proof pan/dish, sauté the onion, garlic, silverbeet, leek, grated parsnip and thyme for 5-8 minutes.
4. Stir in the orzo, pour in the vegetable stock and season with salt and pepper. Put the meatballs into the pan.

Note: If you are wanting to freeze this for a later date, this is when you would do that. Cover tightly with tin foil.

5. Bake for 30 minutes until the orzo is tender and the meatballs are cooked through.
6. Mix together all of the lemon dijon sauce ingredients, loosening with a little warm water if needed.
7. Once the bake is cooked, remove from the oven and top with feta and parsley, then spoon over the sauce before serving.
8. Serve warm from the pan.
9. Any leftovers will keep in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 3 days. Alternatively you can freeze, uncooked, for up to 3 months. Allow to defrost, before placing in the oven to cook.



Lets talk about
what's next for
YOUR FARM

Whether you're thinking about upgrades, expansion or ways you can lift day-to-day efficiency, we'll help you explore the right solutions for a more profitable and productive operation.

Talk to our team at the **FIELDAYS!**

WAIKATO
MILKING SYSTEMS

waikatomilking.com
0508 645 546



Growing the value of precision dairy farming

Tarbotton Land & Civil



**Converting
to dairy?**

**We can help get
the job Done Right.**

We provide a complete solution from effluent ponds and irrigation dams to earthworks associated with dairy sheds, compost barns, underpasses, laneways, tree removal and more.



Scan to learn more about our services
tarbotton.co.nz

Mid Canterbury trio strikes a rural chord

The Landgirls are not trying to be a big band.

The Mid Canterbury trio, made up of Anna Munro, Abbey Mackenzie and drummer Pete Wilkinson, play the kind of music that fits where they live. Country leaning, harmony driven, and built for rural halls, pubs and paddock gatherings.

"It's definitely got a bit of a country vibe... just songs that people like hearing. It is an easy listen," Munro says.

The Landgirls began as a duo five years ago, with Munro and Mackenzie playing together when they could, before bringing in Wilkinson into the mix two years ago.

Munro says the pair came together in a way that will feel familiar to many. A shared connection, similar upbringings on farms, and a conversation that turned into a plan.

"We realised we had quite similar taste and decided to meet up for a bit of a jam session."

At that stage, both were living in different places, which meant music was something they returned to when they could. The first proper outing came at the Geraldine fete, where they signed themselves up to perform. For a time it remained casual, with the pair catching up a handful of times each year to play.

It was not until both were back in Mid Canterbury that things began to take a more regular shape. Weekly practices became the norm, often held in a shed on the Mackenzie family farm, and Wilkinson was brought in to round out the sound.

Even then, there was no push to turn it into something more formal.

"It's more for the love of it really."

The Landgirls' sound sits comfortably between country and folk, drawing on influences like Fleetwood Mac and Elton John. Munro plays piano and harmonises, while Mackenzie carries the lead vocal and guitar, but it is Wilkinson who anchors the group on stage.

"And then Pete is just a real steady rockstar at the back, kind of keeping us in check sometimes if we're really nervous, he gets us to take a moment."

The result is a sound built less on volume and more on feel, with a focus on songs people recognise, delivered in a way that suits smaller, more intimate settings.

That approach has found its place at rural events, from community gatherings and birthday celebrations through to paddock parties.

One of the standouts for the group was Party in the Paddock in its early days.

"Probably one of our highlights was playing for the Tamar party in the paddock... the first year that that was on it was so good, it was a real buzz."

They were due to play together again at the event the following year, but life had other plans.

Munro went into labour the night before, missing the event, while Mackenzie carried on the set with Pete Wilkinson on the drums.

For Munro, music has always been part of the picture.

"Growing up, music was definitely my thing."

Farming, she says, was something she worked at, while music was something that came more naturally. Returning to it in recent years has felt like reconnecting with something that was always there.

"I suppose it's like a return to what you did as a kid. The things that made you happy."

Like many rural women, she does not see those different parts of life as needing to compete.

"It's actually fine to have a lot of different interests... it just means you're letting all aspects of yourself out a bit."

Munro farms with her husband Mitch in Mt Somers, while Mackenzie is head teacher at Peel Forest Preschool. Music sits alongside that life, rather than separate from it.

At the moment, however, music is having to fit into a much busier season. Both Munro and Mackenzie have had babies in the past few months, and the rhythm they had



Anna Munro (left) Abbey Mackenzie, and Pete Wilkinson bring a country sound to rural stages across Mid Canterbury. PHOTOS SUPPLIED



The Landgirls began as a duo, with Anna Munro and Abbey Mackenzie playing together, before later bringing in Pete Wilkinson on drums.

established has shifted.

"It's definitely been harder to carve out the time."

Practices are less structured and often interrupted.

"Even if it looks like a few songs and then stopping to breastfeed... it's so worth it because you just remember a little bit of who you are."

Support at home plays a role as well.

Munro speaks openly about the importance of having a partner willing to step in, whether that is taking care of the children during practice or making it possible for her to get to a gig.

"I think it's cool for the kids to see mum not just doing loads of washing... actually like, oh, there's mum up there singing."

Looking ahead, the plan is to ease back into things from spring.

"Yeah, we are thinking more from about spring onwards that we will try and get back up and running. However, if people have something before then, certainly get in touch."

Follow The Landgirls Band on Instagram and Facebook @landgirlsband

BOOK IN FOR YOUR SERVICE WITH

**MALCOLM LOVETT
AUTOMOTIVE LTD**

8am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

Can pick up / deliver your vehicle.

Phone 03 308 9109

Corner Cass and Havelock St
(use Cass St entrance)

**Honda Service
Store Ashburton**



**HANHAM
CONCRETE**



- Concrete Water/Feed Troughs • Precast Panels • Water Tanks/ Effluent Tanks • Silage Pits
- Concrete Bunkers • Weeping Walls • Pivot Bridges • Wingwalls • Concrete Pipes • Killing Sheds

For any quote or inquires contact us on
03 308 4816

Or call into the yard at
205 Wilkins Rd, Tinwald, Ashburton

www.hanhamconcrete.co.nz
info@hanhamconcrete.co.nz





AGRECOVERY

YOUR RURAL RECYCLING SCHEME

From empty agrichemical containers and drums to seed, feed and fertiliser bags, Agrecovery makes it easy to recycle the plastics used every day on New Zealand farms.

Free. Simple. Nationwide.



0800 247 326
www.agrecovery.co.nz



AGRECOVERY
Rural Recycling Scheme