

# INSIDE DAIRY

Your levy in action



## STRONG FOOTING FOR THE NEW SEASON

06

- 14 | WHAT MOTIVATES YOUNG FARMERS?
- 18 | WINTERING — A NATIONWIDE ISSUE
- 22 | PREVENTING MILK FEVER WITH SYNTHETIC ZEOLITE



# OVER THE FENCE...

## We're rising above the challenges.

Our communities, and farms, have faced no shortage of adversity in recent years. Covid-19 alone has presented challenges we'd never have anticipated several years ago – let alone the shifts in policy, weather and farm practice we have also seen.

Despite the difficulties, there are always learnings to be gained. As we head into the new season, *Inside Dairy* has talked to a range of farmers who've actively looked to the future and made proactive decisions about issues they're facing. We hope you're inspired by their stories in this edition.

One of the immediate challenges facing us all is the staffing shortage. We continue to advocate hard for the Government to support us with more international staff. In March, we saw another 300 border exceptions granted. While this was a positive for those farmers who are granted a visa, we were hugely disappointed given we'd pushed for 1500.

Meanwhile, it's more important than ever to attract Kiwis into farming. We've reignited our GoDairy campaign to attract people into dairying. Longer term, we're working on a Workforce Resilience Plan to look further into the future at how we retain talented people.

Last month, we completed the emissions pricing consultation. As industry partners of the Primary Sector Climate Action Partnership, He Waka Eke Noa (HWEN), DairyNZ is advocating for farmers to get a fair deal when agriculture emissions are priced by 2025.

The Government has legislated to put agriculture into the NZ Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) if we don't come up with a better option. Frankly, the ETS as it stands now would be the worst outcome for farmers and New Zealand. So, playing a part in how emissions are priced, and ensuring dairy maintains a degree of control, is vital for our sector.

The consultation saw robust discussion that has contributed to the advice put forward to Government. We will keep you informed on its progress.

I always appreciate your feedback, so please email me with any thoughts on this edition or ideas for future editions –  
[tim.mackle@dairynz.co.nz](mailto:tim.mackle@dairynz.co.nz).

**Tim Mackle**

Chief executive  
DairyNZ

## Features



### 06 Lessons learnt for new season

Five farm operators share what they've learned this season that's put them in a stronger position for the next one.

### In this issue

- 2 Our best chance to stay out of the ETS
- 3 A fresh face to dairying
- 12 Giving time to the team
- 13 Solving the labour crisis
- 16 Grassroots path to profit

### Regulars

- 4 Snapped on-farm
- 20 Take 5
- 21 Just Quickly
- 27 Regional focus
- 28 Regional updates
- 29 DairyNZ contact list



#### On the cover:

Taieri Plains sharemilker Gregor Ramsay and son George, from our cover story on pages 6-11.

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# CONTENTS



14

## What young farmers value

Growing their skillset, caring for animals and working outside are some of the things that fuel the fire.

## 18 Wintering – not just a Southland issue

Getting wintering right matters on all farms, regardless of whether you feed on crop.



## 22 Feeding synthetic zeolite pre-calving reduces milk fever

DairyNZ's experiments have yielded promising results for this prevention strategy.



### We appreciate your feedback

Email [insidedairy@dairynz.co.nz](mailto:insidedairy@dairynz.co.nz) or call us on 0800 4 DairyNZ (0800 4 324 7969).



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# OUR BEST CHANCE TO STAY OUT OF THE ETS



**He Waka Eke Noa's two pricing options are our strongest opportunity for success, writes DairyNZ chair Jim van der Poel.**

With the He Waka Eke Noa consultation now closed, I'd like to thank all farmers who gave feedback on the two alternative options to agriculture entering the NZ Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS).

The level of robust discussion is testament to how significant this decision is for our sector. It's important we get this right. Farmers deserve a better deal than the ETS so we can maintain profitable businesses while we work to reduce our emissions.

Agricultural emissions will be priced by 2025 – the Government has already legislated for that. Our sector fought hard for a chance to come up with a better solution than the ETS, and He Waka Eke Noa is our best opportunity to secure this.

The partnership has designed two credible options. Your feedback has been critical in strengthening the advice before it is sent to Government. So far, some clear themes have emerged from the consultation:

- Farmers want to work towards farm-level pricing as soon as possible, so they are recognised and rewarded for on-farm actions they take.
- Any emissions pricing option must reduce emissions.
- There needs to be greater recognition of sequestration through the ETS, with HWEN picking up the balance.
- Money raised through any levy needs to be returned to the sector and distributed in a fair and transparent way.

Over the last few weeks, we've also seen some farmer groups put together their own emissions pricing options. I would like to thank them for taking the time to put those together.

While we appreciate what they are trying to achieve, unfortunately, there is a lot of important detail missing from those proposals, like what they would cost farmers and what emission reductions would be. We will be looking at this feedback closely to see what could be incorporated into existing options.

It's important to note that we don't have free rein when it comes to designing these options. There are strict confines we need to work within. We're also working to tight timeframes, with a recommendation due to be delivered to Government by May 31.

Any proposal that's going to get over the line with Government needs to be credible if we are going to avoid agriculture entering the ETS. DairyNZ and the partnership want to get farmers the best deal possible, so we need to be pragmatic and realistic.

In my view, the current options presented by the partnership are our best chance of success. With the enhancements we are receiving from our feedback, we are very hopeful that we can prevent our sector going into the ETS.

# A FRESH FACE TO DAIRYING

## Shannon Munro's bringing her love for dairy farming into homes all over the country.

Early this year, DairyNZ launched its *Join Us* campaign, which aims to give Kiwis a better understanding of what it means to be a dairy farmer.

Fronting the campaign is Shannon Munro, an Eastern Bay of Plenty farmer who wants to share her love of rural New Zealand and encourage other Kiwis to join the sector.

Shannon and her husband Steve have been dairy farming for about 10 years, having left the city to provide a different upbringing for their young family.

After starting in farm assistant and calf rearing roles, the couple shifted into farm manager and ZIC positions, and later into contract milking, moving around the country as opportunities arose.

"We're now in our first year leasing a 66ha dairy block, previously leased by Steve's parents. We bought their 170-cow herd," says Shannon.

"The kids enjoy a lot of freedom on the farm. They have lots to keep them busy and they're learning life skills they may not have otherwise learned in the city."

The couple have three children and are planning to stay on their farm for the next few years but, ultimately, want to own their own small farm.

Shannon says, as a young Māori woman, she's proud to be presenting a different face to dairy farming and showing what dairy farming has to offer.

"Dairy farming offers really great opportunities and a great lifestyle. There are lots of opportunities for people to progress quickly and it's very rewarding."

*Join Us* looks into daily life on a farm, from working with machinery and technology to caring for animals and the land in a way that's open and fun. It's about showing young Kiwis that dairying offers a rewarding career and lifestyle.

We're inviting people to visit [GoDairy.co.nz](http://GoDairy.co.nz), where they can complete a quiz to see if they have what it takes to be a dairy farmer, and look at pathways into the sector.

The campaign is part of a wider *Here for the Long Game* project, which aims to help communities understand dairy farmers and how they're working to provide a better future for their families, the land, their communities and New Zealand.

Learn more at [dairynz.co.nz/the-long-game](http://dairynz.co.nz/the-long-game)



The *Join Us* commercial featuring Shannon and son Sid launched during January's highly viewed T20 Black Clash cricket match.

