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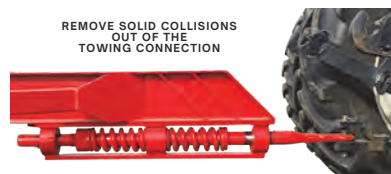
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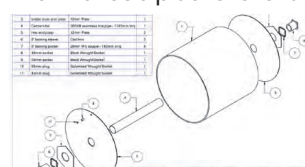


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Our stories don't stop at the last page.

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.

THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF RECOGNITION

There are a lot of awards in this month's Rural Guardian.

From the FMG Young Farmer of the Year to the Ballance Farm Environment Awards and the NZI Rural Women Business Awards, this issue is filled with people being recognised for what they do well.

I have to admit, I love awards season.

One of the privileges of this job is getting the opportunity to talk to some of the best in our industry. Not just the winners, but the finalists and entrants who are prepared to put themselves forward, open up their businesses and farming operations to scrutiny, and see how they measure up.

Because while it is easy to dismiss awards as simply a trophy, a title and a well-deserved pat on the back, for our rural sector they are much more important than that.

Entering an awards programme means putting yourself, your business or your farming operation under the microscope. It means explaining why you do things the way you do and being prepared to have those decisions assessed by people outside your own farm gate.

That takes a fair bit of courage.

It can also be incredibly valuable.

When you are busy running a farm or a rural business, there is not always much opportunity to step back and take an objective look at what is working, what could be improved and how you measure up.

Awards provide that opportunity.

They also give us a chance, as a sector, to showcase what good farming and good rural business actually look like.

That matters.

There is an enormous amount of innovation happening quietly behind farm gates across New Zealand. Farmers and growers are constantly adapting, whether that is improving environmental outcomes,

finding better ways to manage animals and soil, adopting new technology, building stronger businesses or looking after the people working alongside them.

Awards bring some of those ideas out into the open.

And when those stories are shared, other people get to learn from them.

Perhaps most importantly, they give people something to aspire to.

That is particularly valuable for the younger generation coming through agriculture.

The FMG Young Farmer of the Year is a great example. It asks young people to test their practical knowledge, business skills and ability to perform under pressure, but it also puts some incredibly capable young people in front of the wider industry.

Likewise, the Ballance Farm Environment Awards show that environmental responsibility, productivity and profitability do not have to sit in separate boxes. The NZI Rural Women Business Awards shine a light on the innovation, determination and entrepreneurship happening in rural communities.

Of course, these awards are not about suggesting there is one right way to farm, run a business or build a career in agriculture.

Quite the opposite.

Their real value is in showing just how many different ways there are to do things well.

Winning is worth celebrating, of course.

But perhaps the greater value is everything that happens around it: the conversations, the ideas shared, the independent feedback, the confidence gained and the example set for the people coming next.

A trophy might sit on a shelf, but the real value is in what it sparks in others.



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The face of a man who is proud to call himself a southerner! Despite the Hurricanes scarf, draped around Tony Roberts by 2025 winner Brenden Attrill, Tony and his wife Michelle are delighted to call their victory "a win for Southland." Daughter Kate Roberts (right), is equally excited to join the celebration. PHOTOS SUPPLIED

From sharemilking dream, to national stage



Amy Riach

Michelle and Tony Roberts didn't inherit the farming business they have today. Instead, they began with a passion, a move south, and a willingness to build their future from scratch.

Now, they have been named the

2026 National Ambassadors for Sustainable Farming and Growing.

The deer farming and dairy grazing couple from Merino Downs were named winners of the Gordon Stephenson Trophy at the National Sustainability Showcase in Christchurch on July 2, capping off more than three decades of hard work and innovation.

"Shocked is an absolute understatement," Tony laughed.

"Honestly, we didn't think we were in the running. Michelle and I both said early in the night we'd just enjoy the evening and see where it went. We just thought there were these other amazing contestants who were far more polished and

equipped for the role."

"But to come away with the title, it's a real honour. We're pretty chuffed."

For the humble Southland couple, the win has inspired a patriotic pride. Despite the Hurricanes scarf, draped around Tony by 2025 winner Brenden Attrill, the Roberts are proud to call their win "a win for Southland."

"The Southland team that runs the awards was just over the moon that someone from Southland could be representing the whole country as the national sustainability ambassadors," Michelle said.

"What an honour for us all down

south."

Born and raised in Taranaki, and southerners at heart, Tony and Michelle are proud to describe themselves as "self-made."

They began their farming careers in sharemilking, before making the bold decision to relocate to Southland in 1995.

From there, they steadily worked their way into farm ownership, operating Top Deck Trading near Merino Downs.

Today, their family business combines a specialist deer unit producing velvet and trophy bucks, alongside intensive dairy heifer grazing and a small sheep flock.

Across a 269-hectare operation, building their farm has been "one hell of a journey," Tony said proudly.

"We've raised a family along the way, thoroughly enjoyed it, and had some amazing people help us get to where we are."

"We're sort of self-made, should we say, and pretty proud of it."

National judging panel chair, Karen Williams, said that grassroots story is exactly what makes the couple such worthy national ambassadors.

"They chased a dream, worked their way from sharemilking into farm ownership and then built the business they have today."

"Their story gives hope to others that this pathway is still possible."

But the pair's greatest strength is the way they work together, Williams said.

"Tony is always looking around corners. He's prepared to challenge conventional thinking, embrace new technology and ask, 'Why not?' But every great idea needs

someone who can turn it into a sustainable reality, and that's where Michelle is exceptional"

"She brings a calm, considered approach and has a simple rule that new ideas sit for three days before any decisions are made. Together they create a really balanced partnership."

Tony agrees. "I always call Michelle my handbrake," he laughed.

"I'm the big ideas guy, but whenever we do anything major we sit down and discuss it. Together we come up with the right outcomes for the business, our personal life and our family."

Their collective approach to their farm, and to their growing family, is clearly reflected in their approach to sustainability.

"We've always been passionate about farming, and we've always tried to do the right thing," Tony said.

"Don't always ask me what the right thing is, we're still learning that ourselves. But that's the journey we've been on, we got involved in various advanced party groups, focused on the environment, and built a lot of knowledge that we didn't always have."

Michelle said that surrounding themselves with knowledgeable people had made all the difference.

"You don't know what you don't know," she said.

"That sustainability journey has actually always been there, from a very early stage in our life. But in later years, it's been more about the people that we've met, and about us gaining more knowledge around the mitigations that you can easily put in on your farm."



Among the first deer farmers to trial Nedap SmartTags, for monitoring animal performance, the Roberts' deer are forerunners in New Zealand.



The Roberts' family affair! From left, Mark Lieshout, his partner Kate Roberts holding baby Lucy, Tony Roberts, his grandson Bowden, and Michelle Roberts.

"We just thought, well why can't we, why don't we? It takes a village. Once you have that knowledge, it empowers you to make changes on your own farm," Michelle said.

For the Roberts, those changes have included introducing biodiversity corridors, active wetland restoration, retiring marginal land, and improving water quality.

But it has also included embracing new technology, and the pair are among the first deer farmers to trial Nedap SmartTags for monitoring animal performance.

"This new tech is game-changing," Tony said.

"There are so many more opportunities now than there were even three or four years ago."

And while environmental stewardship impressed the judges, it was the Roberts family's willingness to share what they have learned that truly stood out.

Judge Williams described the couple as generous with both their knowledge and their time.

"Their gates are always open," she said.

"They've hosted farmers from around New Zealand, international visitors, students and community groups."

Michelle has also taken on leadership roles beyond the farm gate, including serving on

Southland's Regional Forum, helping guide freshwater management.

Her commitment to community, she told the Guardian, comes from watching her parents.

"My father shaped a lot of how I think about community. He was always giving back to his community, either through the Lions Club, or through St. Vincent de Paul, or just by visiting the old people in the hospital, even when he was just about as old as they were."

"He has had a big influence on how I feel about community and his involvement, and my mother's involvement growing up, has definitely instilled some of those values in me."

But the farming community itself has also proved one of the greatest teachers.

"Everybody's got some knowledge to share," Tony said.

"You take little bits away from everybody and put it into your own farm. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't, but you're always evolving."

And for this couple, evolution is the first step in preparing their farm for a lasting tomorrow, future-proofing a business that is already looking towards the next generation.

Their daughter Kate Roberts, and her partner Mark Lieshout,

have both joined the business, and Kate was there for every step, joining her parents at the awards ceremony to celebrate.

Kate told the Guardian, the entire family was "completely overwhelmed" by the national win.

"We thought winning the regional award was an amazing achievement in itself," she said.

"Going up against all the other incredible regional winners, we honestly thought there was no way we'd come away with the national title."

"We're shell-shocked honestly, but so proud of Mum and Dad and how far we've all come."

"We've always been people of the land and people about the stock," Kate said.

"All of us are really passionate about that, and having a farm that looks really beautiful as well as being economical and productive. You're future proofing it this way as well."

For Kate, that future is already here on the farm, where she is raising her own children, one-year-old Lucy, and Bowden, nearly three, on the land alongside their grandparents.

"Just being able to raise kids on the farm is really valuable and special to us," she said.

"The little things become really special. To see the kids' eyes light up, and be able to do it all with



Tony and Michelle Roberts on the farm, now the newly named 2026 National Ambassadors for Sustainable Farming and Growing.

Mum and Dad. Just the pure thrill they get out of seeing Nan and Pop come over, and being so close to them, has been a big motivator for sure."

As National Ambassadors for Sustainable Farming and Growing, 'Nan and Pop' will spend the coming year travelling the country, speaking at events and representing the Ballance Farm Environment Trust.

For Tony and Michelle, this is the opportunity of a lifetime, to shine a light on the wider farming community.

"We want to share our story," Tony said, "but more importantly, advocate on behalf of all farmers in the food and fibre sector."

"There are people doing some incredibly good work out there who don't get the recognition they deserve because they're quietly getting on with it. We want to highlight that."

Despite the busy year ahead, Tony is adamant there is nowhere else he'd rather be than on the farm.

"It's freedom, there's nothing like it. You're looking after the birds, the stock, the plants. You're part of that ecosystem."

"Whether it's a beautiful sunny day or a cold, windy day, you're still out there doing what you love."

The love the Roberts share, for "Kiwi, number eight wire farming," is exactly what has driven them this far.

"Even in the middle of a cold, shitty, horrible day, you can't really think about being anywhere else," Michelle said, "although sometimes inside would be nice! But it's what we value, it's bred into us."

"I really can't imagine not living on a farm," she laughed.

"It's just the way we live. It's who we are."



From sharemilking to farm ownership, Tony and Michelle Roberts operate Top Deck Trading near Merino Downs, where their family business combines a specialist deer unit with intensive dairy heifer grazing and a small sheep flock.



"Absolutely shocked!" From right, Michelle, Tony, and Kate Roberts, thrilled to celebrate their unexpected win at Ballance Environment Trust Awards. From Merino Downs, the Roberts were named winners of the Gordon Stephenson Trophy at the National Sustainability Showcase in Christchurch on July 2.



RWNZ faces questions over definitions bill submission

Rural Women New Zealand says its opposition to the Legislation (Definitions of Woman and Man) Amendment Bill was a board-led advocacy decision, but one rural woman says members should have been consulted before the organisation spoke publicly on their behalf.



Claire Inkson
RURAL EDITOR

Rural Women New Zealand (RWNZ) is facing questions over whether it adequately consulted members before lodging a submission opposing the Legislation (Definitions of Woman and Man) Amendment Bill.

The dispute has highlighted a broader tension for membership organisations: when is an elected board entitled to speak on behalf of members, and when should members be directly asked?

Emmy Maxwell, a rural woman and North Canterbury farmer who says she is a member of Rural Women New Zealand, has written an open letter to the organisation's national board, saying she was disappointed RWNZ took a public position on a contentious issue without first seeking wider member feedback.

The bill, a Member's Bill in the name of New Zealand First MP Jenny Marcroft, seeks to amend the Legislation Act 2019 by defining "woman" as "an adult human biological female" and "man" as "an adult human biological male", with corresponding definitions for "female" and "male".

Supporters say the bill would provide legal clarity around sex-based rights. Opponents, including RWNZ, argue it is unnecessary and could worsen discrimination.

RWNZ lodged a submission opposing the bill, saying it did not believe the legislation would improve the rights, opportunities or wellbeing of women and girls in New Zealand.

Maxwell argues RWNZ had no clear mandate to take a public position on such a significant and divisive issue without first asking members.

"This bill raises important questions about the legal meaning of those words, and the protection of women's sex-based rights in New Zealand law," Maxwell wrote in her open letter.

"Whether members support or oppose the bill, it is an issue of major significance to women. For that reason, I expected Rural Women New Zealand to consult its members before taking a public position."

Maxwell said she first wrote to RWNZ on May 29, asking the organisation to support the bill, or at least engage with members before speaking on their behalf.

She said she saw no member survey, no online discussion, no invitation for feedback, and no open communication asking rural women for their views before

RWNZ lodged its submission.

"A national organisation should not take such a strong public position on an issue of this significance, without first engaging with the women it claims to represent," she said.

In an interview with Rural Guardian, Maxwell said she believed RWNZ should have made members aware submissions were open and given them an opportunity to have their say.

"They should have made the members aware of the submission coming up. I've been on plenty of committees where people vote. They should have had a poll or voted or something like that.

"If their members had voted to be against it, the majority, then they should have submitted on that."

Maxwell said her support for the bill came from concern about women's sex-based rights and spaces, including sport, healthcare, data collection, prisons, refuges and changing facilities.

"I think it would cement the rights of women and girls to have their single-sex based spaces," she said.

Maxwell said she did not want to "put anyone else down", but believed the law needed to be clear where biological sex was relevant.

In her open letter, she wrote that supporting the legal definition of woman and man was "not about excluding anyone", but about ensuring laws written to protect women and girls could continue to have clear meaning and be consistently applied.

The letter generated significant discussion after being shared on social media, attracting more than 780 comments at the time of writing.

RWNZ has acknowledged its members hold a range of views on the issue.

In a written response to Maxwell, chief executive Sandra Kirby said RWNZ had submitted in opposition because it did not believe the bill would improve the rights, opportunities or wellbeing of women and girls.

"At a time when rural communities are dealing with real and pressing challenges, this Bill represents time and resource that could be far better spent on issues that genuinely improve women's lives," Kirby wrote.

"This position reflects our commitment to backing causes that genuinely improve life for women, and the board's judgement that this Bill doesn't do that."

Kirby said RWNZ supported members to self-identify, did not hold data on gender identity, and did not plan to start doing so.

"I realise that this is disappointing to you," Kirby wrote. "We know our members hold a range of views on this issue, and always encourage members to



Emmy Maxwell says Rural Women New Zealand should have consulted members before lodging its submission on the Legislation (Definitions of Woman and Man) Amendment Bill. PHOTO SUPPLIED

submit to legislation to ensure their voice is heard."

RWNZ also sent an advisory to members following public discussion of its submission.

In that advisory, the RWNZ board said the submission focused on its belief that the bill failed to improve women's rights or wellbeing, and argued that time and resources should instead address pressing rural issues.

The board said it believed the bill created legislative issues, worsened discrimination, and harmed the wellbeing of individuals in rural areas.

It said the submission was a "Board-led process" and that all board members were involved in reviewing its contents.

"Our decision to submit was based firmly in RWNZ values, and followed the criteria agreed in our advocacy policy," the board said.

The advisory listed those criteria as advancing the social and economic wellbeing of communities outside main urban areas, supporting the empowerment of women and families within rural communities, reflecting the cultural diversity of rural New Zealand, giving due regard to the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and reflecting that all people are equal under the law.

The board described the bill

as a "very short and blunt bill" and said its concerns centred on the intended application of the definitions into at least 13 other pieces of legislation, where it believed the "blunt application may disadvantage women".

"As your elected members we make policy and advocacy calls on members' behalf between AGMs and remits. This was one of those calls," the board said.

It also said it was looking closely at its processes and reviewing the steps taken.

"We will learn from this process and make changes that need to be made."

Rural Guardian requested an interview with RWNZ chief executive Sandra Kirby to discuss how the submission was developed, what governance process was followed, whether members or branches were consulted, and the reasoning behind the organisation's opposition to the bill.

RWNZ declined the request.

"Thank you for the opportunity, which we will politely decline and won't be facilitating interviews," communications and advocacy manager Georgia Nelson said in response.

Maxwell said the refusal to be interviewed added to her concerns about accountability.

She described the timing and process as "underhanded" and said RWNZ's refusal to answer questions from the media or its own members was disrespectful to those it claimed to represent.

Maxwell said she would like RWNZ to apologise and acknowledge that members should have been consulted before the submission was lodged.

"I just think, gosh, Rural Women, the name should be a clue."

Maxwell said she hoped speaking out would encourage other women to take part in public debate, even where issues were difficult or divisive.

"We shouldn't, in this day and age, be unable to have free and open debate without being persecuted for it," she said.

For Maxwell, the central issue is whether RWNZ's submission could fairly be said to represent rural women when members had not been directly asked.

"Rural women are not a single voice," she wrote.

"We are mothers, grandmothers, daughters, farmers, workers, volunteers, business owners, community leaders, and advocates."

The bill was referred to the Social Services and Community Committee after its first reading. Public submissions closed on July 2.

What's still lurking in the tank could kill your crops

Stop spray contamination where it starts

Threats to crops can come from unexpected sources.

Farmers and growers are wise to pests, climate and environmental dangers and risks. But something more insidious is out there: Spray residue in what you think is a clean spray tank.

Pieter Van Der Westhuizen, UPL New Zealand's Technical Market Development Manager and adjuvant expert, warns that spray equipment contamination is one of the most under estimated causes of crop damage in agriculture.

"People may think that their spray gear is clean, but cleaning spray tanks with laundry powder or ammonia is not going to remove every trace of spray. That's simply not what they're formulated to do. You may think the tank is clean, but spray actives can still be there – even if it's in small amounts. That's where the risk lies. It only takes a drop to ruin a crop. All Clear 2X tank cleaner is the affordable crop insurance policy farmers and contractors can't afford not to have."

Pieter says All Clear 2X will out-perform ordinary tank cleaners on the widest range of agricultural chemicals, even commonly used oily products which are notoriously "sticky", or difficult to remove.

All Clear 2X is a specifically formulated, non-corrosive, spray tank cleaner and decontaminator, designed to remove any agrichemical residues from the entire spray system. Its unique three-way mode of action combines surfactants, sequestrants and detergents to lift residues from surfaces, dissolve deposits and prevent contaminants from re-attaching within the spray equipment. It also locks ups, breaks down,



Residual herbicide damage resulting from insufficient tank clean-out.

and neutralises the agrichemical molecules.