HERE FOR THE LONG GAME

# Snapped on-farm

Here are some of our favourite photos from social media over the past few months, showing what's been going down on farms around the country. If you'd like your photo to feature, share your snaps by tagging us on social media or using the **#dairynz** hashtag.



**Photographer:** Jo Wood (AKA Gumboot Girl),  
environmental specialist in Tomarata,  
Northland.

"Our first wee babe today, a friendly, chilled little guy."



**Photographer:** Jo Sheridan, Owl Farm Demonstration Manager in Waikato.

"Is it just me, or does anyone else love to see a dead-straight fence line in a crop? The colour contrast is beautiful."




**Photographer:** Rhys Roberts, chief executive Align Farms in Canterbury

"This is our son, Gus Roberts (7), with fodder beet, which is one of three winter feed methods we've been comparing and giving updates on, including financial analysis for each."

# LESSONS LEARNT FOR NEW SEASON

Five farm operators spoke to *Inside Dairy* about what they learnt over a challenging season, and how it'll change the way they farm in the next.



Picture perfect grazing for Gregor and Lynne Ramsays' herd on the Taieri Plains last spring.





Dan and Kate with children Lizzie (7) and Sam (9), and dog Star, with this winter's swede crop.

## DAN AND KATE KING DEALING TO WINTERING CHALLENGE

After 14 years of farming on the West Coast, Reefton farmers Dan and Kate King say long periods of high rainfall across winter and spring are the “new normal”. Last year the district received 1800mm of rain between June and December in a region that averages 1900mm a year.

“Winter went relatively well for us but the constant rainfall over spring, with cows calving, inevitably led to pasture damage and pressure on our supplements. Dry matter intake for a few critical weeks was only about 15kg DM a cow a day, just as they were really starting to produce milk volume. We can see now that we need to plan for these long wet periods to be a part of each season” says Dan.

Next season, rather than allocating balage over winter in addition to the winter crop, the Kings will save the approximately 180 bales they make and hold it purely for feeding onto the milking platform throughout the milking season, as needed. Meantime, they've ordered three truck and trailer units of meadow hay for adding into the winter crop diet.

After trialling a diverse-mix winter feed crop, they're returning to a more conventional HT Swede crop, recognising the higher yield (19-20t DM/ha) grown, compared to the lower (11t DM/ha) diverse mix trialled last winter.

**“We can see now that we need to plan for these long wet periods to be a part of each season.”**

Making sure their cows are comfortable is important to the Kings. They use a range of good management practices to ensure the cows get enough lying time, such as back fencing and portable water troughs to minimise pugging. When rainfall and the risk of generating excessive mud are high, the cows are put on grass paddocks.

The Kings are currently redeveloping a lane to become a stand-off area, and are planting Italian alders and pittosporums (which Kate has grown from seed) nearby to provide shelter from the north and south during extreme weather events.

Finally, last season, Dan and Kate were late getting their culls away due to processor limitations, which put unexpected pressure on feed supplies.

“This year, we've already booked in our culls and allowed for empties too, being very aware that Omicron could have an impact on processor capacity,” says Dan.

# GREGOR & LYNNE RAMSAY

## BUILDING A STRONG PARTNERSHIP

A love affair with New Zealand farming, and dairying in particular, was enough to prompt Gregor Ramsay to return here after an initial stint on his OE. He and his then-new wife Lynne left Scotland with a dream to own their own dairy herd.

Seven years on, it's a box firmly ticked, with the couple now in their third year of sharemilking a very productive 140-head Jersey herd on the Taieri Plains, south of Dunedin.

Earlier on, Gregor had also spent time as an area manager for Fonterra. That job gave him a good insight into how the strength of a landowner-sharemilker relationship can – or cannot – underpin the success of a farming operation.

**“This sort of relationship is worth its weight in gold.”**

“So often, I'd come across an owner who was a decent person, and their sharemilker, also a decent person, yet they didn't seem able to make it work.”

Gregor and Lynne's learnings from their relationship with farm owner Philip Wilson extend beyond just last season, to include the last two.

“Year one was tough here. We and the herd were adapting to a different region and different regime, and production fell short of where we wanted to be,” says Gregor.

“But to his eternal credit, Philip had the patience and belief in us to sit down at the end of that year and discuss how we could lift our performance. He set a clear target (60,000kg MS) and we discussed how we'd achieve that. It was a test for his relationship with us, and we appreciated his honesty and faith in us.”

Gregor and Lynne repaid it by achieving 63,000kg MS at the end of year two, and will hit 66,000kg MS this season off the 40ha milking platform.

The couple have come to value Philip's professional, fair and well-communicated approach. It's underpinned by a respect for his well-proven farming skills, which make him far more than a detached farm investor in the partnership.

“It is not something we take for granted, and this sort of relationship is worth its weight in gold,” says Gregor.

“We appreciate the respect we're given. We're going to also run an additional small farm nearby with another landowner with the same sort of honesty and values. For us, that's worth a lot more than simply moving to a larger size operation.”



*Lynne and Gregor with sons George (2) and Hamish (nine months). Photo: Blacklabel Photography*



*M. bovis prompted the boot wash station, but Garry and Joyce have taken further steps since Covid.*



## GARRY VOOGT BIOSECURITY PLAN A TIMELY ASSET

In the past year, Garry Voogt has come to appreciate the value of having invested some time and thought into a farm biosecurity plan in the wake of *Mycoplasma bovis* (*M. bovis*).

“We’d always run an almost fully closed system on the farm – all AI with no bulls. After *M. bovis*, we put an outrigger around the boundary, along with a boot wash for visitors and a proper alert notice. The heifers were the biggest risk, and we already get the bulls tested that are running with them.”

But with Covid’s imminent arrival in the past year, Garry and his wife Joyce decided to sit down with DairyNZ regional team leader Wilma Foster (who’s also Joyce’s sister) to develop a formal biosecurity plan for their farm in Manawaru, Waikato.

“Wilma prompted us to start working on a plan and how to minimise Covid’s effects if we got it on the farm,” says Garry.

They were able to think through procedures to better control arrivals of both stock and people, and where the greatest risk of infection might come from.

**“The last thing we need is to have to isolate for two weeks.”**

“We recognised that the AI technician, coming every day, was likely to be the greatest risk. We set up an area in an old cowshed for the technician to come to each day, quite separate from the main dairy. We also made sure we were always wearing masks when around them.”

Social distancing towards new arrivals on the farm is now the norm. The couple are also closely scrutinising every trip they take off-farm, to reduce the risk of bringing Covid back and exposing their manager to it.

“And we’ll be trying to get hold of rapid antigen test kits – the last thing we need is to have to isolate for two weeks,” says Garry.

“Sitting down with Wilma and making a plan has really helped us think things through carefully to try and minimise Covid’s impact on the farm and on us.”

**Got a biosecurity plan?**  
Manage risks and protect your business from pests and diseases with [dairynz.co.nz/biosecurity-planner](https://dairynz.co.nz/biosecurity-planner)

# RYAN GOBLE

## FRESH APPROACH TO RE-GRASSING

With an autumn-calved herd comes the appeal of high-value winter milk. But it also brings the challenge of growing good-quality grass to meet peak milk demand during the year's shortest growth days.

Since converting fully to autumn calving four seasons ago, Taranaki sharemilker Ryan Goble has used maize as a key supplement for maintaining that valuable winter production. Of the farm's 180ha total, 35ha are usually planted out in maize by the first week of October.

Ryan also boosts winter feed supply by integrating the sowing of annual ryegrasses into the maize cropping rotation. He plants them the autumn before the maize is sown, then sows the maize, and returns to a perennial or annual for another year.

"We find doing it ahead of the maize significantly reduces the weed level in the maize when it's planted, and we also have fewer weeds when re-sowing back into an annual."

The high proportion of farm area in annual grasses has been made even more effective as a winter feed supply source this season. Ryan's been exploring the use of Italian grasses sown in half the cultivated paddocks, and annuals in the other half.

**"Generally, the better you treat them (Italian grasses), the better they persist."**


Alongside the tetraploid annual grass, the Italian grass provided an additional boost to winter feed supply at the peak feed period.

"We've also found the Italian grasses continue well into spring and early summer. Generally, the better you treat them, the better they persist."

Like the annuals, they're relatively easy to establish once sown, offering a slightly longer round length of about 25-30 days, compared to the annuals' 20-25-day growth round.

Ryan is also anticipating two years' persistence with the grasses. This fits well with the relatively high paddock turnover demanded by the area of maize planted each season.

"This balance works well and means we can plant those paddocks cultivated less often in a longer-term, high-quality tetraploid ryegrass. That includes those paddocks close to walking distance from the dairy that also receive effluent."



Ryan with a Platform ryegrass clover mix planted in March 2021, following a maize crop.

# GLENN JONES & SARAH BRETT COPING WITH COMPLIANCE

For many farmers, the surge in compliance demands from freshwater and greenhouse gas regulations has bordered on overwhelming in the past few years.

Key concerns have included the Government's cap of 190kg N/ha/year, greenhouse gas measurements, and water quality outcomes within most regional plans.

**"We have to put our best foot forward."**

Canterbury sharemilkers Glenn Jones and Sarah Brett have been determined to take those challenges and make them work in a positive way for them and their farm business.

Glenn says their key lesson in the past season hasn't been so much of a light bulb moment of learning. Instead, it's been a confirmation they're on the right path with not only meeting regulatory expectations, but also taking the information demanded by compliance and applying back into their business, to grow it sustainably and profitably.

"And for us, a big part of that has come from being in one of the first catchments to be most affected by these regulations, namely in Selwyn, Te Waihora. Along with our iwi farm owners, The Proprietors of the Rakaia Incorporation Limited, we got on board early. Working in partnership, we both hold high expectations about stewardship and respect for the land. We have to put our best foot forward."

Five seasons into their sharemilking role, Glenn and Sarah say tackling compliance demands head-on has been significantly helped by building a network of like-minded peers, advisors and mentors.

"Being part of the (DairyNZ) Selwyn and Hinds Project, with its partner farms, gave us access to modelling work and expertise to support it. We chose a young, talented farm advisor in Kirsty Thomas, who has a strong background in farm environmental management," says Glenn.

This has helped make constraints like N limits, surpluses and losses better understood.

"The limit of 190kg N/ha/year was a challenging restraint to be brought in. However, we've been able to model our losses and our inputs, and learn which levers we need to pull to come under it. This includes better clover establishment in pastures."

Similarly, for greenhouse gases, the couple have made a point to "know our numbers" – knowing they sit comfortably below the Canterbury average of 11.3t CO<sub>2</sub>/ha."

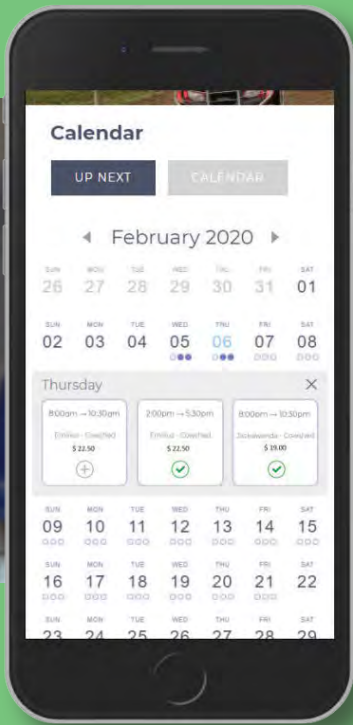
We're now starting to think about the value of engaging with the younger generation of skilled farm and herd managers out there. We want to help upskill them on these environmental aspects, so understanding it all becomes part of the culture, alongside grass and stock management."

*To learn more about the Selwyn and Hinds project, go to [dairynz.co.nz/selwynhinds](http://dairynz.co.nz/selwynhinds) or contact Virginia Serra on 021 932 515 or [virginia.serra@dairynz.co.nz](mailto:virginia.serra@dairynz.co.nz)*

*Need help to meet compliance demands or get your head around what's required of you? Please reach out to your DairyNZ regional team (contact details page 29).*



*Glenn and Sarah see external challenges as an opportunity to strengthen their business.*



# GIVING TIME TO THE TEAM

**Using an app to choose time slots at their local gym gave Rhys and Kiri Roberts the idea for a more flexible farm roster system.**

Rhys and Kiri, who work for Align Farms in Canterbury, manage 30 staff across five dairy and one dairy support farm. Kiri says they wanted to find a way of reducing hours and giving the team more control of their working week.

“The gym app gave us the idea, and in 2019 we started using a simple whiteboard system where staff could choose workdays from allocated spots,” says Kiri. “Then, over a two-year period we refined, developed and prototyped our online app ‘You Choose’.”

Rhys and Kiri worked with a developer in Christchurch to create the app, which allows the team to pick shifts that make up their hours on a 6:2 roster, within certain boundaries. Staff can access the app on their smartphones or on the Align website.

“Staff can choose their shifts but can’t work more than three shifts a day or more than six days in a row, so this gives everyone more free time,” says Rhys. “We rotate the first pick, so everyone gets a shot at their favourites. The app is more flexible than a traditional 6:2 roster where staff are on deck from 4.30am until 5pm but only get paid for 10 hours because of meal breaks.”

The core team has first dibs, but if they’re happy with their weekly hours, underemployed locals on the database can book in for shifts.

Training is encouraged and rewarded. For example, a welding shift could be added to the roster and the qualified staffer is rewarded with a 1.5 times hourly rate payment.

“It’s a win-win for everyone,” says Rhys.

Assistant farm manager Zhybale Castil says Kiri and Rhys are very supportive employers.

“They give us flexibility and look after our wellbeing. They insist that we have a work-life balance.”

Rhys has also worked with other Canterbury farmers and DairyNZ’s workplace design team to co-design initiatives like Kanban for farms ([dairynz.co.nz/kanban](http://dairynz.co.nz/kanban)) and leadership training for emerging farm managers.

At a time when dairy workers are in short supply, the Roberts’ approach has been highly successful in attracting and retaining staff.

## WORKING LESS

Kiwi dairy farmers have achieved a big reduction in staff working hours:

### 2016/17

Most employees worked more than 60 hrs/wk through spring and more than 50 hrs/wk the rest of the year.

### 2020/21

Most employees were working fewer than 60 hrs/wk in spring and fewer than 50 hrs/wk the rest of the year.

Check out roster options at [dairynz.co.nz/rosters](http://dairynz.co.nz/rosters)

# SOLVING THE LABOUR CRISIS

We urgently need more people to join the dairy sector – and stay with us. Here are some of the ways DairyNZ is helping with that.



## GETTING MIGRANT WORKERS THROUGH

Border restrictions and MIQ have severely affected dairying. With record-low unemployment, finding local workers is challenging. We've been strongly advocating to the Government for access to more international workers. Restrictions were lifted for the class border exceptions, but only 500 workers will be allowed into New Zealand in time for calving. It's important that you apply now at [dairynz.co.nz/immigration](http://dairynz.co.nz/immigration) before you miss out. Meanwhile, we'll continue to ask the Government to do more to fill critical roles.