Pieter strongly recommends using All Clear 2X whenever changing between products, but especially when moving from herbicide applications to fungicides or insecticides, and for end-of-season sprayer maintenance.

By thoroughly cleaning tanks, pumps, hoses, filters, booms and nozzles, Pieter says All Clear 2X reduces the risk of contamination. "This protects sensitive crops, preserves yield potential and gives farmers and growers complete confidence that every spray application gets off to a really clean start. There's nothing in the background that will compromise the expected outcome from the spray

programme."

Pieter says the recommended way to use All Clear 2X is to drain all equipment immediately after spraying including tank, hoses and booms. "Rinse the inside of the tank with clean water, clear of visible residues, and flush through hoses and booms using at least 1/10 of the tank spray volume. Fully drain the tank and dispose of the rinsate."

Then half-fill the tank with clean water and All Clear 2X at 250 mL per 100 L of the total volume of the tank. Agitate this cleaning mixture in the tank. Flush hoses and booms until cleaning solution starts to come out through all the nozzles. Then keep circulating the cleaning mixture while filling the spray tank to capacity.

"It's best to leave it to sit overnight," Pieter says. "That will clean-out all the chemicals currently available on the New Zealand market."

Pieter says what's left in the tank is safe to spray out in the yard without harm to the environment. "As All Clear 2X has no active and is non-corrosive and is chlorine and ammonia free, it's a better way all around."

Pieter explains that even very small trace amounts of crop protection products left behind in tanks, hoses, filters, screens, booms and nozzles can cause significant damage when spraying subsequent crops.

"Herbicide residues such as metsulfuron, picloram, carfentrazone-ethyl, glyphosate, dicamba, 2,4-D, sulfonylureas, and flumetsulam persist in spray systems and contaminate future spray loads, resulting in crop damage, reduced yields and quality, and rejected produce. It can also result in costly resprays and, worst case scenario, recultivation and replanting. "You'd have to start again from scratch."

He says a classic example of where the tank wasn't fully cleaned was in a maize crop that was sprayed for broadleaf weeds with a highly selective post emergence herbicide. Unfortunately, the maize was also taken out. The culprit? Closer investigation found clethodim residue in the tank.

"As New Zealand, farmers, growers and spray contractors increasingly rotate between herbicides, fungicides, insecticides, plant growth regulators, and foliar fertilisers, the risk of spray tank contamination has never been greater."

Pieter says with more than a thousand ACVM-registered crop protection products in use in New Zealand, effective sprayer decontamination is an essential part of a robust spray programme.

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Slee keeps family tradition alive with Young Farmer title



Claire Inkson
RURAL EDITOR

Otago Southland dairy farmer Tom Slee has become the third member of his family to win the FMG Young Farmer of the Year title after a dramatic late comeback at the Grand Final in New Plymouth.

The reality of winning New Zealand's most prestigious farming competition had still not fully sunk in for Slee when he returned south.

"It's pretty surreal," the 29-year-old said. "It's very cool."

Slee claimed the national title on July 4 after a demanding Grand Final contested by seven regional champions and featuring written exams, interviews, public speaking, practical modules and technical challenges.

Heading into the final Agri-Knowledge quiz, he was sitting in third place behind Aorangi representative Jack Taggart and Waikato Bay of Plenty's Cam Clayton.

Slee knew there was little room for caution.

"I was pretty nervous, so I just had to go for it," he said.

"There were definitely some nerves there, and I think all the supporters were sitting on the edge of their seats for a while."

A dominant performance during the buzzer rounds carried him to the top of the leaderboard, with Taggart finishing runner-up 10 points back and Clayton taking third place.

The comeback carried a strong sense of family history.

Slee's father, Richard Slee, won the Young Farmer of the Year title in 1999 after mounting a similar late charge, while his uncle Simon Hopcroft took the title in 2004.

Slee's victory makes him the 14th champion from Otago Southland. It also returns the trophy to the region for the first time since Season 50.

Slee said the family connection brought a mixture of pressure and motivation but also gave him an experienced support team.

"They definitely helped with my training and throughout the few days we were up there."

The support extended well beyond his immediate family.

More than 60 people made the journey north to cheer him on, including former Lincoln University mates who travelled to New Plymouth for the event.

"It was pretty cool," Slee said.

While the technical component of the competition rewarded preparation, Slee said the practical day was the toughest part of the Grand Final.

"The practical day was definitely hard for me, both mentally and physically," he said.

"I felt pretty prepared for the technical day. You had everything there, and if you had done the preparation, it paid off."

"The practical day was more

about seeing how things unfolded. You had to do a lot of things on the fly."

Contestants were given just two hours to work through a series of farm-based tasks.

"I think I could have been there for another three hours trying to get everything done," Slee said.

Alongside the overall title, Slee won the Agri-business and Agri-Knowledge sections, taking his total prize package to more than \$90,000.

New Zealand Young Farmers chief executive Cheyne Gillooly said Slee had impressed judges with his broad skill set, leadership qualities and commitment to the food and fibre sector.

"It's incredibly exciting to see the title go to Tom, someone who is not only an exceptional farmer, but also a strong ambassador for the next generation of people working in the sector," Gillooly said.

He said the standard of competition had been exceptionally high.

"Every one of these finalists should be immensely proud of what they've achieved."

"These young farmers represent the very best of our sector, and the talent, leadership and commitment they've shown gives me a lot of confidence in the future."

Gillooly also acknowledged the volunteers, supporters and sponsors who worked behind the scenes to make the competition possible.

"It's the people behind the scenes who make this competition what it is," he said.

"We're hugely appreciative of everything they give to make it happen."

For Slee, the greatest opportunity from the win was not the prize package, but the platform the title would give him during the coming year.

"For me, it is really about the opportunity to represent agriculture in New Zealand," he said.

"The prizes are pretty cool, but being able to represent young people and people in farming is a big opportunity and a privilege. I'm looking forward to that."

Slee has already had a taste of the influence that comes with the title, receiving messages from parents whose children competed in AgriKidsNZ.

"We have had some really nice calls from AgriKids parents congratulating us and saying their children are looking up to me as a role model," he said.

"That is pretty special."

Despite the celebrations, there was little time to pause.

The official function continued until about 3am, leaving Slee and his supporters "a bit dusty" the following day.

After flying back to Invercargill in poor weather, he was soon answering phone calls and heading to a farming discussion group meeting.

Farm work, including the approaching calving season, also remained firmly on the agenda.

Slee said he was proud to represent both Otago Southland and farmers around the country, and hoped his win

would encourage others to put themselves forward.

"Give it a go," he said.

"It is a pretty cool way to put yourself out there against some of the best in the country, while learning and developing your skills."

The competition had challenged him beyond technical and practical farming ability, particularly through the interviews, public speaking and constant attention surrounding the Grand Final.

"The last few days have definitely challenged me, particularly with interviews, speaking to different people and learning how to handle different situations," he said.

"You always have to be learning something new. That is probably what I have enjoyed about the whole process."

Runner-up in the FMG Young Farmer of the Year was Aorangi representative Jack Taggart, who finished just 10 points behind Slee, while Waikato Bay of Plenty's Cam Clayton placed third.

The Grand Final also included the FMG Junior Young Farmer of the Year and AgriKidsNZ competitions, showcasing the next generation of talent coming through the sector.

Waikato Bay of Plenty pair Benjamin Barbour and Toby Christensen, from Putaruru College and John Paul College, won the 2026 FMG Junior Young Farmer of the Year title after strong performances in the technical modules and final face-off.

East Coast team Sophie Storrar and Hannah Newman, from Woodford House, finished second, while Aorangi representatives Emma Kinzett and Megan Nish, from Mt Hutt College, placed third. Newman was also named FMG Junior Contestant of the Year.

Waikato Bay of Plenty completed a clean sweep of the youth titles when Otewa Gumboot Gang, from Otewa School, were crowned the 2026 AgriKidsNZ Grand Champions.

Halcombe Black, representing Taranaki Manawatū, finished second, while Aorangi team Beaconfield Redbands placed third. Jack Jeeves was named AgriKidsNZ Contestant of the Year.

Tom Slee celebrates after being crowned the 2026 FMG Young Farmer of the Year.



Prime Minister Christopher Luxon presents Tom Slee with the FMG Young Farmer of the Year trophy at the Season 58 Grand Final in New Plymouth. PHOTOS SUPPLIED



More than 60 supporters travelled from Southland to back Tom Slee during the FMG Young Farmer of the Year Grand Final in New Plymouth.

Methven talent shines on national stage at Young Farmer finals



Amy Riach

Methven has plenty to celebrate after three local competitors delivered podium performances on the national stage.

Former Mount Hutt College student Jack Taggart finished runner-up in the 2026 FMG Young Farmer of the Year Grand Final, while current students Emma Kinzett and Megan Nish claimed third place in the Junior Young Farmer of the Year competition.

The trio represented the Aorangi region in New Plymouth, where the country's best young rural talent gathered for the 58th annual contest.

For Taggart, who finished behind Otago's Tom Slee, the result followed months of preparation and sacrifice.

"I'm pretty chuffed, there's been a lot of hard work put into the build-up to this," he said.

"It was Kane Brisco, the Farmstrong advocate, who told me, 'you're a winner if you make it to the start line.' It might sound a bit cheesy, but regardless of reaching the podium, I actually felt really pleased with just that."

The Grand Final tested competitors across two demanding days, beginning with a three-hour written exam, a business proposal presented to a panel and an HR challenge.

Finalists then progressed to a full day of practical farming tasks, including shearing sheep, building fences, assembling calf feeders and constructing a traditional Taranaki gate.

The classic wire-and-wooden-batten gate proved particularly challenging, with Taggart injuring both thumbs during the task.

"I'd cut one thumb open on a piece of wire, and smacked the other hard with a hammer. Then we had to repair a tyre, which was like trying to thread a needle with two thumbs that weren't really wanting to work," he laughed.

Despite the injuries, he completed the challenge and said the physical and mental pressure was part of the appeal.

"The highlight for me is just getting pushed physically and mentally and still doing well. I just really love an occasion to rise to. And this was definitely that."

Taggart said he finished the competition physically exhausted but satisfied his preparation and energy management had paid off.

"The satisfaction was getting up there and knowing I'd put in as much as I could, and then some more."

Taggart, 27, attended Mount Hutt College about a decade ago and said it was especially rewarding to share the experience with the school's junior competitors.

"Mount Hutt College was my high school as well, and their agriculture teacher Mrs Jessep was my teacher too. It was neat to have



Methven was well represented at the national Young Farmer competitions. From left, Megan Nish, Jack Taggart and Emma Kinzett on stage in New Plymouth.



Prime Minister Christopher Luxon joined the competitors on stage in New Plymouth to congratulate the 2026 winners. From left, runner-up Jack Taggart, overall winner Tom Slee and third-place finisher Cam Clayton.



The written challenges are just as important as the physical tasks, and "even more intimidating". Taggart developed and presented a business innovation plan to a panel of judges and managed an HR crisis scenario.



The famous Taranaki gate left Taggart with two injured thumbs after he sliced one hand on fencing wire and struck the other with his hammer. Despite the injuries, he completed the build, saying he "gave it everything in the tank".



Emma Kinzett, left, and Megan Nish, from Mount Hutt College, answer questions from MC Te Radar during the FMG opening ceremony.

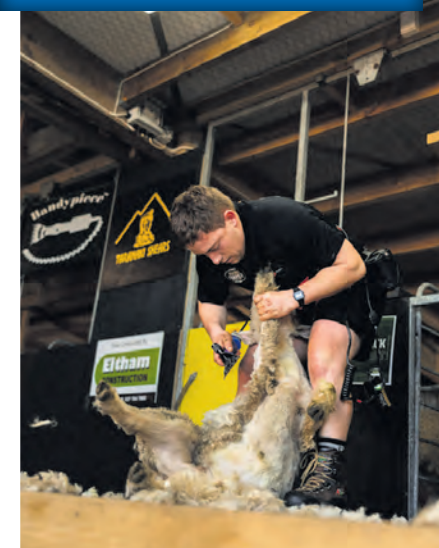


Megan Nish and Emma Kinzett race against the other junior teams to build rat traps using only the materials provided.



Junior competitor Megan Nish backs a football into a bucket during a novelty challenge on competition day.

Jack Taggart makes quick and tidy work of the sheep-shearing challenge.



With snow on Mount Taranaki and the ground hardened by an overnight frost, Taggart puts everything into breaking ground.



Repairing the dreaded puncture was "like trying to thread a needle with two thumbs that don't work", Taggart said.



her there supporting all three of us this weekend."

He also credited the Methven community with helping him reach the national final.

"There have been friends, family, team members and a professional network who all stepped up so I could prepare. It's really a community effort, not just mine."

Mount Hutt College students Kinzett and Nish also made their mark, finishing third against 13 other regional teams from around New Zealand.

They topped the country in the written exam, placing first in the essay section of the competition.

"It was such an amazing experience," Kinzett said.

"The whole weekend was jam-packed! We just did a little bit of absolutely everything, water troughs, fencing, rain gauges, all of it."

Preparation had been intensive, with the pair giving up Wednesday afternoon sport to train with agriculture teacher Fiona Jessep.

"We studied practice exams, practised our fencing, and we had a local contractor come in and teach us practical skills," Kinzett said.

Learning how to complete practical tasks as a team was one of their biggest challenges.

"You'd normally plumb a water trough yourself, or do your fencing yourself. Learning how to do those tasks as a team, and working out who should do what, made Megan and I really play to our strengths," she said.

The pair also faced the pressure of a live quiz in front of about 700 people.

"Stuff that you'd know normally just disappears up there. But we pulled together, and we're proud of that."

Kinzett said the support of Jessep, their families and the wider Methven community had made a huge difference.

"Ms Jessep has been amazing. I can't explain how helpful she's been with everything," she said.

The experience has also strengthened Kinzett's ambition to build a career in agriculture and one day compete in the senior contest.

"I'd love to do the actual Young Farmer of the Year competition when I'm older, and I would love to do it with Megan too," she said.

She also found inspiration in Taggart's performance.

"He's our regional advocate, and he was very inspirational. He helped us a lot, and he gave us a lot of his time."

Young Farmers are the future of New Zealand agriculture, so each issue we shine a spotlight on a Young Farmers Club member. Today we talk to Oliver Teale from Nightcaps Young Farmers

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

I have been a member of Nightcaps Young Farmers for three years.

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

The highlight has been meeting new friends and taking part in farm tours. I have also enjoyed talking with other farmers about the challenges we are facing and discussing possible solutions.

3 How did you become involved in agriculture?

I became involved in agriculture through my interests in hunting and Young Farmers.

4 What is your job now, and what has your journey in agriculture been like so far?

I am currently the 2IC on a dairy farm in the Scott's Gap area of Southland. The farm milks 550 cows across 186 effective hectares through a 40-a-side herringbone shed.

My role includes milking, tractor work, grass management, crop walks, caring for young stock and putting up both permanent and temporary fencing.

My farming journey began on a mixed beef and arable farm before I moved into dairy farming. I later came to New Zealand to continue developing my dairy experience. I worked for Pāmu, milking cows and working with red deer, before moving to a privately owned winter-milking farm in the Taupō area.

I then moved to Southland, where I have worked on several dairy farms milking between 500 and 800 cows.

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

I would like to see New Zealand agriculture remain profitable and for younger generations to continue having opportunities to work their way towards farm ownership.

6 What are your future plans?

My goal is to manage a dairy farm and eventually progress into contract milking.

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

My biggest inspiration has been my first boss, David Nixey. He taught me a great deal, helped build my confidence and encouraged me to become involved with the local Young Farmers club.

He also pushed me to come to New Zealand and experience how dairy farming is done in another part of the world.



Nomination —

Ollie has been a welcoming face around the club for the past few years and is always willing to lend a hand. More recently, he put in a huge amount of behind-the-scenes work for the Gumboot Ball, helping with both the set-up and clean-up, while ensuring all health and safety requirements were met. This included making several trips to collect and return hay bales, cutting up rubbish drums and disposing of the waste after the event. Thanks, Ollie, for all your hard work and everything you contribute to the club.



CONGRATULATIONS TOM SLEE!

Tom was crowned 2026 FMG Young Farmer of the Year at the Grand Final in New Plymouth in July. Slee is the 14th winner from Otago Southland, and the third in his family to don the cloak of knowledge - following in the footsteps of his father and uncle.

Congratulations also to Benjamin Barbour and Toby Christensen - 2026 FMG Junior Young Farmer champions, and to Laura Connolly, Isaac Wilson and Jack Woodward - 2026 AgrikidsNZ winners.

We're here for the good of the country.



Beyond the farm gate: a young farmer's election wishlist

Lincoln Young Farmers vice-chair Hillary Cooper says greater investment in young farmers is essential to secure the future of New Zealand agriculture. PHOTO SUPPLIED



Amy Riach

With New Zealand heading into an election year, many people are focused on inflation, health, infrastructure and the rising cost of living. But for young farmers, another question feels just as urgent: who will take over the farms that help feed the country?

For Hillary Cooper, vice-chair of Lincoln Young Farmers, this election matters deeply. In 2026, she will be eligible to vote for the first time. Like many young people in agriculture, she is looking at a future shaped by farm succession, changing markets and pressure on rural communities.

At the heart of Cooper's message is a simple point: New Zealand

needs to value its food and fibre sector more.

"All people are asking for is for New Zealand to prioritise the food we produce," she said.

For Cooper, that means closing the gap between town and country, giving farmers practical support, and investing in the next generation. The need is growing. She said the average New Zealand farmer is about 65, and many families are now working through who will take over the farm.

"Mum and Dad are selling the farm, and a lot of children are now looking to take over," she said. "That succession with properties is really big right now."

That transition is happening during an uncertain time. Commodity prices are stronger now, especially for sheep, beef and dairy, but Cooper said farmers know how quickly conditions can change. A shift in government policy, market prices or regulation can affect income, confidence and long-term plans.

"The industry is on a balancing scale all of the time," she said.

"We're so susceptible to change that we find it repellent."

Environmental rules, compliance costs, climate pressures and unstable markets all add pressure to businesses that are already stretched. Cooper said the past decade has been especially hard for arable, sheep and beef farmers. That makes change feel risky, even when it may be needed.

She said the public and policymakers also need to understand that not all farming sectors are the same. Dairy farmers can see their production and income more regularly. Sheep, beef and arable farmers often invest heavily before seeing a return. That difference changes how much risk each business can carry.

"You can't put them all in one box," Cooper said. "They're not interchangeable."

Her top election wish is better access to funding and support from government agencies, especially the Ministry for Primary

Industries. She wants farmers to have help when rules change, and she wants more investment in organisations that work directly with rural communities.

Cooper said groups such as Beef + Lamb New Zealand do important work but are often stretched too thin. More resources, she said, would make it easier for young farmers to build confidence and plan for the future.

Education is another priority. Cooper does not think the answer is simply making agriculture compulsory at school. Instead, she wants better access to practical learning, especially for students who may not have many chances to connect with farming.

"Our school kids should be a priority for policymakers," she said. "They love it. They thrive in it. And practical skills are a big part of it too."

Cooper believes stronger policy is necessary if New Zealand agriculture is to stay competitive.

But she said farmers must be able to trust the people making the rules. Without trust, compliance becomes harder, and the whole system suffers.

She also wants more people to recognise how deeply farming supports rural towns. Farms help keep schools open, shops busy and communities alive.

"If you didn't have farmers, you wouldn't have a community," she said. "The bakery wouldn't succeed, the school would be empty."

That sense of community is one reason people stay in farming, even when times are hard. Cooper said farmers often get through tough seasons because they know others nearby are facing the same pressures.

Still, the industry needs more young people. Farming can mean isolation, long hours and modest pay. Many people outside rural areas do not see it as a career option, and those without farming backgrounds can struggle to find a clear path in.

Cooper said farming is too often seen only as physical labour, rather than as a business that needs leadership, technology, financial skill and fresh ideas.

She believes agriculture must become more open to people from different backgrounds. "We have to broaden our skill input," she said. The idea that someone must come from a farming family to be good at the job is wrong, she added.

As the election approaches, Cooper's message to politicians is clear: support the industries that feed the country, invest in young people, and stop treating agriculture as an afterthought.

"Valuing young people more than anything now is key," she said.

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From dairy dreams to orchard success



Claire Inkson
RURAL EDITOR

Nelson Young Grower winner Amelia Marsden is preparing for another shot at the national title while putting down roots in a new role developing young kiwifruit and apple plants at Thomas Bros Orchards.

Winning the Nelson Young Grower title in June for the second year running brought Marsden a very different kind of pressure.

When she entered the competition last year, she was primarily looking to challenge herself and enjoy the experience. Winning came as a surprise.

This year, she arrived as the defending champion.

"I put much more pressure on myself because I wanted to repeat what I had done last year, so that was quite stressful," Marsden said.

"It is always going to be different because you have different competitors and slightly different modules, but this year there was definitely more pressure to do it again."

The 30-year-old nursery manager at Thomas Bros Orchards in Riwaka successfully defended her regional title on June 19 and will now compete against six other regional winners at the national Young Grower of the Year final in Cromwell on August 27 and 28.

She placed third at the national final in 2025.

Marsden said the weeds and herbicides section was easily the most challenging part of this year's regional competition.

"I think it was probably the most difficult module I have faced in any of the Young Farmer or Young Grower competitions I have entered. It was incredibly difficult."

The fertiliser module was more familiar territory after her previous role with Ballance Agri-Nutrients, while the tractor section was among the most enjoyable.

Although Marsden has proven herself a strong competitor, she said winning was not the main reason she entered.

"I would not describe myself as competitive by nature, but I am very self-competitive."

"I primarily enter to find out where my strengths and weaknesses lie and what I need to work on. The competitions expose you to different areas and skills that you might not encounter in your everyday work."

The networking, industry exposure and personal development that came with the competition were equally valuable, she said.

Marsden is also an experienced Young Farmer competitor, having reached regional finals during each of the past four years. She plans



Amelia Marsden celebrates winning the 2026 Nelson Young Grower of the Year title. She will compete in the national final in Cromwell in August. PHOTO SUPPLIED

to enter again this season before reaching the competition's age limit.

Her experience has taught her how to operate under pressure and be strategic when moving through a practical competition.

"You learn where you are going to get the most points and not to get hung up on the things you do not know."

"At the end of the day, you cannot earn points for something you do not attempt."

Marsden is planning a more focused build-up to this year's national Young Grower final after a difficult lead-in to the 2025 competition limited her preparation.

Finalists are given advance notice of the broad subject areas the practical modules will cover, allowing them to target their study without knowing the specific tasks they will face.

"Once I have that information, I will be able to prepare with a more specific focus."

Her new workplace is also likely to prove a valuable resource.

"Thomas Bros has quite a history of employees progressing to the national final, so I will be relying on some of the people here for guidance. They understand what the competition involves."

The first day of the final will coincide with her father's 70th birthday, giving the family an additional reason to celebrate in Cromwell.

Her parents were travelling in Europe during last year's final and were disappointed they could not attend.

"After I won the regional competition last year, Mum said, 'You weren't meant to win this year because we're not going to be there.'"

"They are very excited that they will be able to attend this time."

Marsden's route into horticulture was far from planned.

She grew up on a West Coast dairy farm and had wanted to become a dairy farmer from the age of five. Her school subjects were chosen with an agricultural career in mind, followed by a Bachelor of Agriculture at Lincoln University and work in the dairy industry.

A serious wrist injury early in her career changed that path.

Following surgery, Marsden was no longer able to milk cows and began looking for rural professional, advisory or representative roles.

A friend's mother suggested she apply for a position in horticulture.

"I applied without expecting to hear anything back because I had no horticultural experience, but I was appointed as a supervisor at Willisbrook Orchards. It went from there."

At university she had found plant science uninspiring, but the subject came alive once she began applying it in the orchard.

"Once I was working with plants practically and could apply that knowledge, I found it really interesting."

Horticulture was also physically accessible in a way livestock farming was no longer able to be, following her injury.

"It can be physically demanding,

but in a different way from livestock farming. You do not need to be able to physically handle a large animal."

Marsden found much of her dairy knowledge could be transferred into horticulture.

She compared the use of Hi-Cane to help manage flowering and harvest timing in orchards with the use of reproductive tools to condense calving in dairy herds.

"The methods are completely different, but both are ways of manipulating and managing the peak workload."

Her career has since included apple supervision, kiwifruit management and fertiliser advisory work before she joined Thomas Bros as nursery manager shortly before the regional competition.

The role appealed after development work during the previous winter helped her realise she was most interested in young plants and establishing orchard blocks.

"I loved the kiwifruit role I previously had, but I discovered my passion was in developing young plants and getting blocks established, rather than solely in fruit production."

There was also another complication.

"It turned out I was allergic to kiwifruit."

Thomas Bros is now developing an on-orchard nursery to produce replacement plants for its own kiwifruit and apple blocks.

On the kiwifruit side, plants will be propagated from seed before being grafted and cared for through the growing season. They will then be lifted the following winter and planted into gaps within established orchard blocks or potentially used in future developments.

A similar system is being developed for apples, including establishing an in-house rootstock supply.

"We will graft the trees, grow them for a year and then plant them into gaps in the orchard blocks."

Thomas Bros grows Green, SunGold and RubyRed kiwifruit, along with apples, pears and

cherries.

Marsden said RubyRed offered both consumer novelty and practical supply-chain benefits.

"Instead of cutting into a kiwifruit and seeing green or gold flesh, consumers see that striking red colour."

The variety is harvested earlier than SunGold, helping extend the period in which New Zealand kiwifruit is available to consumers and reducing competition for space and labour during the main gold harvest window.

Marsden has been at Thomas Bros for only a short time, but said the company's reputation and the opportunity to help grow the nursery made the position appealing.

"I am excited to see how this role and the nursery might grow."

She is reluctant to map out a rigid five or 10-year career plan, having already experienced how quickly circumstances can force a change of direction.

"When I had to leave dairy farming, I moved away from planning everything too rigidly because I had previously mapped out my entire dairy career."

"The injury made me realise how easily circumstances can change."

While losing the career she had expected was difficult, Marsden said it ultimately made her more resilient and willing to take opportunities.

"I want to retain the flexibility to take opportunities as they arise."

"I would not want to turn down a good opportunity simply because it did not align with a path I had decided on years earlier."

That willingness to change direction has carried her from a West Coast dairy farm into orchards, advisory work, competition success and now a role nurturing the plants that will shape the future of one of Nelson's longest-established horticultural businesses.

Her next challenge will be in the national competition in Cromwell on August 27.

She hopes a stronger preparation, support from her new team and another year of experience will help turn last year's third placing into something more.



Amber Davy takes Canterbury Young Grower title

CLAIRE INKSON

Amber Davy may have fallen into the potato industry by accident, but seven years on she has firmly established herself as one of horticulture's emerging leaders.

The 29-year-old Eurogrow quality and field manager has won the 2026 Canterbury Young Grower title after competing against six other contestants at Lincoln University on June 25.

Davy will now represent the region at the national Young Grower of the Year competition in Cromwell on August 27 and 28.

She described the win as "pretty surreal". "It was my first time doing anything like this," she said.

Although confident in her own area of seed potatoes, Davy said the broader nature of the competition pushed her well beyond her usual field of expertise.

"I work only with potatoes, so I was quite nervous about everything else," she said.

To prepare, she spent time with an agronomist, spoke with past competitors and revisited notes from her university studies.

Contestants were given an outline of the modules beforehand, but Davy said there was still plenty of uncertainty about what they might face on the day.

"You never really know whether you have studied the right things."

One of her biggest concerns was the telehandler module, as she had not driven machinery for about seven years.

"It actually went better than expected," she said.

Davy grew up on a sheep and beef farm near Taihape and completed a Bachelor of Agriculture at Lincoln University.

She was unsure what direction she wanted to take after graduating, but a summer job rouging seed potato crops proved to be the beginning of a career she now loves.

"At the end of summer, I was offered a job driving tractors for a local potato grower," she said.

Because the work was seasonal, she began carrying out tuber and field inspections for Eurogrow between planting and harvest.

The arrangement eventually led to a full-time role.

"I have always liked science, research and plants, so this role is actually perfect for me."

Davy has now been with Eurogrow for seven years and is the company's only full-time South Island-based employee.

Working from her home near Chertsey, north of Ashburton, she covers the entire South Island.

Her role includes overseeing Eurogrow's new variety programme, managing trials around the country and looking after its early generation seed programme.

The new varieties are her favourite part of the job.

She also values the close relationships within the potato sector, which has around 100 commercial growers nationwide.

"It is a very tight-knit community. Everyone knows everyone," she said.

"Potato growers are forward-thinking, great to work with, and keen to see people do well."

Davy said access to suitable land was one of the main challenges facing the potato industry, particularly as more land was converted to dairy.

Disease and pest pressure were also increasing as the amount of suitable growing land reduced.

Another concern was attracting the next generation into the sector.

"The average age of a potato grower in New Zealand is not exactly young," she said.

Davy is helping address that challenge as chair of the Potatoes New Zealand Youth

Council.

The council works alongside Potatoes New Zealand to develop initiatives that encourage young people into the industry and support those already working within it.

"The opportunity came up, and I am very big on taking opportunities when they arise," she said.

That approach has also seen Davy continue her education and travel overseas for specialist training.

She has completed a Postgraduate Certificate in Applied Science and a Postgraduate Diploma in Horticultural Science and attended the Potato Business School in Holland in 2023.

She has also attended the International Potato Congress and travelled to Germany to spend time with agronomists connected to one of Eurogrow's international breeding partners.

Despite her growing experience and industry involvement, Davy said her immediate focus remained on learning.

"I did not start out in the sector, and I still have a lot to learn," she said.

"My main focus is learning as much as I can and continuing to take opportunities as they come."

She also wants to help build a strong future for the industry.

"I am really enjoying working alongside farmers and helping foster the next generation, because the next generation are the people I will be working with in 20 years' time."

Davy is now turning her attention to the national competition, where she will compete against six other regional winners.

She said she was both nervous and excited.

"I am up against some really strong competition."

Her preparation will again involve seeking advice from people with expertise outside her own area.

"I will track down and speak with people who know more than I do."

Davy said the national event would also be a valuable chance to meet people from across the wider horticulture industry and broaden her knowledge beyond potatoes.

Runner-up in the Canterbury competition was Jacob Preston, farm manager at Eyrebrook Fresh Limited in Christchurch.

Third place went to Charlie Crozier, who grew up on his family's vegetable farm in Leeston and is in his first year at Lincoln University, studying towards a Bachelor of Commerce in Agriculture.

The Young Grower competition celebrates the skills and achievements of young people in horticulture and encourages others to consider careers in the sector.

Regional competitions are organised independently, with Horticulture New Zealand hosting the national final in a different location each year.

The competition is open to commercial fruit and vegetable growers aged 30 and under.

HortNZ chief executive Kate Scott said the competitions were a highlight of the year and helped demonstrate the skill of young people working across the industry.

"The regional organisers contribute a huge amount of time, expertise, energy and passion to make the Young Grower regional competitions happen. We could not do it without them," she said.

"They do it to recognise and celebrate the high calibre of young people working in the industry, and to show others the many pathways horticulture offers into interesting and rewarding careers."

Davy's advice to anyone considering one of those pathways is simple.

"Just do it."

"It does not matter where you start, and your first job does not have to be your forever job. It can be a great stepping stone."

"Take the opportunities as they come."



Canterbury Young Grower of the Year winner Amber Davy (right) with Canterbury Growers Association chair Rob Lindsay. PHOTO SUPPLIED



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A high country tradition continues



Merino wethers splash across a stream before beginning the climb from Lake Stream towards the Upper Rakaia Valley. PHOTOS ANNA MUNRO

Mid Canterbury photographer Anna Munro documents her journey into the high country for Lake Heron Station's annual winter muster.

The annual Lake Heron Station winter muster got underway on June 19, continuing a high country tradition stretching back around 150 years.

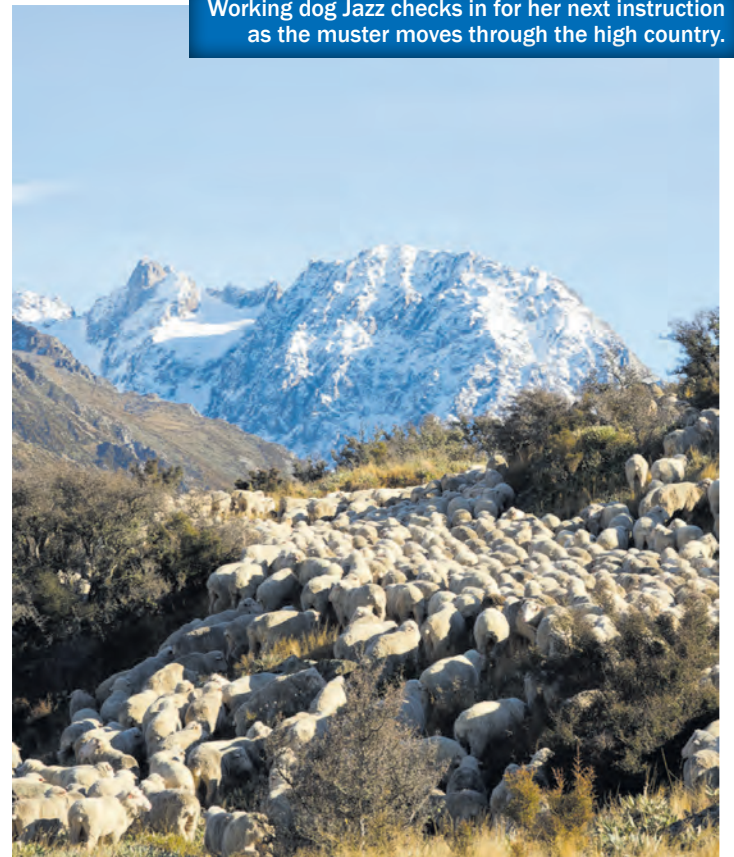
Station owner Philip Todhunter, shepherd Katja Etherington and local Anna Munro — joined by seven-month-old musterer Isabel Munro — moved the station's merino wethers into the Upper Rakaia Valley, where they will spend

the winter grazing and growing wool before being mustered home for shearing in November.

The muster is a true test of both people and stock, and a reminder of the remarkable hardiness of the merino. As the mob turned up the Rakaia, a classic high country nor'wester began to blast down the valley, but the sheep settled into the journey and pushed steadily on into the headwind.

Follow Anna Munro on Facebook and Instagram @muster.anna.munro and on her website www.musterannamunro.co.nz

Working dog Jazz checks in for her next instruction as the muster moves through the high country.



Working dog Jazz checks in for her next instruction as the muster moves through the high country.

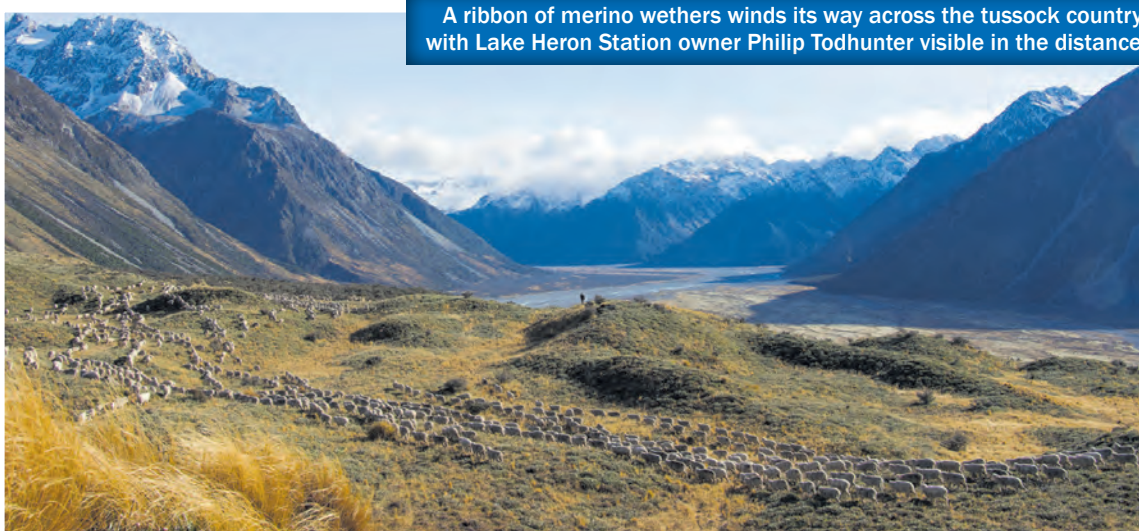




A high country muster is a family affair. Anna Munro takes in the spectacular nor'west skies with seven-month-old Isabel tucked up warm and sleeping.



Working dog Rizzo keeps a watchful eye on the mob as the wethers string out into the headwind on their journey up the Upper Rakaia Valley.