## ATTRACTING KIWIS TO JOIN OUR SECTOR

We want smart, capable people to join our sector. Our new *Join Us* campaign takes a fun and upbeat approach to helping Kiwis understand what it's like to be a dairy farmer. Through the campaign, which features Whakatāne dairy farmer Shannon Munro (page 3), we're asking the public if they have what it takes to be a dairy farmer, and we're inviting them to 'join us'.



## GIVING YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCE ON-FARM

Getting young people interested in dairying remains a focus for us. We're working to offer a practical on-farm internship programme. We piloted this programme with farmers and 12 tertiary students this past summer. We'll review the findings and adopt this programme in future if it's successful.



## SOLVING WORKFORCE ISSUES IN THE MEDIUM TO LONG TERM

We're working with farmers, businesses, industry groups and the Government to develop a Dairy Workforce Resilience Plan because our sector's future success will be determined by how well we attract, grow and retain talented and capable employees today. The plan outlines the challenges, barriers and opportunities facing dairy employers and employees, and provides a programme of work to foster a healthy and thriving workforce for the next 10 years.



## HELPING BOSSES AND WORKERS

The labour market is tight right now, so our number-one piece of advice is to look after each other. We have many amazing resources and tools available on our website to support you. Head to [dairynz.co.nz/people](http://dairynz.co.nz/people)



# WHAT *Young* FARMERS VALUE

WITH THE PATH TO FARM OWNERSHIP STEEPER THAN IT USED TO BE, WHAT MOTIVATES OUR YOUNG PEOPLE TO WORK HARD THESE DAYS? LET'S HEAR FROM FOUR FIRED-UP YOUNG FARMERS.



**NATASHA PRICE**

23 | FARM ASSISTANT | WAIKATO

## HOW DID YOU GET INTO DAIRY FARMING?

I lived on a small dairy farm my whole life. I studied the Bachelor of Science (Zoology/Ecology) at Massey University. After uni, I was looking for jobs and kept seeing farming jobs, so decided to give it a go. I did the DairyNZ GoDairy Farm Ready course at Scott Farm in 2020. This made me want to get into farming even more. It seemed like a positive work environment.

## WHAT'S SURPRISED YOU ABOUT DAIRYING?

I didn't think there would be so much support. We have support from our neighbours and discussion groups, and I've joined Young Farmers. There are so many people who'd give you a hand if you were struggling.

## WHAT ARE YOU PROUD OF IN YOUR JOB?

The way we care for the animals, making sure they have food and water and are happy and healthy. Also, when you help calve a cow – it's a pretty cool feeling bringing a little calf into the world.

## WHAT GIVES YOU PURPOSE?

I love animals. I like going on bush walks and taking photos of native birds. Seeing friends and family and keeping a good work-life balance.



**POUTAMA TOTO**

24 | FARM ASSISTANT | NORTHLAND

## HOW DID YOU GET INTO DAIRY FARMING?

I was 16, on a dive course, and wasn't sure what I was doing after. I helped a mate cover a silage stack and he offered me two weeks' work while I was on a break between courses, and after the two weeks I knew what I wanted to do. So, I went back to Northland College, Kaikohe, to do their agriculture course. It's a really great initiative for the kids who aren't interested in mainstream school and just want to get out there and learn hands-on.

## WHAT'S SURPRISED YOU ABOUT DAIRYING?

A lot to be honest, like the amount of work we do to keep the cows happy. Despite the common perspectives of dairy, it isn't a huge polluter.

## WHAT ARE YOU PROUD OF IN YOUR JOB?

Being with the cows, producing quality milk. I'm also very proud of winning Northland Dairy Trainee of the Year in 2021.

## WHAT GIVES YOU PURPOSE?

Looking after my family – I have a four-year-old and another on the way. I love fishing and diving. Also, the hard work we do. I thrive on the sense of achievement of getting the job done – it's a great feeling.

# 5X

That's how much more likely an employee is to say they plan to leave farming if they feel like their employer doesn't care for them. On the flipside, if you ensure your employees feel valued, are making progress towards their goals and have time for what matters to them, you'll be rewarded with more productivity, and they'll want to stick around.

Start with the questions we used in this article, or learn more at [dairynz.co.nz/people](https://dairynz.co.nz/people)





**OWEN VELTMAN**

21 | HERD MANAGER | CANTERBURY

**HOW DID YOU GET INTO DAIRY FARMING?**

I grew up in it and fell in love with farm life. Studied at Lincoln (Bachelor of Commerce – Agriculture), so knew I wanted to be involved in the industry but wasn't sure what that was heading into my degree. Good equity pathways is a good motivator. Also, I love being outside and dairy is a good way to do that.

**WHAT'S SURPRISED YOU ABOUT DAIRYING?**

One thing I've learnt from this farm is how calculated you can get. In past jobs, it's all been done by eye, so pasture management has been a weak point for me. On this farm, there's reasoning behind it. Maybe not surprising, but it's been a big learning experience.

**WHAT ARE YOU PROUD OF IN YOUR JOB?**

Seeing my own development in the role. I had the 'idiot' phase where I made lots of mistakes. Now I'm competent in my role and I'm proud of that. Building skills that are necessary for the role, like finding mastitis cows or pulling out lame cows – they're little things that give you confidence in your abilities.

**WHAT GIVES YOU PURPOSE?**

I really enjoy hunting, snowboarding and surfing – but especially hunting. Most of my weekends off are heading into the hills to get a good stag, chamois or tahr. I recently got a 13.5 inch tahr – best one so far.



**KELLY-ANNE HOPPER**

22 | FARM ASSISTANT | SOUTHLAND

**HOW DID YOU GET INTO DAIRY FARMING?**

I grew up on a farm. As soon as I could, I got on a 30-hour flight to Canada and did some travelling and worked as an outdoor instructor. I realised I missed the farm, so I came home and started part-time relief milking, then was offered a full-time position.

**WHAT'S SURPRISED YOU ABOUT DAIRYING?**

Farming has helped me realise how strong I am. It's shown me how much grit and resilience I have. In farming, you really need to look after yourself: eat well, get a good sleep, and your mental health.

**WHAT ARE YOU PROUD OF IN YOUR JOB?**

Very proud to be a farmer. We have a great community around us. We strive to do the best for our animals, and we look out for one another when it really counts.

**WHAT GIVES YOU PURPOSE?**

I'm really into the outdoors. Going hiking, kayaking, rock climbing – just climbing up hills. I've gotten into gardening lately and am really loving it. A big part of my life is improving the environment. I love learning about regenerative and biological farming – farming with nature.



# GRASSROOTS

## PATH TO PROFIT

**Over the years, DairyNZ Mark and Measure courses have paid dividends for Waikato couple Stephanie and Andy Gudgeon.**

Going to their first Mark and Measure course in 2010 gave Steph and Andy the opportunity to focus on their business away from farm and family.

“It was good to have some adult time to concentrate on the figures,” says Steph, who admits to being a reformed spender.

“That first course set us on the right track and led us to pay more attention to profit. Knowing whether you’re a spender or a saver helps you to focus on where to spend and where to save money.”

Steph and Andy sharemilked for 12 years, while working towards farm ownership by reducing personal spending and concentrating on equity growth. They bought their farm near Tirau, Waikato, in 2018.

“We were ready to purchase our first farm and couldn’t finance a highly developed property. We’d always recognised the profitability of grass-based systems, and looked for a farm with good soil, contour and fertility so we could run a profitable grass-driven system,” says Steph.

The couple run a System 2 farm with 196 Friesians on 76ha. They milk twice a day from July until late September and 3-in-2 for the rest of the season.

Andy says they enjoy the challenges of a low-input system.

“It’s different every year and constantly evolving, depending on the animals and the weather. We’re grassroots farmers, and although we want to sustain a low-input system, we also want to make a profit.”

“We’re definitely testing the limits,” says Steph. “We’re not stingy, but we want to limit our exposure to rising costs and farm with as few inputs as possible, so having clear and realistic goals is important to us.”

Compared to previous jobs on corporate farms, the Gudgeons have taken a couple of steps back to farm simply, with not much machinery, concentrating on cows and grass. Having said that, not everything in the system is simple, particularly pasture management, says Andy.

“A big focus for us is improving the pasture so we have feed all year round. We’re fine-tuning and renovating about 5ha a year. So far, we’ve done 30ha.”



Andy and Steph say farming on a small scale is highly rewarding and allows plenty of time to spend with their four children.

The couple plant mixed multispecies: a combination of ryegrass, three types of subterranean clovers, as well as cocksfoot, chicory and plantain. The farm's original ryegrass, Nui, has self-seeded over the years.

In the spring, the Gudgeons broadcast a variety of seeds to increase density.

"One of the species we use is Rohan. It has a unique spreading ability that essentially fills the gaps in the pasture," says Andy.

"Our aim is to boost the pasture so it has a wide range of species to provide feed all season round and in all climates. We also want species that replenish themselves, grow tillers or self-seed. Mixed grass species have allowed us to harvest 14.6t DM/ha, but we think we can achieve more."

Andy says they try not to take their residuals too low – average pasture cover in June is 3000kg DM/ha.

"Our average growth rate per day in autumn is 60kg DM/ha. We use a plate meter through autumn and winter to see how we're tracking. Having a surplus is a good thing because it protects our income.

"We don't defer grazing but roll it forward and break-feed. We make about 200 bales of silage (26% of the farm) and grow 5ha of maize silage. The yield is 25t/ha after 110 days."

The couple use fertiliser strategically after soil testing, and they're gradually reducing each application. This season they've used 60kg N/ha, including the maize.

Steph and Andy say going to Mark and Measure courses has moved their mindset from being everyday farmers to profitable business owners.

"It's provided us with the foundation skills to turn our love of farming into a career where we can develop ourselves, grow our wealth and achieve financial freedom," says Steph.

### Hear more from Steph

We recently interviewed Steph, alongside DairyNZ business specialist Paul Bird, on our *Talking Dairy* podcast. Go to [dairynz.co.nz/podcast](https://dairynz.co.nz/podcast) and click on Episode 16: Protecting profit in a high payout.



## STEPH & ANDY'S TOP TIPS FOR MAXIMISING PROFIT

- Become a pasture farmer – profit is where the grass is.
- Create easy systems that achieve consistent results.
- Aim to run your business 1% better each day.
- Plan, budget, and visualise your future success.

## MARK & MEASURE

A three-day course to help you learn key business concepts and skills, and gain confidence to achieve your unique picture of personal and business success. Suitable for couples, business and family partnerships, and individuals.

## COURSE DATES

TAUPO	24-26 MAY
QUEENSTOWN	14-16 JUNE

Register at [dairynz.co.nz/mark-and-measure](https://dairynz.co.nz/mark-and-measure)

# WINTERING - NOT JUST A SOUTHLAND ISSUE



**Getting wintering right matters on all farms, regardless of whether you feed on crop, writes DairyNZ senior scientist Dawn Dalley.**

Until now, winter grazing regulations and public scrutiny have focused on farms wintering on crop in Southland and South Otago. Farmers in those regions have made significant wintering changes to improve environmental and animal care outcomes.

But wintering on crop isn't just a Southland issue. The Government is currently reviewing the National Environment Standards for intensive winter grazing. Once in place, the regulations will apply to all farms grazing annual forage crops between

May 1 and September 30 in the same year. We encourage all farmers to follow good management practices and make a wintering plan in preparation.

Wintering is also not just about crop feeding or dealing with major adverse weather events. Every year in almost every region, there's the potential for lengthy periods of wet weather over winter. The severity, frequency and duration of wet conditions differ between regions, but most farms experience sodden paddocks and mud at some stage.

Caring for your cows in these conditions is a top priority. Cows need to **lie for more than eight hours a day** to maintain their health and comfort. Research at the Southern Dairy Hub shows that during and on the day after rainfall events, some animals don't lie down for up to 24 hours.

## READY FOR THE RAIN

It's important to monitor your paddocks, the weather and your animals' behaviour. If wet weather persists and your animals aren't getting enough rest, you need to change your management of the cows. The easiest way to make this happen is with a written contingency plan that includes all options for managing or moving cows to a drier, preferably sheltered area with feed.

If you don't already have a wintering plan, sit down with your team before winter to get your options on paper. To see a full list of contingency plan options, go to [dairynz.co.nz/contingency-plan](https://dairynz.co.nz/contingency-plan)

Also, if your stock are wintered off-farm, you're still responsible (with the grazier) for their welfare. Discuss your wintering plan with your grazier and add any specific requirements to the contract.

## WHEN SHOULD YOU PUT YOUR PLAN INTO ACTION?

No two farms will have the same threshold for implementing a contingency plan, but you can make sure everyone on your team knows when to implement your plan.

As a team, carry out daily checks of the paddock conditions and mobs at various times of the day. Share what you're seeing with each other – this will help with decision-making.

Assess conditions in the whole paddock. What proportion of the grazing area has water pooling? Use the gumboot score – see below. This will make it easier to predict what the paddocks might look like in the next few days and what your options are for that area. Factor in whether the weather's likely to improve, worsen or stay the same. Also, look for 'lying bowls', marks left by

cows lying in the soft crumbly soil. If you can't see lying bowls, or your cows have a lot of wet mud on their flanks, this indicates they haven't been lying or they've been lying on a sodden surface, and alternative management is required.

Taking note of how your animals are behaving is useful – are they calm and content, or getting restless? You and your team know your farm and cows better than anyone, so you'll know the best options for managing your animals in wet weather. We can't predict the weather, but you and your team can plan for a successful winter.

DairyNZ has online resources to make wintering easier for everyone:  
[dairynz.co.nz/winter-plans](http://dairynz.co.nz/winter-plans)

## KEY POINTS

- Wintering good management practices are important on all farms, nationwide, whether you feed on crop or not.
- Lying time is crucial to cows.
- Every farm will benefit from having a contingency plan for prolonged wet conditions.

## THE GUMBOOT SCORING METHOD FOR WINTERING PADDOCKS

<p>1. Low/Dry</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boot imprint dry and sides remain formed</li> <li>• Easy to walk across</li> <li>• No liquid pooling</li> <li>• If soil is held in hands, it does not seep through fingers</li> <li>• Soil is firm</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>No action required</b></p>
<p>2. Medium/ Wet</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boot imprint wet, may be sticky and less defined</li> <li>• Mud sticks to your gumboot</li> <li>• No liquid pooling</li> <li>• If soil is held in hands, some seeps through fingers</li> <li>• Soil is sticky</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Monitor conditions</b></p>
<p>3. High/ Sodden</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boot imprint disappears</li> <li>• Liquid pooling obvious</li> <li>• If soil is held in hands, it seeps through fingers</li> <li>• Soil is liquified</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Implement Plan B</b></p>

# TAKE 5

## Tips for farmers

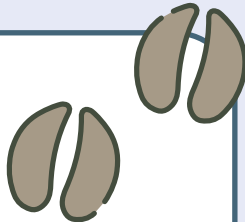
# 1.