A ribbon of merino wethers winds its way across the tussock country, with Lake Heron Station owner Philip Todhunter visible in the distance.



Shepherd Katja Etherington and her team guide the mob along the Rakaia riverbed towards their winter grazing country across Jagged Stream.



Lake Heron Station shepherd Katja Etherington whistles commands to her dogs as a fierce nor'wester sweeps across the valley.



Lake Heron Station owner Philip Todhunter pauses with working dog Patch during the station's annual winter muster.

Hurst sets direction for Federated Farmers



Claire Inkson

RURAL EDITOR

South Canterbury farmer Colin Hurst says his new role as national president of Federated Farmers is about service, teamwork and ensuring farmers have a strong voice where decisions are made.

The mixed arable and dairy farmer from the Waimate area was elected president at Federated Farmers' annual meeting in June after serving three years as vice-president.

For Hurst, the presidency continues a commitment to giving back to the farming community.

"It is about community service and trying to make things better for our fellow farmers at the end of the day."

Hurst has spent more than 30 years with Federated Farmers, beginning at branch level in South Canterbury before moving through regional and national roles.

While being "out the front" does not necessarily come naturally, he says his leadership style is collaborative.

"As president, I will try to be

across all the topics as best I can, but we still have people who specialise in those areas."

Gisborne farmer Sandra Faulkner has been elected vice-president.

"I am pretty rapt to have Sandra there. I have worked a lot with her and it is sort of the dream team really."

Hurst takes on the presidency as a general election approaches, with Federated Farmers focused on five priorities for the next government: cutting the cost of farming, enabling technology and infrastructure, empowering community conservation, supporting young farmers and fixing local government.

Of those, Hurst says local government reform is particularly important.

In Canterbury, the dominance of Christchurch in regional decision-making has created tension between urban and rural communities.

"It becomes an us-and-them situation and it is not very stable politically."

He favours local government structures based more closely around river catchments.

"You are managing the land and protecting rivers from flooding, so it makes sense to have structures based around those catchments."

Cutting farming costs will also be central to the organisation's election-year advocacy.

Federated Farmers is pushing for 10 new permitted activity standards, an end to whole-farm conversions to permanent carbon forestry, greater use of farm plans instead of resource consents, no new taxes for farmers and flexibility in regional land use.

Technology and infrastructure are also priorities. Hurst says new agricultural products can take up to six years to gain approval, despite many being safer for the environment and users.

Water storage is another key issue.

"New Zealand is not short of water," he says.

He believes regions including Hawke's Bay, Wairarapa and Northland could benefit from greater support for water storage projects.

Federated Farmers is also seeking increased funding for the QEII National Trust, which Hurst says is a strong example of voluntary conservation.

"Farmers are lining up to get involved and the QEII Trust is having to turn people away."

"It is farmers effectively gifting that protection to the nation."

One remaining issue from the organisation's previous election platform is KiwiSaver access.

Federated Farmers wants farmers to be able to use KiwiSaver to help buy their first farm, just as others can use it for a first home.

"For farmers, the farm is your



South Canterbury farmer Colin Hurst says his new role as Federated Farmers president is about giving back and making sure farmers' voices are heard. PHOTO SUPPLIED

superannuation scheme. It is your business."

Asked what success would look like at the end of his term, Hurst returns to the five-point plan.

"It is business as usual in many ways, and it is about cutting red tape."

He wants progress on RMA and local government reform, productivity, trade and practical policy settings.

Hurst says the primary sector remains central to New Zealand's economy.

"When farmers are doing well, they spend money in their communities. That creates jobs, pays taxes, builds roads, supports schools and health services, and helps the whole country get ahead."

He is aware some farmers question whether Federated

Farmers represents them, but says the organisation is built from the grassroots, with 24 provinces and about 150 elected representatives.

"We are the voice of farmers, and that voice resonates up from the grassroots."

On environmental issues, Hurst prefers collaboration over public conflict.

"Rather than attacking each other through the media, it is better to try to understand the issues and work out solutions in a positive way. That is my style."

For Hurst, the presidency comes back to ensuring farmers have a practical voice in national decision-making.

"My job as president is to make sure their voices are heard loud and clear wherever decisions are being made."



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The conversation that shouldn't wait

ERIN NEALE

Succession. A sensational television show of the late 2010s? Absolutely. But for farming families, it's also an inevitability reality every business will face.

In March 2025, Rabobank published a white paper estimating that, over the next ten years, more than half of all New Zealand farm and orchard owners will reach retirement age. As a result, \$150 billion of New Zealand farming assets is expected to change hands. Rabobank referred to this "changing of the guard" as what is likely to be New Zealand agriculture's largest-ever intergenerational transfer of wealth. Yet despite the scale of what's coming, only 33% of farmers surveyed had a formal succession plan in place.

At some point, the assets will transfer. This much I know. It's up to you whether that happens within your family, or to an outside interest.

Planning for the future does not mean succession on day one and retirement on day two. Succession evolves over time, often over many years, as family circumstances, business goals and individual aspirations change. It is the gradual process of bringing the next generation into the business while there is still time to learn, develop their skills and gain confidence. Much of farming becomes second nature because you have done it every day for years, building

knowledge through decades of decisions, problem-solving and adapting to whatever the season throws at you. The earlier those lessons are shared, the stronger the business will be for the next generation.

Another reason to start the process sooner rather than later is that every family is different, and so is every succession plan. There is no one-size-fits-all approach, which is why the best plans are built around your family's goals, values, and legacy.

Don't just think of succession as the transfer of land, livestock, and machinery. While that might be part of the puzzle, some of the

most valuable things you transfer won't be found on a balance sheet. Consider the professional relationships you've built over the years, the leadership skills and resilience you've developed – the types of skills that come from living and breathing the business every day.

In farming, there's always another reason to wait. Another job to do. Another season around the corner. Another immediate priority that feels more urgent.

"We'll talk about it after calving ... let's just get through this season first ... we've still got plenty of time ..."

The irony is that succession is not a one-and-done chat. It takes

time, consideration, professional advice, and documentation. By delaying it, you only narrow the window you have to achieve the outcome you want.

Start by getting the right people around the table: family members involved in the business, those who may be affected by future decisions, and, of course, your trusted advisers. The initial conversations don't need to solve everything. They just need to begin with honesty about what each person thinks, what the business can realistically support, and what steps need to happen next.

My advice is simple: start the succession conversation now. Or,

at a minimum, make a plan to make the plan. With or without your input, your assets will change hands eventually. At least this way, you have the opportunity to help shape the outcome. The goal is not simply to transfer ownership of the farm. It is to pass on opportunity, knowledge and responsibility, while preserving the relationships that made the farm possible in the first place.

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

Erin Neale, Associate at Brown Glassford & Co Limited.



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Ravensdown has signed on as naming-rights sponsor of the Show for the next two years as it strengthens its agricultural focus and returns to its traditional Wednesday-to-Friday format. PHOTO SUPPLIED

Ravensdown backs Canterbury A&P Show's return to its rural roots



Claire Inkson
RURAL EDITOR

The Canterbury A&P Show's return to its traditional Wednesday-to-Friday format has gained a significant vote of confidence, with farmer-owned co-operative Ravensdown signing on as naming-rights sponsor for the next two years.

Now known as the Ravensdown Canterbury A&P Show, the partnership comes as the Canterbury A&P Association continues to strengthen the event's financial position and sharpen its focus on agriculture, farmers and the rural businesses that have long been at the heart of the Show.

Ravensdown chief executive Garry Diack said the partnership came about through discussions with Canterbury A&P Association chairman Sir David Carter, as the Association worked to secure the Show's long-term future.

For Ravensdown, he said, the timing and fit made sense.

The co-operative has strong South Island roots and will celebrate its 50th anniversary next year, meaning the second year of the sponsorship will coincide with that milestone.

"The opportunity to celebrate

farming in New Zealand, through a company with strong South Island roots, at the Canterbury Show, and to use that sponsorship to help rejuvenate the economic base of what I think is one of our iconic agricultural events, just came together really well," Diack said.

He said Sir David's leadership and determination to put the Show back on a stable footing had also given Ravensdown confidence in its direction.

"I like the fact that he has come in with as much passion as he has acumen, with the aim of putting the Show back on a stable footing for the long term."

Diack said Ravensdown strongly supported the renewed emphasis on agriculture.

"I also think getting back to a farmer-centric, or more broadly, agriculture-centric Show is really important.

"We need to showcase to our urban friends, relatives and colleagues the success of agriculture in the South Island, and this is a way to do that."

He said the Show also played an important role in bringing together farmers, rural businesses and different parts of the primary sector.

Ravensdown had been doing its own work around the concept of belonging, he said, and the connection between belonging, resilience and wellbeing.

"The Show is a place where farmers can demonstrate that sense of belonging: this is what I've got on show, and this is the contribution I make.

"The businesses that support them, the companies they work with and the co-operatives they invest in all come together at events like this.

"We get a strong sense that we belong to something significant."

For Diack, the Canterbury A&P Show remains one of the few places where the breadth of the rural sector can come together.

"It brings rural people together; it brings different sectors together, from dairy to sheep and beef.

"It's almost the town square of our existence."

Ravensdown's backing comes at an important stage for the Show, with the Association continuing its work to restore long-term financial resilience.

Sir David Carter said the naming-rights partnership would help strengthen that position.

"We're still battling our way out of what we inherited two years ago," he said.

"We're determined to restore financial sustainability and resilience to the Canterbury A&P Association, and we're making progress, but we're not yet out of the woods."

The financial risks associated with staging a major outdoor event remained considerable, he said.

"If you have a Show and get really bad weather, you can run at a significant loss. You need money in the bank for a rainy day, literally."

The 2026 Show will also mark a return to the traditional Wednesday, Thursday and Friday format following feedback from members and major agricultural

exhibitors.

Carter said the Saturday format had not worked as well for some of the larger rural exhibitors.

"What we found from talking to our members, and particularly the large agricultural exhibitors, was that they didn't like the Saturday.

"It meant a lot of extra staff time."

The previous format had been introduced while the Association was working with external event operators.

Carter said that arrangement had provided valuable support at the time, but returning to the traditional three-day weekday format reflected what the rural sector wanted from the Show.

"It's just popular demand, and we're still trying to encourage those larger anchor exhibitors back.

"We're getting some of them back. We want them all back.

"I think the fact we've changed our format back to the traditional Wednesday, Thursday, Friday will continue to build that sort of support."

The Association has also brought event management back in-house after using external event-management expertise for the 2024 and 2025 Shows.

It is now working with experienced event manager Jeff Bone, who has previously worked with the Canterbury A&P Association and knows the Show well.

Sir David described the move as another important turning point.

"We've got the event-management side now inside the

tent rather than being contracted."

He said rebuilding the Show would take time, but there was growing confidence in the direction it was heading.

"We're getting back to what it was.

"It's going to take us time, and these little steps we make, and the fact Ravensdown has come on board, shows they've got confidence that we're making good progress."

Diack said Ravensdown hoped its involvement could also encourage other major rural businesses to return, helping strengthen the Show as a gathering place for the wider agricultural sector.

"If we can help get the event back to its iconic status as a place where the industry meets, then I think the big players will want to come back and meet there as well."

With its traditional format restored, major rural businesses returning and a new naming-rights partner on board, the 163rd Ravensdown Canterbury A&P Show is building momentum towards November.

For Carter, the Show remains an integral part of Canterbury's rural identity and one that is worth fighting for.

"You can't have Show Week in Canterbury without the Show."

The Ravensdown Canterbury A&P Show will be held at Canterbury Agricultural Park from November 11 to 13.

Supporting Rural Mental Wellbeing: What Practitioners and Professionals Need to Know

KATHRYN WRIGHT

Being rural in New Zealand is not a “niche” area — up to 19% of us are rural. Working with rural communities means working in a world where “just go and get help” doesn’t always match reality. It doesn’t reflect the layered, complex barriers rural people face when they’re under pressure. Help seeking is rarely straightforward — not because rural people don’t care about their wellbeing, but because the conditions of rural life make reaching out far more complicated than it appears from the outside.

My research examining rural help-seeking, social connection, land use change, and demographic transition — has shown that mental health in rural communities is shaped by a mix of cultural expectations, structural pressures, and the realities of farm life. Suicide rates remain significantly higher in rural areas, but focusing only on statistics misses the upstream factors that make help seeking so difficult.

The Barriers Beneath the Surface

Across my research and in my professional experience,

three major barriers consistently emerged:

1. Practical Barriers

These include the difficulty of taking time off work, the cost of appointments and travel, and limited access to local services. When someone’s responsibilities are tied to stock, crops, machinery, staff, and family, stepping away for even an hour can feel impossible. The farm doesn’t pause for distress.

2. Shame Barriers

Many rural people fear being judged as weak, incapable, or not coping. In tight-knit communities, privacy is limited, and the idea of others finding out they’re struggling can feel worse than the distress itself. Silence becomes a protective shield.

3. Knowledge Barriers

People often don’t know where to go, what help looks like, or how “bad” things need to be before reaching out. Many assume others have it worse, or that they’re not “sick enough” to justify support.

These barriers affect rural people of all ages and genders. They are not signs of resistance — they are signs of context.

Community Factors

My recent research widened the lens to whole communities. It showed



that help seeking is not just an individual decision; it is shaped by:

- social connection
- identity and cultural expectations
- community pressures
- structural change
- land use transitions
- volunteer capacity
- gendered labour

Rural social connection is deeply protective, but increasingly fragile. As populations shift, forestry expands, and volunteer numbers decline, the informal infrastructures that once held communities together — shared spaces, clubs, saleyards, sideline conversations — are under strain.

Stoicism and “getting on with it” remain powerful narratives. They offer strength, but they also silence vulnerability. Rural women carry much of the emotional and organisational load, often absorbing community strain while managing their own.

Farm succession pressures

also emerge strongly in my work. Uncertainty about the future of the farm, intergenerational expectations, and the emotional responsibility of legacy can create significant stress for families navigating change.

Firearms, Safety, and Trust

Firearms are a normal part of rural life

— tools for pest control, stock management, and recreation. Many rural people fear that seeking help will jeopardise their licence. Clear, accurate information about firearms safety and mental health processes is essential. Reassure clients that disclosure does not automatically trigger licence removal, and encourage safe storage, regular check-ins, and open conversations about risk. Understanding the cultural significance of hunting — connection to land, identity, and wellbeing — helps practitioners approach firearms conversations respectfully and effectively.

What Practitioners and Professionals Can Do

Be relatable

Use everyday language. Allow humour and relaxed conversation. Rural people open up when they feel understood, not analysed.

Understand the farming calendar

Mental health fluctuates with seasonal pressures. General rural professionals will benefit from this too. Knowing the cycles of dairying, sheep and beef farming, horticulture, and contracting helps you time interventions and interpret distress.

Acknowledge structural pressures

Land use change, forestry conversion, environmental regulation, service closures, and public criticism all shape rural wellbeing. Even when people don’t name these pressures directly, they influence mood, identity, and stress.

Support practical pathways into help

Offer flexible appointment times, telehealth options, outreach services, and clear information about confidentiality. Small adjustments make help-seeking feel possible.

Engage employers and families

Farm owners, managers, and family members play a critical role. Basic mental health literacy helps them recognise distress early and respond safely.

Final Thoughts

Rural people don’t need rescuing — they need to be met where they are. When practitioners and service professionals understand rural life, show genuine curiosity, and recognise the broader pressures shaping distress, rural people are far more likely to reach out early. Rural communities rely on practitioners and professionals who can walk with them, long before the proverbial hits the fan.

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Farmer-led safety changes helping drive down injury claims



Safer Farms ambassador Lindy Nelson says rollover protection, GPS tracking, rollover alerts and speed limiters can help reduce the severity of farm vehicle incidents.



Claire Inkson
RURAL EDITOR

Farmers are being credited for a sharp fall in farm-related ACC claims, with Safer Farms saying practical, everyday decisions are helping make rural workplaces safer.

Farm-related claims have fallen from more than 25,000 in 2020 to 17,322 last year.

Safer Farms ambassador and Wairarapa farmer Lindy Nelson said the progress belonged to farmers, growers, contractors and rural teams who were changing the way they approached safety.

"It is very encouraging, and the credit belongs to the farmers who are making positive changes to the way they work and think about safety," Nelson said.

Rather than one major intervention, she believed the reduction reflected thousands of practical decisions being made in sheds, yards and paddocks around the country.

She said one of the biggest changes was a shift away from viewing health and safety as a compliance exercise.

"Health and safety has traditionally been an eye-roll

conversation. It has often felt judgemental, or as though people outside farming are telling farmers how to run their businesses.

"Farmers know their land, their stock and their people best."

More farmers were beginning to see safety as part of good work design, she said.

That included setting jobs up properly, thinking about fatigue and pressure, using the right equipment and creating systems that reduced the consequences when something went wrong.

Nelson said serious accidents did not happen only to inexperienced operators, or people taking obvious risks.

"They also happen to highly experienced farmers carrying out everyday tasks.

"Sometimes it is a momentary lapse in concentration, or someone not recognising a situation for what it is."

She said farmers could not be expected to remain completely alert and make the correct decision every second of every day.

Instead, equipment and systems should be designed so people could "fail safely".

Rollover protection devices, GPS tracking, rollover alerts and speed limiters were examples of technology that could reduce the severity of an incident.

Nelson said farmers often accepted safety technology in vehicles while remaining hesitant about similar equipment on quad bikes.

"We would not drive a car without seatbelts or rely solely on our brakes and steering, yet on quad bikes people can still be reluctant to use the same kinds of protective measures."

She said cultural change was more likely when it was led by farmers themselves.

Safer Farms was developing a network of safety champions around the country who could share their experiences with others.

"They are not health and safety experts. They are ordinary farmers who are curious, willing to learn and prepared to share what they have learned.

"Social change happens when it is led by people who look like you, sound like you and have had similar experiences."

Nelson's own interest in farm safety began before she entered the agriculture sector.

As a critical care nurse specialising in head injuries, she flew with the Westpac Rescue Helicopter and was often called to farms to treat seriously injured people.

After marrying a farmer, she became increasingly concerned by the number of fatalities and severe injuries within the sector.

"There was often an attitude that nothing could have prevented an incident because it was simply a one-off.

"But over the years, those one-off incidents kept adding up."

Many involved experienced



Safer Farms ambassador and Wairarapa farmer Lindy Nelson says practical, farmer-led changes are helping make rural workplaces safer. PHOTO SUPPLIED

farmers carrying out routine jobs rather than doing anything extraordinary, she said.

Nelson said smaller injuries also needed greater attention.

Safer Farms is preparing to launch its Be a Farmer for Longer campaign, which will focus on practical steps such as selecting appropriate footwear and reducing the risk of slips and falls.

Although those incidents were often treated as minor, they could

leave a farmer unable to work for weeks.

Nelson said the next step was to continue sharing practical solutions and meeting farmers wherever they were on their safety journey.

"It is not about outsiders telling farmers what to do.

"It is about farmers working together, sharing what works and helping make sure everyone gets home safely at the end of the day."

El Niño prompts call for farmers to plan ahead

SARAH RICKARD

Canterbury and Otago farmers and growers are being encouraged to check their irrigation systems and water-use plans now, as El Niño increases the likelihood of drier conditions across eastern parts of New Zealand.

Earth Sciences New Zealand has confirmed that El Niño conditions have developed in the tropical Pacific and are expected to strongly influence New Zealand's weather into 2027.

Irricon principal environmental consultant Sarah Rickard says the outlook is a timely reminder for farmers and growers to make sure their irrigation systems are ready before seasonal demand increases.

"Dry conditions were already evident across parts of Canterbury heading into winter, and we had reached meteorological drought by the middle of June," Rickard says.

"Now that we are in August, with El Niño declared and the possibility of a drier spring for eastern areas, it is worth checking that your irrigation equipment, soil moisture monitoring and water-use planning are all working as they should."

"These checks are always important, but they become even more valuable when water availability or consented volumes are limited."

Understand your consent conditions

Rickard says farmers operating under annual water volumes or restrictive return-period conditions need to pay close attention to how they manage their use and allocation.

"When conditions become dry, there can be pressure to irrigate early and often," she says.

"However, using too much of your annual allocation at the beginning of the season could leave you short of water later."

Farmers should understand their annual and seasonal consented volumes, any daily or return-period restrictions, minimum flow restrictions, how quickly their allocation is being used and whether water-use records and measuring equipment are accurate.

Test application depth and uniformity

Irrigators should be tested to confirm they are applying water evenly and at the expected depth.

"An irrigator can appear to be operating normally while still delivering too much water in some places and not enough in others," Rickard says.

Uneven application may result from pressure issues, worn or blocked nozzles, incorrect sprinkler setup, spacing problems or other maintenance requirements.

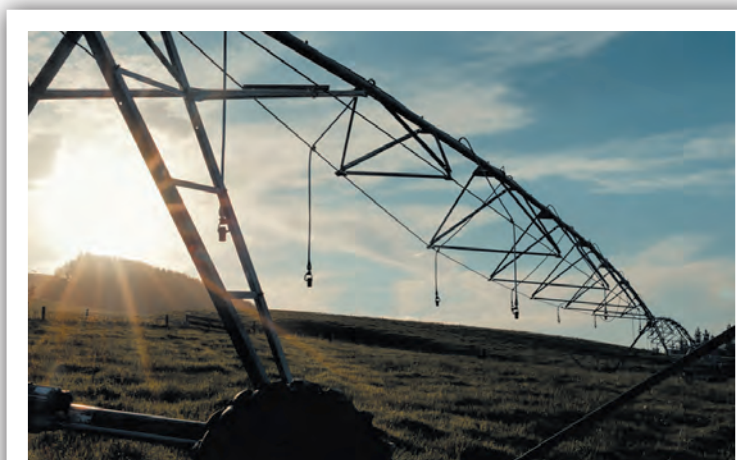
"If water is not being applied evenly, some areas may become too wet while others remain moisture-stressed," she says.

"You may also use a significant amount of your consented allocation without getting the result you need."

Testing equipment and maintenance checks during winter gives farmers time to identify and address any problems before irrigation systems are operating regularly.

Check soil moisture monitoring

Irricon environmental consultant Jane Robb, who specialises in soil moisture monitoring, says probes can provide valuable information about when to irrigate and how



Irrigator performance should be tested now.

much water to apply, but only when they are installed, configured and interpreted correctly.

"Make sure your probes are positioned in the right soil types for the area you are irrigating, are working properly and have appropriate trigger points for your soils and crops," Robb says.

"It is also important that the people making irrigation decisions understand what the readings are telling them."

Farmers should check that probes are installed at appropriate depths, and trigger points suit the soil type, crop and root zone.

The data should be reviewed regularly, ideally ahead of each irrigation season, and used to guide irrigation decisions before plants become moisture-stressed.

Alongside understanding consent limits and checking irrigator performance, soil moisture monitoring should form an important part of every farm's preparation for the season ahead.

Five irrigation checks to complete now

1. Review water allocations and consent limits and consider how water will be prioritised if dry conditions continue.
2. Test irrigator performance for application depth, pressure and uniformity.
3. Complete maintenance early, including replacing worn or blocked nozzles.
4. Check soil moisture probes are installed correctly, provide reliably data and are positioned in the correct soil type.
5. Review irrigation trigger points to make sure they suit the soil type, crop and root zone.

Rickard says El Niño does not guarantee drought, but it reinforces the importance of preparation.

"None of us knows exactly how the season will unfold, but farmers can control how ready their systems are," she says.

"Finding a problem now is much better than discovering it when irrigation demand is high and every millimetre of water counts."



Irricon principal environmental consultant Sarah Rickard.



Irricon environmental consultant Jane Robb.

Managing Uncertainty



Eva Harris

There's nothing quite like an anniversary to make you step back and reflect on the twists and turns life has thrown at you, and to humble you with the illusion that we have total control over the events that shape our lives.

Ten years ago, we were enjoying our carefree adult lifestyles with disposable income, a house that stayed clean for more than a day, and time to waste doing fun, non-productive things like hobbies, or sleeping in.

We made plans assuming we were in control of the major events in our lives. Little did I know I was

already four months pregnant ...

I regularly get asked to advise on how to plan for future consent renewals, approve changes in land use requiring millions of dollars of additional debt, or recommend actions people can take to mitigate the risks of regulatory change.

All of these decisions require some understanding of what the future regulatory landscape will look like so we can prepare a robust plan to navigate it.

By the time this piece is published, new legislation will have been released to completely overhaul our environmental resource management system, reform local government, and lay the foundations for a national freshwater farm planning system.

By 2030, a new environmental regulatory authority will be created, along with new environmental targets and new rules setting out how those targets will be achieved.

The foundations of this new system will be completely

different from those of the Resource Management Act, with core principles such as being outcomes-focused and balancing environmental, social, cultural, and economic needs no longer embedded in legislation. Thirty years of case law could be erased as we navigate the implementation of 1,200 pages of new legislation.

So how can we possibly make robust, strategic, long-term plans in our businesses given the unprecedented uncertainty we face about our future environmental landscape? From what I've seen, there are two approaches: the "jump and hope" approach, or the "do nothing" approach.

Given the value the agricultural industry brings to New Zealand's weak economy, there is a school of thought that no government will be brave enough to introduce limits that severely impact production. Or, if they do, the bureaucracy involved will mean a new government comes in and

reverses everything before the new rules ever take effect. Therefore, we might as well carry on with the assumption that the future will look much like today.

There is a risk, of course, that those assumptions prove wrong and development plans are cut off at the knees. On the flip side, a lack of regulatory certainty is a surefire way to hinder capital investment in innovative land-use options and new technology.

Why would anyone spend additional money to mitigate nitrogen losses if they don't have to? You might as well make hay while the sun shines so you're in a stronger financial position if things do change.

And this is probably the key risk for the new regulators to manage: flip-flopping rules are a great way to make sure nothing happens. Water quality outcomes do not particularly care what laws we operate under or whether the economy is thriving.

If we want to see real

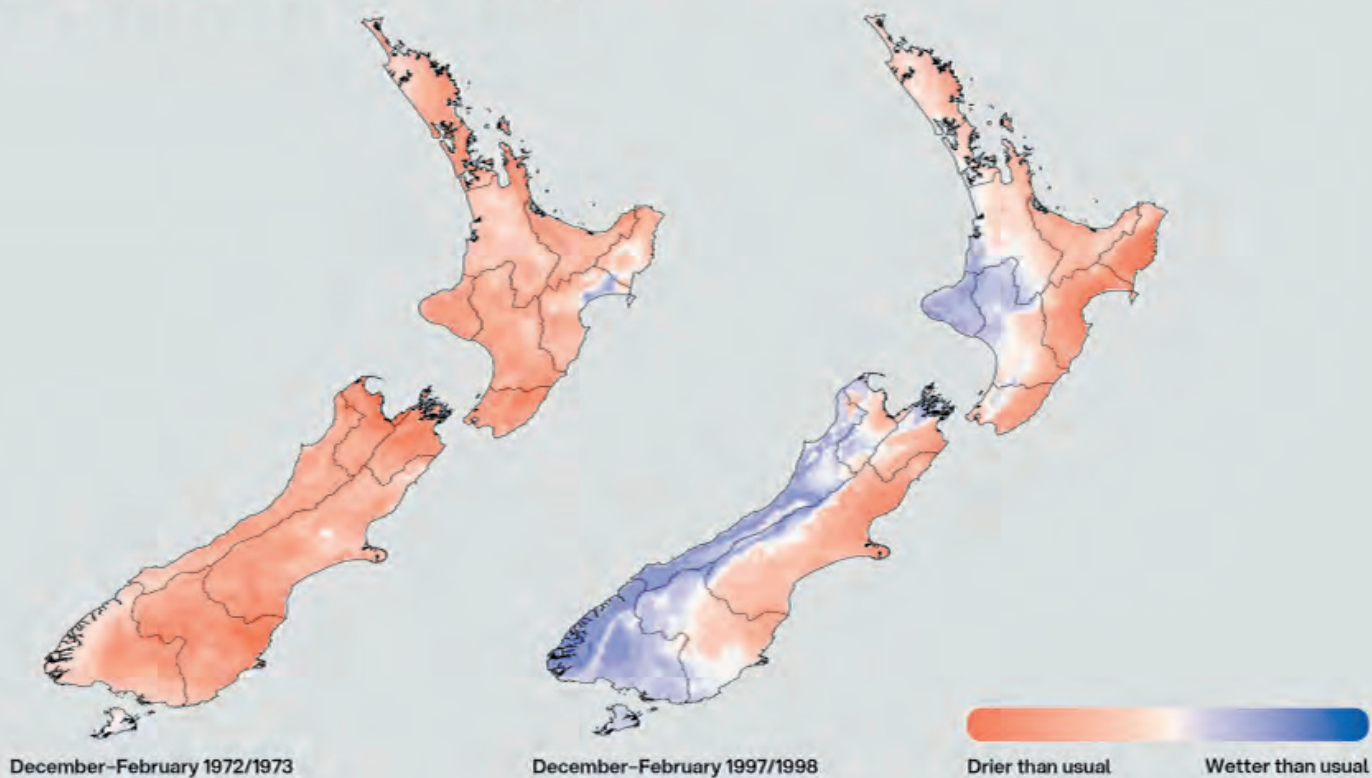


improvements in our water, we need farming systems that can deliver those outcomes without burdening businesses with regulation that adds cost but little environmental benefit.

Long-term strategic thinking needs to happen at every level of the community — from national and local government to catchment groups and individual landowners — regardless of the laws we are operating under.

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

Summer rainfall during the 1972/73 and 1997/98 El Niño events



Historical El Niño events show no two seasons are the same. While both 1972/73 and 1997/98 were strong El Niño events, rainfall patterns varied considerably across New Zealand, highlighting why forecasts should be used as a guide rather than a guarantee. PHOTO EARTH SCIENCES NEW ZEALAND

Prepare now, not later:

What El Niño could mean for New Zealand farmers



Federated Farmers National Vice President and adverse events spokesperson Sandra Faulkner says farmers should not ignore the potential impact of El Niño. PHOTO SUPPLIED



Claire Inkson
RURAL EDITOR

“We know the average outcome of El Niño, but no El Niño is average.”

That is the message from Earth Sciences New Zealand Chief Scientist Weather and Seasonal Forecasting, Chris Brandolino, as farmers begin preparing for what could be one of the strongest El Niño events on record.

Earth Sciences New Zealand has confirmed El Niño conditions have developed in the tropical Pacific and expects the climate driver to strongly influence New Zealand's weather through spring, summer and potentially into autumn next year.

For farmers, the message is not to panic, but to plan.

“You're much better off having a plan and not needing it than needing a plan and not having it,” Brandolino says.

Federated Farmers National Vice President and adverse events spokesperson Sandra Faulkner agrees.

“Do not ignore this thing,” she says.

More than just a drought forecast

El Niño is one of the world's major climate drivers, originating thousands of kilometres away in the tropical Pacific Ocean where sea surface temperatures become

unusually warm.

That warming alters tropical rainfall patterns, which in turn influence the jet stream and atmospheric circulation reaching New Zealand.

Brandolino compares it to a major economic decision.

“It's like adjusting the official cash rate by 100 basis points. That's a big macro change that filters down to individual households.

“El Niño is similar. It's a large-scale climate driver, but every farm experiences the effects a little differently.”

The event is already strengthening rapidly, with Earth Sciences New Zealand saying it is likely to rival, or even exceed, the strongest El Niño events on record, including 1972, 1982, 1991, 1997 and 2015.

Why confidence doesn't mean certainty

While scientists are highly confident this will be a very strong El Niño, predicting exactly how it will affect every region remains more difficult.

“If I'm handing out slices of blame pie,” Brandolino says, “El Niño typically gets about 25 percent.”

In other words, El Niño is an important contributor to New Zealand's weather, but it is not the only influence.

Climate change, regional sea surface temperatures, the Indian Ocean Dipole and Antarctic weather patterns all continue to shape seasonal conditions.

Brandolino says history provides guidance, but not certainty.

“Every El Niño comes with its own personality.”

What farmers

should expect

For eastern regions, particularly Canterbury and Marlborough, the long-range outlook is familiar.

Long-range modelling favours more persistent westerly winds through spring, bringing drier conditions, lower soil moisture and increased wildfire risk.

It is not simply the lack of rainfall that concerns Brandolino.

“The westerly winds scoop up moisture from the Tasman Sea and dump it over the West Coast. By the time that air reaches Canterbury, there often isn't much moisture left.”

Those northwest winds are expected to become stronger and more frequent through late winter and spring.

Combined with periods of unusually warm temperatures, they can rapidly dry soils, increase evaporation and raise wildfire risk.

Meanwhile, western regions, including the West Coast, Southland and parts of Central Otago, are expected to experience increased rainfall.

Planning early could protect both production and profit

Faulkner says one of the biggest differences between this El Niño and previous droughts is the quality of information farmers now have available.

“We now have tools at our disposal that we didn't have in previous droughts,” she says.

That includes weather forecasting, soil moisture monitoring, facial eczema spore counting, farm apps and other management tools.

“We need to make the most of those.”

On her own farm, Faulkner says drought planning is deliberately simple.

"We have a one-page drought plan that sits in a desk drawer and gets pulled out whenever a dry season looks possible," she says.

"We'll sit down with the calendar and work through trigger points. If it hasn't rained by a certain date, we know which stock we'll sell first. If it still hasn't rained by the next date, we know what the next step is."

Rather than waiting until feed runs short or markets become flooded with stock, Faulkner believes farmers should decide in advance what actions they will take if dry conditions develop.

"The important thing is making those decisions before you're under pressure."

"You can always put that drought plan back in the drawer if it rains. If the warnings are wrong, then we all win."

She says moving early can also protect farmers financially.

"That's why planning and moving early is really important. You need to catch those who are still buying because they still have grass."

"If that dry creeps across from east to west, suddenly you are really boxed in."

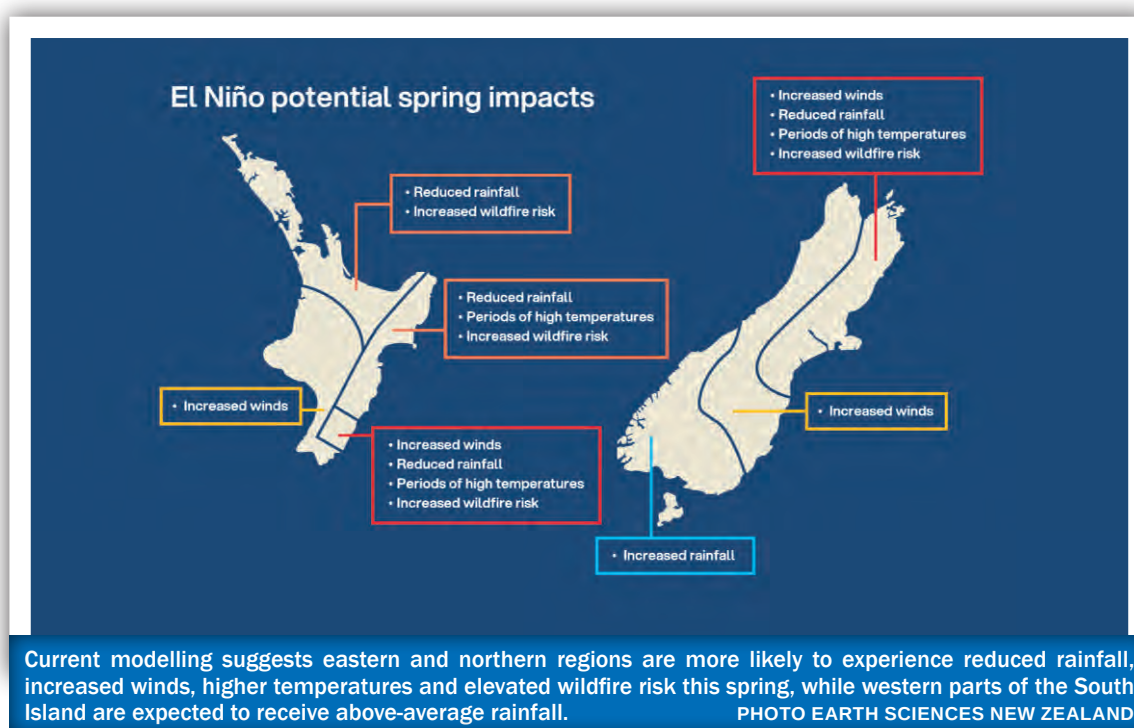
Feed could tighten quickly

Faulkner says many East Coast farmers have had a good pasture season so far and some may be carrying healthy stores of supplementary feed.

But winter is only just beginning.

"Anyone feeding out regularly will go into spring and summer having used a lot of that," she says.

Recent severe weather through parts of the South Island may also



affect feed reserves, with some farmers using winter supplements earlier than expected to get stock through difficult conditions.

"There are all manner of implications that come from these weather events through winter, and they may impact feed availability come spring and summer."

Every El Niño tells a different story

One of the biggest misconceptions, Brandolino says, is assuming every strong El Niño unfolds the same way.