### Praise your people

Did you know 40% of dairy farm employees don't feel their contribution is recognised, making them twice as likely to look for a new job? You can turn that around with frequent and specific feedback about how well they're working. Appreciation is like rain – small amounts and often is best.

# 2.



### Front-foot lameness

The key to preventing lameness is good record-keeping, identifying risk factors and having a prevention plan. Now's the time to review your lameness records and plan any work or changes needed ahead of next season. If you aren't recording yet, try our Healthy Hoof App at [dairynz.co.nz/preventing-lameness](https://dairynz.co.nz/preventing-lameness)

# 3.



### Keep counting

Continue your facial eczema management programme until spore counts are consistently at 10,000 spores/g of pasture or less for three weeks, and cooler temperatures have arrived. Paddocks susceptible to higher spore counts include those that are sheltered, have pasture litter, or are on north- and west-facing slopes – [dairynz.co.nz/facial-eczema](https://dairynz.co.nz/facial-eczema)

# 4.



### Benchmark your business

Want to measure your farm's performance against customisable benchmarks, such as farms of a similar system in your region? DairyBase helps you better understand your system and its performance, find out what's working well, and identify opportunities for improvement. Get started at [dairynz.co.nz/dairybase](https://dairynz.co.nz/dairybase)

# 5.



### Stand out

When writing a job ad, be clear about your unique selling proposition. What makes your workplace stand out? Maybe you have a flexible milking schedule, great team culture, or you invest more than others in staff training and development? Get more great recruitment tips in episode 23 of *Talking Dairy* – [dairynz.co.nz/podcast](https://dairynz.co.nz/podcast)

## NEW SHED MEETINGS

Covid restrictions have led DairyNZ to look at new ways of getting farmers together in small groups.

Farm performance general manager Sharon Morrell says while Covid prevents DairyNZ from running as many events as usual, we're exploring fresh approaches to engaging with and helping farmers.

"We've identified short-format 'shed meetings' as a way we can work during the Omicron outbreak. Talking with small groups allows us to continue providing relevant information and options to farmers," says Sharon.

### Want to host a shed meeting?

Contact 0800 4 DairyNZ (0800 4 324 7969) or email [info@dairynz.co.nz](mailto:info@dairynz.co.nz)

## Keen to grow your governance skills?

Registrations are now open for the 2022 Rural Governance Development Programme. Take part in this multi-day programme to grow your understanding of governance disciplines and your confidence in applying them. Suitable for dairy businesses of all sizes and structures, the courses begin in June, in Taupo and Christchurch. Secure your spot at [businessstorque.co.nz/#rg](https://businessstorque.co.nz/#rg)



## Post your vacancies today

DairyNZ is starting a new drive to inspire younger people into dairy farming roles before calving, while also showing them how to apply.

With roughly 4000 dairy farming vacancies across the country, we know many farmers are under huge pressure to fill roles this season. So, we encourage you to post your vacancies as soon as possible on the Farm Source job site:

[nzfarmsource.co.nz/jobs](https://nzfarmsource.co.nz/jobs)

Starting in early April, we'll have advertisements running on our social media and online platforms, giving people information on how to apply. This is part of our GoDairy campaign.

if you're looking for staff, you can also check out our recruitment resources at [dairynz.co.nz/people-resources](https://dairynz.co.nz/people-resources).



## Science on the go

Have you checked out the *Talking Dairy* podcast yet? Our most recent episodes dive into the latest research behind plantain, farm technology and fertility genetics. We ask DairyNZ experts to share their findings, but also get an on-farm perspective from dairy farmers like Tracey Berquist (Taranaki) and Will Burrett (Ngāi Tahu Farming, Canterbury). Join the thousands of other farmers tuning in at [dairynz.co.nz/podcast](https://dairynz.co.nz/podcast) or subscribe to *Talking Dairy* wherever you get your podcasts.



Trial cows moving back to their paddock after eating their daily allocation of synthetic zeolite pre-calving.

## Feeding synthetic zeolite pre-calving reduces milk fever

A series of DairyNZ-led experiments have confirmed that supplementing cows with synthetic zeolite for two to three weeks pre-calving reduces the risk of milk fever in pasture-based systems. Here, we describe what to expect from this prevention strategy.



**Dr Claire Phyn**  
Principal scientist,  
DairyNZ



**Dr Scott McDougall**  
Manager, Cognosco,  
Anexa Veterinary Services



**Dr Katrina Roberts**  
Herd health veterinarian,  
Anexa Veterinary Services

Milk fever is a common metabolic disorder affecting cows around calving, when they experience a sudden massive demand for calcium at the onset of lactation. Cows tightly regulate their blood calcium concentrations, but if they're unable to keep up with the demand for calcium, blood concentrations decrease. This is known as 'hypocalcaemia'.

Milk fever is defined as subclinical when the cow is hypocalcaemic with blood calcium concentrations less than 2.15mmol/L but is not exhibiting signs of disease. Approximately 35-50% of cows in a herd succumb to subclinical milk fever at calving, whereas about 2-5% exhibit clinical milk fever with evident changes in behaviour and rumination<sup>1,2</sup>. In many cases, these cows become recumbent – commonly known as 'downer' cows.

Both subclinical and clinical milk fever are associated with an increased risk of other metabolic disorders (e.g., ketosis), infectious diseases (e.g., mastitis, uterine disease), and removal from the herd. For this reason, milk fever is known as a 'gateway disease' and considerable research efforts have been undertaken to prevent this disorder and mitigate its effects.

### Key points

- Supplementing cows with synthetic zeolite pre-calving improves blood calcium concentrations at calving, reducing the risk of subclinical and clinical milk fever.
- This strategy will be particularly beneficial in herds with ongoing milk fever issues.
- Careful management of magnesium supplementation pre- and post-calving is still required when using zeolite.
- Large-scale testing did not detect any improvements to herd reproductive performance.



## Table 1: Checklist to mitigate milk fever

- ✓ Ensure cows are at target BCS two to three weeks before calving
- ✓ Identify at-risk cows prior to calving and feed according to their BCS
  - if less than 5.0 BCS, give 100% of daily requirement; if greater than 5.0 BCS, give 90% of daily requirement
- ✓ Supplement all cows with magnesium pre- and post-calving (0.4% and 0.3% of DM requirement, respectively)
- ✓ Keep dietary calcium levels low pre-calving (less than 0.5% of DM requirement)
- ✓ Supplement all colostrum cows with calcium
- ✓ Maintain dietary phosphorus between 0.25% and 0.45% of DM pre-calving
  - avoid feeds high in phosphorus, e.g., PKE
  - supplement with phosphorus if diets are low in phosphorus, e.g., fodder beet
- ✓ Avoid grazing effluent or recently fertilised paddocks with high potassium levels pre-calving (more than 4.5% of DM)

### Strategies to prevent milk fever

In New Zealand pasture-based systems, supplementing cows with magnesium from two to three weeks pre-calving until mid-lactation is a common strategy to prevent milk fever. That's because magnesium plays a crucial role in maintaining blood calcium concentrations.

Other mitigation strategies (*Table 1*) include ensuring body condition score (BCS) targets at calving are met, and supplementing cows with limeflour, a calcium source, during the colostrum period. Despite these strategies, subclinical milk fever remains highly prevalent, and clinical milk fever is still a major issue on many farms.

### How can synthetic zeolite help?

Synthetic zeolite is a sodium aluminosilicate supplement. It is commonly fed pre-calving in European indoor systems to reduce the risk of cows developing clinical and subclinical milk fever after calving. This strategy is well supported by peer-reviewed research in these systems<sup>3</sup> and, more recently, has been validated to reduce hypocalcaemia in high-yielding cows managed in a North American housed system<sup>4</sup>.

By feeding synthetic zeolite for two to three weeks before calving, dietary calcium and other minerals are bound in the cow's rumen and pass through into the faeces. This stimulates her to increase calcium absorption from the intestines and prepares her to cope with increased calcium demands after calving. As a result, her blood calcium concentrations are maintained.

### Small-scale studies yield promising results

As research data in grazing systems was lacking, DairyNZ conducted a series of experiments investigating synthetic zeolite under New Zealand conditions. We confirmed that zeolite reduces the risk of subclinical and clinical milk fever in grazing cows supplemented with maize silage pre-calving.

In trials conducted at DairyNZ's Lye Farm, Waikato, we determined that feeding cows 500g/day of synthetic zeolite for two to three weeks before their expected calving date increased blood calcium concentrations at calving<sup>5</sup> (*Figure 1a*).

Zeolite also resulted in a large pre-calving reduction in blood phosphate concentrations that persisted until about three days post-calving<sup>5</sup> (*Figure 1b*). This effect was expected, based on results from overseas trials, and is part of zeolite's mechanism of action to prevent milk fever. However, the effects and safety of synthetic zeolite in diets already deficient in phosphorus are presently unknown. Therefore, synthetic zeolite is not currently recommended when diets include high amounts of fodder beet.

Cows fed synthetic zeolite had lower blood magnesium concentrations but were not at risk of becoming hypomagnesaemic<sup>5</sup> (*Figure 1c*). Both control cows and zeolite-treated cows were supplemented with magnesium as per best farm practice. Careful management of magnesium supplementation pre- and post-calving is still required when using zeolite, especially in herds with a borderline magnesium status, to minimise the risk of grass staggers.

Interestingly, the DairyNZ experiments also indicated that synthetic zeolite may improve uterine health and herd reproductive performance, as zeolite-treated cows tended to conceive earlier in the breeding season. This later result was consistent with a recent trial in housed cows fed a total mixed ration at Cornell University, USA<sup>4</sup>. However, both DairyNZ and overseas experiments were conducted with a small number of animals under highly controlled conditions and required validation with larger numbers of cows across commercial herd environments.

### Large-scale studies in commercial herds validate milk fever reduction

Therefore, a two-year study was conducted to:

1. test the practicality of feeding synthetic zeolite pre-calving under grazing conditions
2. confirm its effectiveness in reducing the risk of milk fever
3. verify its potential to improve herd reproduction.

During the 2019/20 season, approximately 1000 cows across three herds in the Waikato were enrolled in the Zeolite Scale-Up Trial, with another 1500 cows across three herds participating the next season. During each season, half of the cows in each herd received 500g/day of synthetic zeolite for three weeks pre-calving.

Results clearly demonstrated that feeding synthetic zeolite pre-calving consistently reduced the incidence of clinical milk fever cases: from an average of 4.4% in untreated control cows to 1.2% in zeolite-treated cows. This meant zeolite-treated cows were nearly four times less likely to succumb to clinical milk fever.

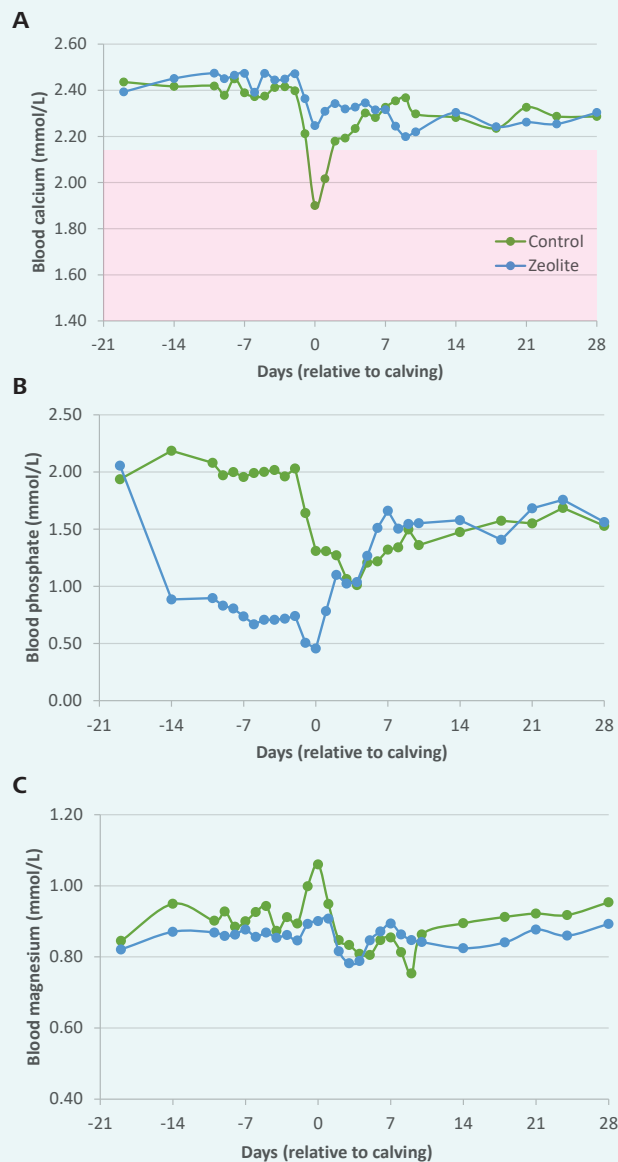
It also reduced the incidence of subclinical milk fever, as cows fed zeolite had higher blood calcium concentrations within one day of calving (*Figure 2*). As expected, blood magnesium and phosphate concentrations at this time were lower in zeolite-treated cows.

There were some differences between herds in their blood mineral responses to zeolite (*Figure 2*), indicating that herds with a history of milk fever issues are likely to benefit the most from this strategy. Results also indicated that synthetic zeolite is most effective in reducing milk fever when delivered to springer cows using maize silage or meal in troughs/bins or using pelletised feed via in-shed systems. Poorer responses will be obtained if synthetic zeolite is top-dressed onto pasture silage in the paddock, as large amounts are wasted and not ingested by cows.

We did not detect any improvements in submission, conception or in-calf rates in zeolite-treated cows. This suggests the strategy will not lead to better herd reproductive performance.

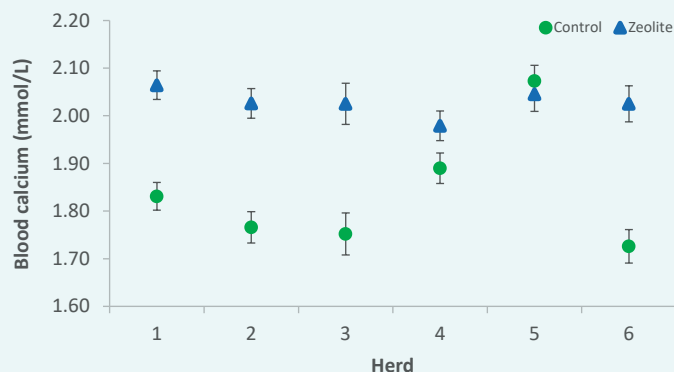
**Figure 1.**

The effect of feeding synthetic zeolite for two to three weeks pre-calving on blood concentrations of (A) calcium, (B) phosphate and (C) magnesium, relative to untreated controls. Pink shaded area shows threshold for hypocalcaemia.