Historical events show common themes, but also significant differences.

During the powerful 1972-73 event, much of New Zealand

experienced widespread dryness.

By contrast, the 1982-83 event brought wetter conditions to parts of lower Canterbury and eastern Otago.

"It's like a family," Brandolino says.

"They all share the same surname, but every member has a different personality."

Historical patterns remain valuable because they show what is most likely, but they should be treated as guidance rather than certainty.

Faulkner says previous droughts still carry important lessons.

"I watched my parents farm through some horrific droughts in the late eighties," she says.

"They were dealing with everything against them: 20-plus percent interest rates and drought.

"That is soul-destroying, and it is dangerous for farmers."

"Ignore history at your peril."

The message for farmers Brandolino's advice is straightforward.

Develop a plan now.

"If dryness develops on your farm, you already know what worked before. You're much better off having that plan ready."

Faulkner's message is much the same.

"Plan, plan and plan again."

"Use the technology, take heed of the warnings and plan."

She also says farmers should not underestimate the emotional impact of a dry season forecast.

"All of these warnings come with anxiety, and anxiety adds weight to any concerns you're already

carrying.

"Never feel that there is nobody there to hear you."

"When it comes to the emotional wellbeing of people on the land, that connection is just so important."

"Please do reach out. We're all in this to help one another."

While El Niño is expected to peak around December, its effects are likely to continue through summer and may persist into autumn if the system reaches the intensity scientists currently expect.

What El Niño could mean for your region

Likely drier

Canterbury, Marlborough, eastern Otago, Hawke's Bay, Gisborne, Wairarapa, Auckland, Northland and Bay of Plenty.

Likely wetter

West Coast, Southland and parts of Central Otago.

Nationwide

Stronger, more persistent westerly winds, higher wildfire risk in eastern regions, earlier irrigation demand where river flows decline, and greater weather variability through spring.

Five things farmers can do now

1. Develop or review your drought plan.
2. Set trigger dates for stock, feed and water decisions before conditions deteriorate.
3. Review supplementary feed reserves and consider your contingency options.
4. Keep an eye on seasonal outlooks, soil moisture and river levels using reputable sources.
5. Reach out early to advisers, neighbours, Federated Farmers or Rural Support if the pressure starts to build.

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Supreme win caps remarkable five years for Kylie Dorr



Kylie Dorr (center) receiving her award for Supreme Winner of the 2026 NZI Rural Women Business Awards at Parliament from NZI's Christina Chellow (right) and Kylie's supporter and mother Sandy Dorr (Left). PHOTO SUPPLIED



Claire Inkson
RURAL EDITOR

Kylie Dorr admits she was in shock when her name was called as the Supreme Winner of the 2026 NZI Rural Women Business Awards.

The owner of Southern Reproductive had already taken out the Emerging Enterprise category at the awards before being named the overall winner at a gala dinner in Parliament's Banquet Hall on July 23.

"Honestly, I was absolutely in shock," Dorr said.

"It feels pretty good. It's an absolute honour to represent Rural Women and to be acknowledged for the many sleepless nights, the hard work and sometimes the tears."

The win recognises a remarkable five years for Dorr, who established Southern Reproductive after returning to New Zealand following eight years in the United States.

Beginning as an independent

artificial insemination technician, she has grown the business to include 12 AI technicians across the South Island and a team of more than 20 seasonal staff.

Southern Reproductive now also provides pregnancy scanning, is the national distributor for IMV Technologies ultrasound devices and has established an AI training school.

Revenue has increased by 100 percent year on year.

Rural Women New Zealand National President Heather Sorensen said choosing the Supreme Winner had not been easy.

"It was a great challenge for the judging panel as there were so many incredible, high calibre and creative businesswomen among the entrants," Sorensen said.

"To be announced as the Supreme Winner is very special and I am delighted that Kylie Dorr is the recipient this year."

For Dorr, one of the highlights of the awards was meeting the other category winners and spending time with women who understood some of the challenges that come with building a business.

"It was fantastic. It was absolutely awesome to meet all of the other category winners and to be in the

same room with so many talented, successful people."

She said several of the women found themselves talking about something that is perhaps less visible from the outside: the isolation that can come with entrepreneurship.

"Several of us talked about how isolating being an entrepreneur can sometimes be, especially rurally, and how finding your people can actually be more of a challenge."

"It was really nice to be in a whole room full of those same like-minded people."

Entering the awards was itself a significant step for Dorr, who said putting herself and her business forward was well outside her comfort zone.

"If it wasn't for the help of my administrator, Dan, it probably wouldn't have happened."

The judging process also forced her to take a step back from the day-to-day demands of Southern Reproductive and properly consider what had been achieved.

"I was really astounded at the feedback from the judges and how positive it was."

"When you're stuck at the coalface, you don't really notice how well you're doing. I'm not really one to look over the fence at

what other people are doing, so I guess I hadn't acknowledged how well we were actually doing."

Dorr said she had continually reinvested in the business as new opportunities emerged, which could sometimes make it difficult to appreciate its overall progress.

"We start doing really well in one part of the business and then I come up with a new part of the business," she said.

Sitting down to analyse the business as part of the awards process had been a valuable exercise.

"You have to be transparent and vulnerable with all of those things."

"It has been a really valuable exercise and has definitely made us look at how we can do things even better than we already were."

The growth of Southern Reproductive has also created employment for other rural women.

Of the business's more than 20 seasonal staff, Dorr said all but one were women.

While that had not been a deliberate strategy, she was proud of the team that had developed around the business.

"We've created an awesome team. It's so good to be able to provide them with that feeling of being part of a team, being

well supported, empowered and encouraged.

"That then helps them to do their jobs better."

"I'm just so thankful for them. I definitely wouldn't have won this award without them."

Southern Reproductive is continuing to grow, with Dorr now looking at how she can spend more time working on the business rather than in it, and plans are also under way to expand into Australia.

Christina Chellow, an Executive Manager at NZI, which has sponsored the Rural Women Business Awards for the past nine years, said Dorr was a deserving Supreme Winner.

"Kylie's entrepreneurial spirit, customer focus and commitment to growth make her a deserving recipient, and we look forward to seeing her continued success."

For Dorr, though, the award has also provided something perhaps less tangible: a chance to stop, look back at what has been built over the past five years and acknowledge just how far Southern Reproductive has come.

And after years of hard work, sleepless nights and reinvesting in the next idea, that recognition is something she is allowing herself to enjoy.

Emma Burke

WHERE AND WHAT ARE YOU FARMING?

We are now Sheep and beef farming at Springfield. Moved here from Hawke's Bay just over two years ago and reestablishing ourselves here. We have a smaller block of our own and a home base so will never be without a base if a job were to end like many managers find themselves in sadly. We have a business where we (Paddy, my husband) contracts his labour and dogs out to other farmers.

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

A 2017 Isuzu Dmax.

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

The dog box and stereo. The dog box involved a journey from Hawke's Bay to Balclutha to pick it up, with a trip over the Rainbow road (Molesworth) to get it. It's not so much the dog box but what's in it — the dogs, all I have reared from pups and the roadies we get to go on with them (for dog trialling).

As for the stereo — what's a roadie without decent sounding music?

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

The best roadie always has tunes by Matchbox 20, Kings of Leon and The Feelers.

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

A really bad vice of eating and driving is the milkshake lollies and a decent coffee.

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

Dogs in the dog box, and my water bottle in the back seat, along with jackets, dog ropes.



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Collective community action is well supported locally, as was demonstrated at this Enviro Collective workshop hosted by Somerview Farm.

PHOTO SUPPLIED

Collective Community Action

ANGELA CUSHNIE

The nature of collective community action typically starts small and gradually spreads outwards. Individuals, farm owners and farm teams, catchment groups, and in the case of Mid Canterbury - a catchment collective. Ensuring there is a district-wide vision requires leadership and collaboration as locals can come together around a common goal.

The role of the Mid Canterbury Catchment Collective (MCCC), and the ten sub catchment groups it administers, is to capture the wants and needs of locals in a Catchment Action Plan (CAP). For most of our groups these plans were originally written in 2022/23 with the assistance of an MCCC facilitator, funded as part of our Ministry of Primary Industries (MPI)

Essential Freshwater grant.

Now in 2026, MCCC form part of a wider movement of 51 rural catchment communities which are currently being supported by MPI, with Central Government investing \$40.5 million over the next four years to continue this support. This provides a valuable opportunity to provide a forum for farmers and others living in a catchment to unite and deliver environmental gains.

At a high level our CAPs incorporate water quality, biodiversity, soil health and nutrient management (or mitigation), land, drainage and irrigation practices - and most importantly they incorporate people.

Prosperity, food production and a sustainable way forward for all underpins every CAP. Developed through an intergenerational lens, each is bespoke depending on the

typography, hydrology and geology of that area. They are first and foremost farmer-led, grass roots actions, which sit alongside a top-down regulatory framework.

Catchment Action Plan Implementation:

The next step is implementation; this requires teamwork and an allocation of roles and responsibilities from both a governance and operational perspective.

It is vital CAPs are a living document, reviewed annually to ensure they are kept relevant. Typically, they are ambitious yet achievable and they remain the intellectual property of 'locals'.

Catchment groups are tasked with monitoring and measuring progress and outcomes. Data gathered is analysed and trends recorded which helps ensure actions are assessed regularly, and tweaks can be made along the way

when and if required.

While the regulatory space is currently in flux, two pieces of work underpin MCCC's current approach;

Land and Water Regional Plan (LWRP)

Introduced in August 2012, the LWRP is the over-arching regional plan introduced by Environment Canterbury to sustainably manage freshwater bodies, riverbeds, wetlands, and associated land use. The plan enforces environmental limits, manages water allocation, and controls runoff or discharges to protect water quality.

Canterbury Water Management Strategy (CWMS)

The CWMS provides a collaborative framework to help manage the multiple demands on our precious natural resources.

Officially launched in November 2009, with implementation

beginning in 2010, the CWMS was developed by the Canterbury Mayoral Forum to transition the region from a first-come, first-served regulatory system to a collaborative, community-led catchment approach.

When working in partnership with the Hekeao Hinds Water Enhancement Trust (HHWET), and local irrigation schemes, MCCC's ten catchment groups are able to tell a compelling story about what is happening in our district from the mountains to the sea (ki utu ki), and interested parties are regularly invited to learn about our journey.

For more information about the Mid Canterbury Catchment Collective, email Angela Cushnie at coordinator@mccatchmentcollective.nz
Angela Cushnie,
Mid Canterbury Catchment Collective Coordinator



Lifestyle

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CAPTURING LINCOLN

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Photo: David Owen



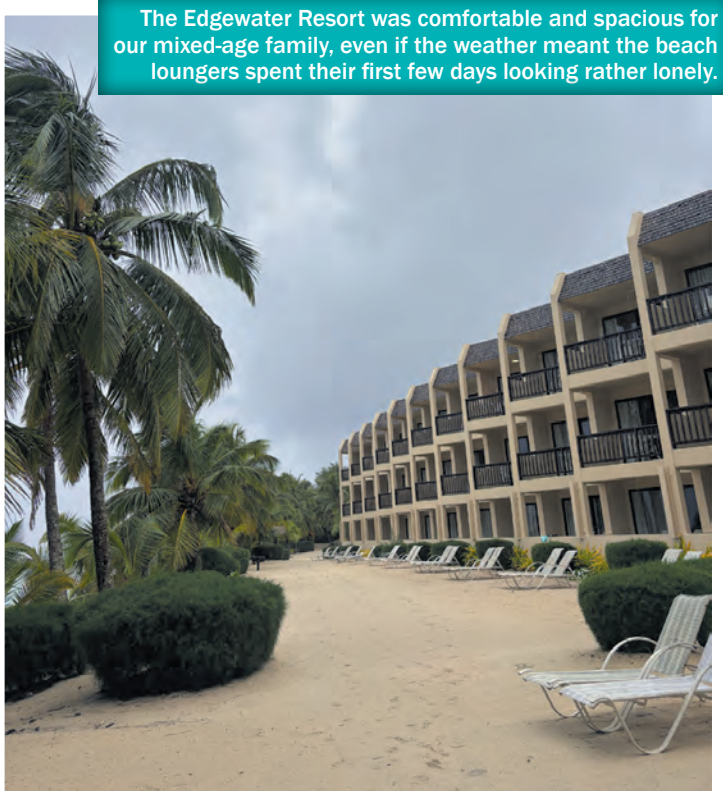
Photo: Dmitry Serbin



Trader Jack's has become something of a Rarotonga institution, combining island character, waterfront views and some of the best food we found during our stay. PHOTOS CLAIRE INKSON



Dogs roam freely across Rarotonga and are a familiar part of island life, although visitors are advised not to feed them, which is hard when most are actually very sweet.



The Edgewater Resort was comfortable and spacious for our mixed-age family, even if the weather meant the beach loungers spent their first few days looking rather lonely.



Agriculture may look very different from farming in New Zealand, but local food production, biosecurity and food security remain vital on a remote island.

Beyond the postcard

A rain-soaked family escape to Rarotonga delivered spectacular snorkelling, slow days and a reminder of what it takes to live and grow food on a remote Pacific island.



Claire Inkson

RURAL EDITOR

The first thing I noticed when we stepped from the plane in Rarotonga was the air.

Warm, sweet and impossibly soft, it felt like a balm after the chilly, damp days Christchurch had been throwing at us.

Even the wait at the small airport, where customs became a drawn-out affair after the arrival of a full plane, had its own charm. An older local musician played island songs as the queue shuffled forward, setting the pace for the week ahead.

Once through, we were handed bottles of water, welcomed with leis of tropical flowers around our necks and ferried to The Edgewater Resort in a van.

I had imagined six days of doing very little beyond soaking up the sun beside the beach.

The weather had other ideas.

It rained like nothing this North Canterbury girl had ever seen. Not passing showers or polite bursts of drizzle, but warm, torrential bucketfuls that continued almost without pause for 48 hours.

Roads disappeared beneath puddles, beaches were washed out and a number of shops and restaurants closed because of

flooding. We abandoned our plans to visit the Saturday market, something I was particularly disappointed to miss, and settled into the rhythm of waiting out the storm.

Fortunately, the resort restaurant remained open. Getting there required an umbrella each, although these frequently blew inside out before we made it through the door.

It was not cold, though, and there was something strangely luxurious about having nowhere else to be. We read books while the waves crashed outside and, after some determined technological wrangling, managed to get a sufficiently reliable VPN connection for my son to watch the FIFA World Cup.

I do not often get the opportunity to sit down and read without feeling I should be doing something else, so I did not entirely mind the rain.

When it finally lifted, the island seemed to reset itself almost overnight. The water covering the roads disappeared, the beaches began to re-emerge and everything looked fresh, intensely green and newly rinsed.

It was as though Rarotonga had taken a very long drink and simply carried on.

Island reality

The Edgewater suited us well in some important ways.

Travelling with my partner and three children aged 18, 15 and four meant space mattered, and our villa delivered that. There were

two large bathrooms, a washing machine and enough room that we did not feel as though we were climbing over one another for six nights. Fans and heat pumps kept everything relatively comfortable.

The accommodation was comfortable rather than luxurious, and parts of it felt a little dated.

Our idea of a beachfront villa had also been slightly more literal. We had imagined stepping straight from the door onto the sand, while in reality the beach view was from a small balcony and partly screened by trees.

After several days of rain, the unheated pool was less tempting, while the coin-operated pool table in the games room came as a small surprise.

Hot water also required planning. The resort used solar water heating, which produced lukewarm water at best after two days without sunshine. Thankfully, there was a booster switch that could be turned on before showering.

One definite highlight was the resort spa, where we treated ourselves to a massage. It was blissful and easily one of the best parts of our stay.

None of the smaller disappointments ruined the holiday, but they were reminders to check exactly what terms such as "beachfront" and "resort facilities" mean before booking.

They also reflected the realities of life on a remote island, where energy, water, freight and food cannot be taken for granted in the way many of us are accustomed to



Fresh, colourful and beautifully presented, this meal at Trader Jacks was one of the standouts of the trip.



A relaxed waterfront stop at Trader Jacks, with the ocean, passing boats and late-afternoon light providing the perfect backdrop.

in New Zealand.

Much of the food available in Rarotonga is imported, including from New Zealand, while local growers produce taro, root crops, coconuts, tropical fruit and vegetables for households, markets and businesses.

Agriculture here bears little resemblance to the large paddocks and extensive operations familiar to Rural Guardian readers. Food production is often small-scale and woven through homes and communities.

That makes it important not only economically, but also for food security. A delayed ship, disrupted flight, weather event or global price rise can quickly affect what is available and what it costs.

Tourism creates an obvious market for locally grown food, but consistently supplying hotels and restaurants on a small island is not straightforward. Growers must contend with limited land, tropical weather, labour constraints, freight costs and the need to protect the island from introduced pests and diseases.

Biosecurity is taken seriously. Visitors must declare food, plants and other risk items brought into the Cook Islands. On an island, the arrival of a new pest or plant disease could have consequences far beyond one farm or backyard garden.

Chickens roam almost as freely as the dogs, scratching around roadsides, gardens and car parks as though the entire island belongs to them. Visitors are encouraged not to feed either.

Despite being a dog lover, the dogs were a more complicated part of island life for me.

As someone who usually walks every day, I asked the receptionist whether it was safe to explore on foot. She advised me to carry a stick.

Most of the dogs appeared friendly, sleepy or completely uninterested in passers-by, but a



Beach hair, clear water and finally some sunshine. After 48 hours of torrential rain, this felt very much like the Rarotonga we had imagined.

Muri Beach is the Rarotonga of the postcards, with shallow turquoise water, pale sand and small green islets sitting just offshore.



few less comfortable encounters put me off walking around the island alone.

A holiday for doing less

There are countless ways to fill a Rarotonga itinerary, from mud buggies and lagoon cruises to paddleboarding, turtle tours and cultural experiences.

We did not take that approach.

We had arrived tired and fairly burned out, so the objective was less doing and more resting. Having a four-year-old also limited some activities and restaurant choices. A surprising number of dining venues are adults-only, which is understandable, but worth knowing before travelling as a family.

The children still had a blast.

The internet was patchy enough to make checking the final proofs of the newspaper I had completed before leaving rather frustrating. There was just enough bandwidth for football streaming, but otherwise it encouraged all of us to spend less time on our devices.

My 15-year-old loved snorkelling, while our four-year-old was perfectly content playing in the sand. We heard no complaints about boredom.

Much of Rarotonga is surrounded by a shallow lagoon, sheltered from the full force of the Pacific by the coral reef beyond it. This creates generally warm, calm water that is ideal for swimming and snorkelling, particularly for families, although currents, coral and marine life still demand respect.

Reef shoes are a must.

The water was so clear that snorkelling felt like swimming inside a tropical fish tank. Fish in an extraordinary range of colours moved through the coral below us, and my son was delighted to spot a pufferfish.

June is technically winter, but the water remained warm. Once the rain cleared, daytime temperatures settled comfortably in the mid-20s, with only slightly cooler evenings.

The western side of the island gave us some spectacular sunsets, with the sky shifting through gold, pink and deep orange over the lagoon.

Muri Beach, on the south-eastern side, is also well worth visiting. It is the Rarotonga of the

postcards, with pale sand, clear lagoon water and small green islets sitting offshore.

It is also home to Sandals Restaurant at Pacific Resort. The food was excellent, but the service was what really stood out. It was easily the best we experienced during our stay.

Trader Jacks, an island institution overlooking the water in Avarua, was another highlight. The food was fresh and beautifully prepared, and the outlook was breathtaking. Charlie's was a favourite for coffee.

Restaurant prices were, surprisingly, often a little cheaper than comparable dining in New Zealand.

The supermarkets were basic but stocked the necessities and were not as expensive as I had expected. They are worth using, particularly when travelling with children or staying somewhere with kitchen facilities.

The restaurant at The Edgewater kept us fed through the rain and did a remarkably good job considering the supply challenges faced by the island, although I would have loved to see more fresh, lighter options on the menu.

Getting around

Rarotonga is only about 32 kilometres around, and its bus system is one of the easiest and most entertaining ways to explore it.

One bus travels clockwise and another anticlockwise, circling the island's main road and picking up passengers along the way.

The buses were often packed, making the open windows a godsend, but the drivers were cheerful, friendly and frequently hilarious.

At \$5 per person for a single trip when we visited, the bus was considerably more appealing than the island's expensive taxis.

One of the conveniences for New Zealand travellers is being able to use New Zealand currency. There is no need to calculate exchange rates every time you buy a coffee, meal or bus fare.

It is still advisable to carry cash. Many smaller businesses operate on a cash-only basis, and the local bus also requires cash payment.



Island wisdom, delivered without fuss: a weathered sign offers a reminder that poor quality is remembered long after a bargain is forgotten.

A supply of smaller notes makes getting around and buying from roadside stalls much easier.

Scooters are another popular option, although visitors need to understand the licensing rules before hiring one. An overseas licence generally covers only the same classes of vehicle the holder is entitled to drive at home. Anyone without a motorcycle class may need to obtain the appropriate Cook Islands visitor licence and complete testing.

Helmets are compulsory for riders and passengers.

Drinking water also requires a little adjustment. Tap water is not generally considered suitable for visitors to drink untreated. Our villa had a separate filtered tap, and filtered water stations are available around the island.

At restaurants, asking for water often meant purchasing a bottle rather than receiving a complimentary glass from the tap.

Sunday remains a day of church, family and rest for many locals, and the island slows considerably.

Numerous shops, cafés and restaurants close, so it pays to buy breakfast and lunch supplies on Saturday or confirm somewhere will be open before setting out.

For weather updates, the Cook Islands Meteorological Service is well worth following. Its forecasts manage to be both informative and genuinely funny, a combination rarely achieved by a government weather service.

More than paradise

Rarotonga was not the flawless tropical escape I had imagined while packing in a cold Christchurch winter.

It was rainier, slightly rougher around the edges and more complicated than the postcard suggested.

But perhaps that made it more memorable.

We saw roads disappear beneath floodwater and become passable again within a day. We watched the lagoon change with the weather, snorkelled among tropical fish, travelled on overcrowded buses and sat together reading while rain hammered against the windows.

The experience also made me think about the hidden systems behind an island holiday.

Every restaurant meal, clean towel, litre of fuel and supermarket shelf depends on supply chains stretching across thousands of kilometres of ocean.

Local growers are producing food in limited space, under tropical weather conditions and with biosecurity risks that can

threaten an entire island economy.

Tourism businesses still have a responsibility to provide what they advertise, of course. A beachfront villa should resemble the description, and visitors paying resort prices are entitled to expect thoughtful food and well-maintained rooms.

But it is also worth remembering where you are.

Rarotonga is not simply a resort surrounded by water.

It is a living island community where people grow food, attend church, raise families, run businesses and somehow keep thousands of visitors fed, transported and entertained despite the weather, distance and logistical challenges.

By the end of the week, we had stopped looking for the perfect holiday.

We were simply enjoying the one we had.

And once the sun finally arrived, Rarotonga was every bit as beautiful as we had hoped.

Before you go

- **Carry cash:** New Zealand currency is accepted, but the bus and many small businesses are cash-only. Smaller notes are useful.
- **Plan for Sunday:** Many shops, cafés and restaurants close while locals attend church or spend time with family. Buy supplies or book ahead.
- **Drink filtered water:** Use filtered taps or water stations rather than drinking untreated tap water.
- **Pack reef shoes:** They protect against sharp coral, rocks and marine hazards in the lagoon.
- **Check scooter rules:** A New Zealand car licence does not automatically allow you to ride a scooter. Check licence and testing requirements before hiring.
- **Use the bus:** Clockwise and anticlockwise services circle the island and are an affordable, entertaining alternative to taxis and fun even if you have hired a car.
- **Follow the forecast:** The Cook Islands Meteorological Service Facebook page provides regular, informative and often very funny updates.
- **Book the spa:** The Edgewater massage was one of the highlights of our stay, particularly after two days of tropical rain.
- **Leave any leftover food or wine with a thank you note for the hotel cleaners — they will appreciate it.**

Students turn rural roots into business with purpose



Claire Inkson

RURAL EDITOR

A group of Year 13 students from Christchurch Girls' High School have launched a rural clothing business with a purpose, using their own farming backgrounds to support conversations around wellbeing in rural communities.

The Rural Collective was founded by Lucy Honeywell, Grace McKnight, Maddy Judd, Millie McAlister and Georgia Henderson, who all board at Acland House and share strong connections to rural New Zealand.

The group created the business as part of their school business studies class, developing a rugby jersey in collaboration with rural clothing brand Dog & Country, with 50 percent of profits donated to Farmstrong.

For Honeywell, who is from the Methven area, and McAlister, who is from near Oxford, the idea came from wanting to create something that reflected their own backgrounds while also supporting an issue close to rural communities.

"We were all in the same business class at school, and we came together as a group," Honeywell said.

"We were brainstorming ideas with our teacher and decided we wanted to do something that supported rural mental health."

The students reached out to several businesses, with Dog & Country quick to respond.

"We messaged Dog & Country first, and they got back to us within a couple of days and said they would be really keen to do a jersey with us," Honeywell said.

"It was a group effort. Everyone put ideas in. We did not know exactly what clothing product we wanted to do at first, but then we came up with the rugby jersey because it is quite versatile."

Dog & Country supplies the jerseys, which are then embroidered with The Rural Collective logo before being sold through the students' website.

Honeywell said the group wanted the product to feel practical, wearable and connected to rural life.

"We are using their jerseys, but putting our own spin on them."

The decision to support Farmstrong came from the group's own awareness of the pressure farming families can face.

"We knew it was an issue, and we wanted to do something about it," Honeywell said.

"Because we have all grown up on farms or have rural backgrounds, we are quite aware of it."

"Farming can be difficult, especially in winter. People face challenges with the weather, and things do not always go to plan."

Honeywell said she had seen



The Rural Collective founders, from left, Maddy Judd, Millie McAlister, Grace McKnight, Lucy Honeywell and Georgia Henderson. PHOTOS SUPPLIED

the pressure first-hand in her own family, particularly during difficult weather events.

"Even with all the rain at the moment, it puts extra stress on people. You still have to go out and do the jobs, and you just have to tough it out."

The Rural Collective's jerseys retail for \$99.99, with half of the profits going to Farmstrong.

Honeywell said the group hoped the jerseys would help raise awareness, as well as funds.

"I hope it creates awareness and shows that it is okay to speak up," she said.

"Everyone can go through down patches, and we hope it helps make those conversations more normal and reduces stigma."

McAlister said the five students had leaned into each other's strengths to get the business off the ground.

"Lucy is really good at organising and promotion. She knows what she is doing," McAlister said.

Honeywell said McAlister had also played a key role in keeping the group organised and communicating well.

Being together at Acland House had made it easier to work as a team, Honeywell said.

"It has made it so much easier because we can talk about things we have discussed in class and come together outside of school."

"The holidays have been harder because we have not all been together, and we launched the website during the holidays. But during the school week it is easier."

The students built the website themselves, with Henderson taking



The Rural Collective's rugby jersey is designed to be practical and wearable, while carrying a message of support for rural wellbeing.

the lead on its design.

Honeywell said creating the business had been a steep learning curve, particularly when it came to pricing, promotion and logistics.

"Promoting it enough has been a challenge," she said.

"Pricing was also hard because we wanted it to be affordable, but we also wanted to make enough profit to donate to Farmstrong."

"The website and logistics were challenging too. We were lucky because Georgia took that on. She tried a lot of different website options and templates before finding one that worked, because a lot of them are quite expensive to create."

Farmstrong engagement lead Krissy Cloutman said the organisation was excited when the students first got in touch.

"It is so cool that they have put it all together, and it is such a

professional-looking website as well, which is amazing," Cloutman said.

"It is pretty impressive when you have young people like themselves who are really wanting to back a programme like Farmstrong and recognise the difference it is making out there."

Cloutman said The Rural Collective supported both fundraising and awareness around rural wellbeing.

"It is the fundraising and the awareness pieces, and their understanding around the challenges farmers face, but also the strength and resilience within the rural community."

"Anything that helps get that message out about those challenges, and also about the strength of the sector, is really valuable."

Farmstrong has been running



The Rural Collective rugby jersey was developed in collaboration with rural clothing brand Dog & Country, with 50 percent of profits donated to Farmstrong.



The Rural Collective jersey was created to raise awareness of rural wellbeing and encourage conversations around mental health in farming communities.

for 10 years and provides practical resources to help farmers, growers and their families manage the ups and downs of farming.

Cloutman said 20,000 farmers and growers last year attributed an improvement in their wellbeing to Farmstrong.

"Farmstrong is about helping farmers, growers and their families cope with the ups and downs of farming, the stresses that come with that, and the things they can do to look after themselves."

"That awareness piece is key."

For Honeywell and the rest of The Rural Collective team, success would mean seeing the jerseys worn widely and being able to make a meaningful donation to Farmstrong.

The group also acknowledged the rural businesses that helped them get started.

"We could not have done it without the backing of rural companies and our sponsors," Honeywell said.

The Rural Collective's sponsors include Hazlett, Cates, Blink Boutique, Ravensdown, FMG, Pāmu, Farmside, Plains Irrigators and Rivers to Ranges.

"They helped us get started, and we could not have done it without them."

The Rural Collective can be found online at theruralcollective.co.nz and on Facebook and Instagram.

The unwritten rules of home

LEANNE BLAKELOCK

Hubband and I recently returned from a holiday in Vietnam. I found myself thinking about culture. Not the big obvious parts of culture, like language, history or food, the tiny unwritten rules people just know.

In Vietnam, one of those rules is crossing the road. A raging river of scooters, cars, bikes, people and horns greet you at any road. The first instinct is wait for a gap. Except, there is no gap. On our first day I ended up messaging a local friend to ask how one should cross the road. The answer, you have to step out into the oncoming traffic and trust that everyone will flow around you. Do not run, do not suddenly change your mind halfway across. Just commit, walk steadily, maybe pray, and somehow the whole thing works.

It feels absolutely unhinged the first time. Heart in throat and braced for the impending impact of car vs pedestrian. Then, after a few days, you find yourself doing it almost casually. You have mastered the art that no guidebook will tell you.

This got me thinking about our own kiwi culture, especially as we look forward to having the annual rural exchange interns arriving from Europe in the next few weeks.

Every year there are things we have to teach, things that are not written anywhere and are just "done."

The rural road wave, for example. You lift one finger off the steering wheel as you pass another vehicle.

Our interns ask, "Do you know him?" and I said "No". "So why did you wave?"

Good question. I have no idea. I just do. Not waving feels rude. Waving too much feels weird. It is a very delicate balance for people travelling at 100km/h in opposite directions.

Then there is gumboots-off etiquette. In my mind this is based almost entirely on flooring surfaces. Wearing your gumboots on rough concrete is fine. The moment you meet polished concrete, lino or tiles, the gumboots come off.

This has provided recurring moments every year. I pull up outside the supermarket, vet clinic or farm supply store and tell the interns they need to take their gumboots off. They look at me like I am absolutely pranking them, pause, hesitate and wait for the joke to land.

Then I take my own boots off and walk into the shop in socks, and they look even more concerned. It is not until we get through the doors and they see the usual farmers' sock brigade padding around the aisles that they realise I am not deranged.

Outside, there will be a tidy little line-up of gumboots by the door and when you come back out, yours are still there. Seems perfectly logical to me.

And then there is "yeah, nah." This is particularly unfair on anyone with English as a second language. Not only does it sound completely contradictory, but "yeah" and "nah" are not exactly



sterling examples of Oxford English.

Interns on receiving a "yeah, nah" in response to a closed question tend to look at us as if we have briefly lost control of the language or perhaps are having a mild stroke.

But to a Kiwi, it makes perfect sense.

"Yeah, nah" means no. "Nah, yeah" means yes. "Yeah, nah,

maybe" means probably no, but I am trying not to sound difficult.

These are the small things that make a place feel like itself. Travel reminds me that our way is not the only way. It also reminds me that home, when viewed through fresh eyes, is fairly ridiculous in its own very familiar way.

From the inside, the rules feel obvious. From the outside, they look mildly mad. And somewhere

between the road crossings, the finger waves, the abandoned gumboots and the deeply questionable English, you realise that is exactly what makes culture worth learning and settles you in as part of the place.

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

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One of Kelly Shakespeare's favourite images from The Lincoln Project captures the old sheds from her family's former farm, still standing amongst newer subdivisions on the edge of Lincoln. Shakespeare says her father painted the sheds John Deere green more than 20 years ago. PHOTOS SUPPLIED



The beauty in the ordinary: Kelly Shakespeare's Lincoln Project



Claire Inkson
RURAL EDITOR

Kelly Shakespeare is photographing the ordinary. Old sheds. Quiet streets. Faded shopfronts. Brick homes

with overgrown gardens. Hand-painted signs. Rusted roofs. The kind of places most people drive past without a second thought.

But in a rapidly growing town like Lincoln, those ordinary places are disappearing fast.

And Shakespeare knows it. "I'll photograph something and six months later it's gone and replaced by new houses," she says.

"That's become a big driver for me. I realised I was going to forget what this place used to look and feel like if I didn't document it."

The Canterbury photographer is the creator behind The Lincoln Project, a long-running documentary photography series quietly building a visual archive of one of the South Island's fastest-changing rural towns.

Part art project, part historical record, the project captures Lincoln not through polished tourism imagery or postcard-perfect landscapes, but through the details locals know by heart.

The old fish and chip shop. A weathered shed.

A bus stop outside Bridgestone Tyres.

A dairy that has stood there for decades.

"It started off as photographing pretty things I saw on my walks," Shakespeare says.

"But now it feels much more about preservation."

The project began organically during the covid lockdown in 2020 while walking her dogs with a camera slung over her shoulder.

"I wanted to capture the bits of Lincoln you don't notice from a car. The quieter details and little moments."

At the time, she shared the images quietly online, almost anonymously, through a dedicated Instagram page.

She didn't expect much response.

Instead, locals began recognising pieces of their own lives inside the photographs.

"People would message saying, 'Oh, that's one of my favourite spots too,' or they'd start sharing memories attached to certain places."

That reaction confirmed something Shakespeare already suspected: everyday places matter more than people realise.

Especially once they're gone.

Lincoln has transformed dramatically in recent years as subdivisions spread across former farmland and population growth

reshapes the once-small rural township.

For Shakespeare, who moved to Lincoln at 16 and whose family has deep agricultural roots in the area, the changes feel deeply personal.

"There's definitely sorrow in it sometimes, especially being a farmer's daughter," she says.

"We're losing these scenes all the time."

One image in particular carries special meaning.

An ageing cluster of sheds sitting stubbornly amongst newer subdivisions was once part of her family's old farm and a historic Clydesdale stud.

"They're ugly, but beautiful," she says.

"They hold so many stories."

It is that tension between beauty and decay, nostalgia and growth, that gives The Lincoln Project its emotional pull.

Shakespeare is not interested in heavily curated imagery or overly polished perfection.

In an era dominated by filters, algorithms and increasingly AI-generated visuals, her work feels intentionally honest.

"I'm really interested in real people and what things actually are," she says.

"I love houses that are a little weathered or roofs that need cleaning. I love rusty sheds and worn-down places because that's real life."



A slice of Lincoln's main street, where old and new sit side by side. Shakespeare says the town's older shops and garages hold deep nostalgia for many locals who grew up around them.

Even as Lincoln grows, rural scenes still exist on the edges of town. Shakespeare says preserving those quieter moments is a major part of The Lincoln Project.



The aesthetic is deliberate. No curated Instagram tiles to be seen here.

"The whole concept of the project is nostalgia and honesty, so it has to be real."

That authenticity has become increasingly important to her as artificial intelligence floods social media with hyper-perfect imagery.

"The more AI becomes a thing, the more I feel pulled toward slightly messy honesty."

Photography, she says, has the power to change the way people see their own communities.

"You can guide people to notice details they might otherwise miss."

"Maybe next time they go for a walk they'll stop and look a little longer."

That slowing down is part of the appeal for Shakespeare personally.

Commercial photography work keeps her busy, particularly within the rural sector, where she photographs for agricultural businesses and farming organisations across the country.

But projects like this reconnect her to why she picked up a camera in the first place.

"When I take my camera with me, I look around differently," she says.

"I stop. I pay attention."

Her relationship with photography began young, growing up on a farm with a family camera constantly in hand.

One memory still stands out clearly.

Her younger brother riding a tricycle in the driveway at sunset.

"The light was beautiful and he laughed at exactly the right moment," she recalls.

"I remember looking at the photo afterwards and realising photography felt like magic."

"You could take a feeling and preserve it forever."

That idea still sits at the heart of her work today.

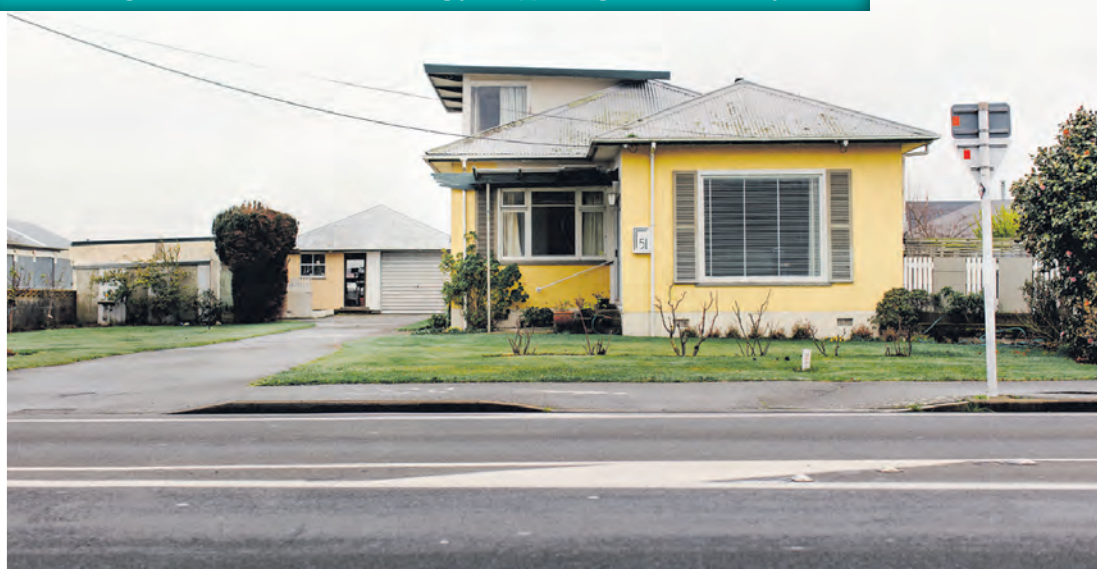
Long term, Shakespeare hopes The Lincoln Project will eventually become a book.

Not just for herself, but for the community.

"I want people decades from now to sit down with it and say, 'Remember this place?' or 'Didn't so-and-so used to live there?'" she says.

As Lincoln continues to grow and change, the project is becoming a precious record of the places, buildings and everyday scenes that exist today, but may one day survive only in memory.

Older homes with character are a recurring feature throughout The Lincoln Project, documenting the kinds of houses increasingly disappearing from Canterbury towns.



Seasonal moments and familiar landmarks are central to Shakespeare's work, which aims to document the everyday details locals often pass without noticing.



A foggy morning in Lincoln captured as part of The Lincoln Project, which Shakespeare describes as both an art project and a visual record of a town in transition.



Canterbury photographer Kelly Shakespeare, creator of The Lincoln Project, a long-running documentary photography series capturing the changing face of Lincoln.



From Scotland to Waipara:

The music promoter betting big on rural Canterbury



Claire Inkson
RURAL EDITOR

When Scottish music promoter Stuart Clumpas first visited Waipara Winehouse three years ago, he immediately saw an opportunity.

The vineyards. The wide North Canterbury skies. The proximity to Christchurch, while still feeling unmistakably rural.

"I looked at it and thought: this could really work," he says.

Now, just a few years later, Stuart Clumpas, with wife and business partner Judith, aims to transform Waipara Winehouse into one of the South Island's most exciting rural event destinations, attracting international acts including Jack Johnson, Ben Harper and John Butler.

For Clumpas, however, the vision stretches far beyond one-off concerts.

After more than four decades in the global music industry, he believes rural New Zealand deserves world-class experiences too.

"People often think major experiences only belong in Auckland or the big cities," he says.

"But rural New Zealand deserves these experiences as well."

Originally from Scotland, the Clumpases have both spent over 40 years each in music and events; Stuart booking his first gig in his twenties before going on to run clubs, then festivals and major venues with Judith throughout the UK and New Zealand.

Their career has included involvement with Rhythm and Vines, Spark Arena and large-scale festivals in Scotland, where they founded the famous T in the Park festival.

Along the way they worked with countless artists, including Crowded House during the band's early years in the UK.

"One of the memorable moments was working with Crowded House in Scotland in the 1980s," Clumpas says.

"I've known Neil Finn and Tim Finn for years and there are some incredible stories there."

But it was an entirely different stage of life that eventually led him to Waipara.

A business partner sent him the sale listing for Waipara Winehouse during the COVID lockdown, even though Clumpas was considering stepping away from the event space and into semi-retirement.

Clumpas, who spends half the year residing in Auckland and the

other in Scotland, was intrigued and eventually went to check it out for himself.

"I went down to have a look and just thought: wow, this place has something special."

Clumpas says Canterbury itself also played a major role in the decision.

Before the earthquakes, Christchurch had never particularly resonated with him.

But returning after several years away, he saw a city transformed.

"It feels like Christchurch and Canterbury are on a real resurgence," he says.

"It feels like a place that's alive again, and being part of helping push that forward feels really good."

The couple officially took over the business in 2023, before embarking on an extensive refurbishment and relaunch last year.

While concerts are now becoming a major part of the venue's identity, Clumpas says the original vision was always broader than simply hosting music events.

"We wanted to create a destination," he says.

Part of that vision has involved repositioning the Winehouse as a regional cellar door hub, showcasing wines from across the Waipara region rather than focusing on a single label, an idea that came from the resident winemaker, Simon McGeorge.

"We wanted to create a regional cellar door experience where people could taste wines from across Waipara in one place, but also provide a cellar door for some of the smaller boutique winemakers who didn't have the resources to do their own," he says.

The Winehouse currently stocks wines from producers including Georges Road, Pyramid Valley, Mount Brown, Tiki Wines, Harris Estate, House of Ball, Forager, McGeorge Wine Co and The Crater Rim.

Rather than competing with neighbouring wineries, Clumpas says the aim is collaboration.

"A lot of visitors are interested in wine, but they might not be an enthusiast who wants to drive to four or five separate cellar doors," he says.

"We can introduce them to the region, let them taste a range of wines, and offer a cellar doors experience for our boutique winemakers."

While the Waipara Winehouse is not a restaurant, it does offer a light tapas-style menu alongside local wines, craft beer and spirits.

Clumpas describes the concept as creating "a front door for the region."

The Winehouse has also started hosting boutique winemaker afternoons, where visitors can sit down directly with local producers.

"If somebody discovers a wine they love, we're more than happy



Visitors can sample wines from across the Waipara region through curated tasting flights at Waipara Winehouse.

to send them down the road to visit that winery as well."

While the wine side of the business continues to evolve, it is the large-scale concerts that have rapidly put the venue on the map.

One of the defining moments came with Canadian folk-bluegrass band The Dead South.

"That was the moment that confirmed Waipara Winehouse could genuinely work again as a major event venue," Clumpas says.

The concert sold strongly, outperforming all the other Australasian shows on the band's tour schedule, while the atmosphere convinced Clumpas the venue had genuine long-term potential.

"The band loved the venue, the crowd loved the experience, and people left saying: 'That was fantastic. We'll be back.'"

Securing Jack Johnson, Ben Harper and John Butler in November was another major milestone.

Clumpas admits convincing promoters and managers to look seriously at rural North Canterbury takes continued persistence.

"I kept saying: this is exactly the right environment for this show."

The vineyard setting ultimately proved part of the appeal, and the decision paid off, with tickets rapidly selling out.

"South Island ticket sales outperformed Auckland again, which is particularly satisfying," Clumpas says.

The events are also having a flow-on effect throughout the wider region, drawing visitors into local accommodation, wineries, restaurants and businesses.

"The council and mayor have been incredibly supportive from the beginning," he says.

"They understood early on what these events mean for the area."



An aerial view of Waipara Winehouse during a major outdoor concert. Owner Stuart Clumpas believes the venue is helping establish North Canterbury as a destination for world-class live music.



Rising American country-folk artist Dylan Gossett is set to perform at Waipara Winehouse in December as part of the venue's growing live music programme.



International singer-songwriter Jack Johnson is among the headline acts helping put Waipara Winehouse on the map as a concert destination. PHOTOS CLAIRE INKSON



Waipara Winehouse has undergone extensive refurbishment since Stuart and Judith Clumpas took ownership in 2023.

The public tasting room has been redesigned as a regional cellar door experience, showcasing wines from producers across Waipara.



While some locals were initially sceptical about an Auckland-based promoter arriving in Waipara with big ambitions, Clumpas says support has grown rapidly.

"At first there was definitely a healthy dose of South Island scepticism," he laughs.

"But once people visit the refurbished Winehouse, or come to Events, attitudes shift very quickly."

Looking ahead, the vision for Waipara Winehouse continues to expand.

Future plans include additional concerts, more diverse events and potentially accommodation on site.

An upcoming performance by rising American country-folk artist Dylan Gossett in a mini festival type event, Wine Country, in December is also helping shape a bigger vision for the venue, with Clumpas hoping to establish it as an annual event.

"We'd like it to become the North

Canterbury Christmas party," he says.

"A proper rural summer event where people come together and have a really good time."

The concept would feature multiple acts, good food, wine and a relaxed vineyard atmosphere, with plans to build it gradually over time.

For Clumpas, however, the project has never simply been about ticket sales.

"It's definitely about more than money," he says, "Always has been for me."

"When local people come up and say they're excited about what we're doing, that means a lot."

After 45 years in the industry, it is a sentiment that perhaps explains why a veteran international promoter has chosen rural North Canterbury for his next chapter.

"We want to build something that's still here for years to come," he says.



Lamb Shepherd's Pie with Feta Mash

Recipe by Livi Kitson-Clark
courtesy of Beef + Lamb NZ
Hearty lamb and vegetable filling topped with creamy potato and feta mash

Ingredients

- 400 g New Zealand lamb mince
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 small onion, diced
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- ½ large eggplant, diced
- 2 carrots, diced
- 1 cup mushrooms, sliced
- 1 tsp paprika
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp dried mixed herbs
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 400 g can chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 2 tbsp tomato paste
- 400 g tomato purée
- 1 cup reduced-salt beef stock
- 1 tbsp red wine vinegar

Potato and feta mash

- 6 medium potatoes, peeled and diced
- ½ cup trim milk
- 1 tbsp butter
- 150 g feta cheese, crumbled
- Salt and pepper, to taste

To serve

- Steamed broccolini and green peas, or other seasonal vegetables
- ¼ cup roasted almonds, chopped

Optional garnish

- Lemon wedges
- Fresh parsley, chopped
- 2 tbsp red onion, finely diced
- Balsamic glaze

Serves 6

Method

1. For the potato mash, cook the potatoes in a large pot of boiling, salted water until tender.
2. Drain, then mash with the butter, milk and half of the feta until smooth. Season with salt and pepper.
3. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 190°C and lightly grease a large baking dish.
4. Heat the olive oil in a large frying pan. Cook the onion and garlic for 2–3 minutes, until softened. Add the lamb mince and cook for a further

3–4 minutes, breaking it up as it browns.

5. Add the paprika, cinnamon, cumin, mixed herbs, salt and pepper, and stir well.
6. Add the eggplant, carrots and mushrooms. Cook for 4–5 minutes, until the vegetables begin to soften.
7. Stir in the chickpeas, tomato paste, tomato purée, beef stock and red wine vinegar. Reduce the heat and simmer for 5–10 minutes, stirring occasionally.
8. Spoon the lamb mixture into the prepared baking dish. Top evenly with the potato mash and sprinkle over the remaining feta.
9. Bake for 25–30 minutes, until the topping is golden and the filling is bubbling around the edges.
10. Serve with steamed broccolini and peas, topped with roasted almonds. Garnish with parsley, red onion, lemon wedges and balsamic glaze, if using.

Nutrition information

Per serving (534 g). Based on 6 servings and excludes serving suggestions and optional garnishes.

Energy
2,041 kJ (488 kcal)
Protein
29.4 g
Total fat
24.3 g
Carbohydrate
33.1 g
Dietary fibre
10.0 g
Saturated fat
9.8 g
Sodium
700 mg
Iron
2.8 mg
Zinc
4.0 mg
Vitamin B12
1.0 µg

UNDERSTANDING SEVERE OSTEOARTHRITIS

In the previous edition, I noted that individuals suffering from severe osteoarthritis frequently contact me for assistance, particularly farmers who experience significant mobility restrictions due to knee osteoarthritis. The associated pain and discomfort often lead to diminished physical activity, resulting in weight gain and a decline in overall fitness, with joint replacement frequently being the only viable intervention.

Addressing severe osteoarthritis requires intensive nutritional therapy. Where appropriate, considering medication and individual circumstances, I recommend a 12-week comprehensive programme incorporating three distinct supplements: Chondroitin (1600mg), water-soluble Curcumin (pepper-free, 1200mg), EPA sourced from fish oils (1000mg), and Glucosamine (1600mg). Chondroitin is paramount, and the addition of water-soluble Curcumin extract—derived from turmeric—proves beneficial owing to its robust anti-inflammatory properties.

For those managing severe osteoarthritis, consistent supplementation with Curcumin has been linked to reduced joint pain, enhanced functional capacity, and decreased morning stiffness. Furthermore, Curcumin's

antioxidative activity may provide additional protection by mitigating oxidative stress, which is thought to contribute to accelerated joint degeneration.

Most conventional Curcumin extracts require black pepper extract to facilitate absorption due to Curcumin's insolubility in water; however, prolonged use of pepper extract may cause gastrointestinal issues such as reflux. Previously, this limitation led many patients to discontinue Curcumin despite its positive effects. Recently, advancements have introduced a new generation of Curcumin complexes that are entirely water soluble, resulting in superior absorption without reliance on pepper extract and improved gastrointestinal tolerance.

Numerous clients living with severe osteoarthritis now report greater comfort. Although the underlying condition persists, interventions aimed at reducing inflammation and supporting joint repair processes can substantially enhance quality of life.

John Arts (Adv.Dip.Nut.Med) is a qualified nutritional medicine practitioner and founder of Abundant Health. To read more articles by John and learn more about the Abundant Health products he has formulated, visit www.healthhouse.co.nz, call 0800 140 141, or email john@healthhouse.co.nz.

For many, joint health deterioration is the first obvious sign of aging. Gradual erosion of cartilage, is by far the most common issue.

What is Bettaflex?

Bettaflex is the most popular supplement in the Abundant Health range because of its positive support for joints affected by wear and tear, helping Bettaflex users to support mobility and quality of life.

How does Bettaflex work?

Bettaflex has been formulated to support joint comfort and mobility, making it an ideal supplement for those seeking support for joint comfort and stiffness. Bettaflex combines high-grade chondroitin sulphate, glucosamine

sulphate and patented BioSolve® Curcumin. This combination supports the maintenance of healthy cartilage and other joint tissue by supporting the joint processes that protect, maintain and renew cartilage.

Why use Bettaflex?

Bettaflex formulator John Arts comments, "I formulated Bettaflex with a single objective; that those concerned about joint health can support mobility and comfort helping them to enjoy better quality of life."

Always read the label and use as directed. If symptoms persist see your healthcare professional.

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Flood damage: Flood damage at Lynton Downs near Kaikōura following July's extreme weather event, which caused widespread flooding, slips and damage across the Kaikōura and Hurunui districts.

PHOTO RACHEL BARTRUM



Communities pull together after devastating flood

JENNY CATIONS-BROWN

Kaikōura /Hurunui rural communities are facing a long road to recovery after an extreme weather event brought more than double the region's average July rainfall, triggering widespread flooding, slips, and significant damage across the district.

For many farming families, the immediate priority has been ensuring the safety of people and livestock, followed by the enormous task of clearing debris, repairing fences, restoring access, and assessing the full extent of the damage. While the floodwaters may have receded, the recovery has only just begun.

The North Canterbury Rural Support Trust has received requests for assistance following this week's flooding. As always, the support we provide to individuals and families remains completely confidential. Our priority is ensuring that those affected know they are not facing these challenges alone.

Rural Support works alongside farmers, growers, contractors and rural businesses, providing practical assistance, a listening ear, and connections to the services people may need during difficult times. Sometimes that support is as simple as helping people navigate the next steps, connecting them with the right agencies, or simply checking in to make sure they are coping.

Recovery from an event of this scale is never just about repairing damaged infrastructure. The emotional and mental toll can be significant, particularly as the initial emergency response gives way to weeks and months of hard work. It is important that people continue to look after themselves, check in on neighbours, and asks for help when they need it.

The Trust is working closely alongside Civil Defence Emergency Management, Kaikōura District Council, Hurunui District Council, and other partner agencies to ensure a coordinated response and that affected rural communities have access to the

support and resources they need.

One of the greatest strengths of rural New Zealand is the willingness of communities to rally around one another. We continue to see neighbours helping neighbours, contractors donating their time, volunteers stepping forward, and local organisations working together to support recovery efforts.

While there is still much work ahead, this spirit of resilience and community will be vital as the rural sector rebuilds.

The North Canterbury Rural Support Trust would like to thank all the RST branches who have reached out offering help and support.

Cookies Classic: More than just a day of the Golf Course

For the past five years, the Cookies Classic, held at the Hawarden Golf Club, has proudly supported the North Canterbury Rural Support Trust, raised valuable funds while providing

local farmers with the opportunity to step away from the demands of the farm and enjoy a well-earned day of connection, camaraderie and friendly competition.

This year's tournament was another outstanding success, with fantastic winter weather delivering clear blue skies, sunshine and virtually no wind, creating perfect conditions for a memorable day on the course.

A full field of golfers took the opportunity to get off farm, catch up with friends, meet others from the rural community, and enjoy a relaxed day together. Events like the Cookies Classic are an important reminder of the value of taking time out, strengthening social connections and looking after personal wellbeing.

With the generous support of many local businesses and sponsors, participants were well catered for throughout the day before enjoying an excellent meal in the clubhouse.

A superb prize table ensured everyone went home with something to celebrate, while

the charity auction once again highlighted the generosity of the rural community, raising over \$2,000 for the North Canterbury Rural Support Trust.

A special thank you must go to the dedicated members of the Hawarden Golf Club, whose hard work behind the scenes makes this event possible each year. From preparing the course and coordinating the tournament to sourcing the many generous donations for the charity auction and prize table, their commitment and countless volunteer hours are what makes the Cookies Classic such a successful and enjoyable event.

"In farming, taking time off the property is often the first thing to be sacrificed, making days like the Cookies Classic an important reminder that looking after yourself and staying connected with others is just as important as looking after the farm."

Jenny Cations-Brown is wellness Coordinator for North Canterbury Rural Support Trust.
www.rural-support.org.nz

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Golf day: A full field enjoys the winter sunshine at the annual Cookies Classic at Hawarden Golf Club, which raised more than \$2,000 for the North Canterbury Rural Support Trust.

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