**Figure 2.**

Feeding synthetic zeolite for three weeks pre-calving improved blood calcium concentrations within one day of calving, especially in herds with hypocalcaemia issues in untreated controls.



**Table 2.**

The effect of feeding synthetic zeolite for three weeks pre-calving on milk production (at ~6 weeks in milk), relative to untreated controls.

Variable	Control	Zeolite	P-value
Milk volume (L/cow/day)	27.8	27.3	*
Milksolids (kg/cow/day)	2.20	2.16	*
Milk fat %	4.34	4.31	NS
Milk fat (kg/cow/day)	1.20	1.17	**
Milk protein %	3.64	3.65	+
Milk protein (kg/cow/day)	1.01	0.99	+
Fat to protein ratio	1.20	1.18	*

Statistically significant differences between control and zeolite groups are indicated at \* (P<0.05) and \*\* (P<0.01), whereas a trend is indicated at + (P<0.10), and **NS** indicates non-significance at P>0.10.

Similarly, we did not determine any difference in uterine health, measured by Metricheck scoring at one month after calving. We also saw no differences in cases of clinical mastitis between calving and mating start date. However, the incidence of cows with somatic cell counts greater than 200,000 cells/ml at the first herd test (about six weeks in milk) was lower in the zeolite-treated cows than in untreated controls: 10% vs 14%. Hence, there may be some benefits to mammary health and milk quality.

Feeding zeolite pre-calving resulted in small (less than 2%) but statistically significant reductions in milk volume and milksolids yields, measured at the first herd test after calving (Table 2). These effects may be related to suppressed dry matter intake pre-calving, as reported in some overseas studies. Nevertheless, evidence from both small- and large-scale studies indicates these effects are relatively subtle and most likely outweighed by the benefits of reduced subclinical and clinical milk fever.



Trial cows eating maize silage supplemented with synthetic zeolite.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. Should I use magnesium supplements with synthetic zeolite?

It's important to use an optimal magnesium supplementation strategy starting at the same time pre-calving. Preferably, more than one method of magnesium supplementation should be used.

### 2. How does feeding synthetic zeolite pre-calving compare with reducing DCAD (dietary cation:anion difference)?

A negative DCAD pre-calving has been demonstrated to prevent milk fever in housed cows, but this can be difficult to achieve in grazing cows due to the high potassium content of pasture. Using synthetic zeolite is an alternative to a negative DCAD strategy, which requires adding large amounts of anionic salts of chloride and sulphate to the diet and feeding low-potassium feeds, such as maize silage.

### 3. When do I stop feeding synthetic zeolite?

Zeolite supplementation should stop immediately after a cow calves, so that she can absorb dietary calcium.

### 4. Is synthetic zeolite compatible with low-phosphorus diets, such as fodder beet?

This hasn't been tested yet, so it is not recommended to feed synthetic zeolite when cows are on fodder beet or other low-phosphorus diets.

### 5. Does natural zeolite, mined from clay deposits, have the same effect as synthetic zeolite?

Synthetic zeolite is produced from natural zeolites to have a standardised composition. However, different types of zeolite have different mineral-binding properties in the cow's gut, which alters their effects on the animal. Only synthetic zeolite is scientifically proven to reduce the risk of subclinical and clinical milk fever under a range of farm systems. The safety and efficacy of feeding natural zeolites pre-calving to reduce milk fever are unknown and, therefore, this is not recommended.

### 6. What is the palatability of synthetic zeolite?

Both DairyNZ and overseas experiments indicate that targeting a dose of 500g/cow/d is optimal – offering higher dose rates can reduce palatability and may limit feed intake. Mixing synthetic zeolite into supplementary feeds such as maize silage, or incorporating into pelletised feed rather than top-dressing onto feeds, can improve palatability, if required.

## Acknowledgements

This research was conducted under the Pillars of a New Dairy System research programme, funded by New Zealand dairy farmers through the DairyNZ levy, and by the Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment. We thank the farmers and their staff whose herds were enrolled in our Zeolite Scale-Up Trial.

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# ALL ROADS LEAD TO SOUTHLAND

**Guy Michaels fell for a Southland lass (now his wife) and then for Southland. Meet DairyNZ's new regional leader.**

Guy's parents were sheep and beef farmers in Te Akau, north of Raglan, where he was born and raised. The family upped sticks and moved to another property in Northland in the 1980s. Guy loved farming life, and the die was cast for a career in agriculture.

While in Southland, doing a practical year's work for a Lincoln University Diploma in Farm Management, Guy met his future wife Joanne, who was studying to be a nurse. Hailing from Oreti, Jo introduced Guy to the delights of Southland.

"First impressions were of very friendly people who were passionate about the province but rated mashed swedes and mince way higher than was warranted," recalls Guy.

After study, the couple started a sharemilking career in Central Southland.

"We were very fortunate to have worked for, and sharemilked for, some great operators who taught us a lot and enabled us to start and grow our business. This is what sets the dairy industry apart from most others. I believe there are just as many opportunities today for young farmers or career-changers to get involved and build a business from scratch within dairying," says Guy.

Guy and Jo eventually bought their own sheep and beef/dairy grazing farm in Glenham, Eastern Southland, in 2002. They sold the farm in 2015 and decided to settle in Gore and take on a new challenge.

"While farming is my first love, I've always taken a keen interest in the 'behind-the-scenes' workings of the farming sector."

**"We have some challenges unique to this end of the country but I'm confident we can navigate our way through."**

Guy joined DairyNZ in 2015 as a consulting officer for South Otago, then took a role as business manager at the Southern Dairy Hub, before returning to DairyNZ as a regional partner. He stepped into the role of regional leader for Southland/South Otago in January this year.

"After working on my own on the farm for so long, I've found being part of the local DairyNZ team a lot of fun and very rewarding," says Guy.

"Southland is a superb place and a fantastic region to farm. It has a kind climate for stock and production. I can't say I've regretted leaving behind those North Island farming challenges, and the career change has been a great chance to try something new."

Guy and Jo have three children: Nic, Hayden and Grace. The family appreciate spending time together with friends, and enjoy boating and quiet times fishing for elusive trout in Te Anau.

"I'm loving the challenge of my new role," says Guy. "Southern farmers, like farmers everywhere, are very resourceful. We have some challenges unique to this end of the country but I'm confident we can navigate our way through and hold the southern South Island as New Zealand's premier place to farm, at least in my eyes!"

Contact Guy on **021 302 034** or [guy.michaels@dairynz.co.nz](mailto:guy.michaels@dairynz.co.nz)



Feature  
update

## Northland

Join Evan and Sherleen Smeath on April 12 for a free event that will take you through the complex problem of lameness and managing summer feed requirements.

The Smeaths, with their son Clinton and daughter-in-law Pam, milk about 280 Jerseys on 95ha in Hukerenui. You can learn more about their system, plus how to tackle lameness and how diverse pasture crops, including chicory, lucerne, fescue, cocksfoot and fodder beet, are holding up this summer.

Agricom's Allister Moorhead will also talk about the viable options for Northland: their pros and cons, and how to determine if they will fit your system.

Find out more at [dairynz.co.nz/events](https://dairynz.co.nz/events)

## Lower North Island

DairyNZ is leading a potentially game-changing catchment project to test the benefits of plantain in local pastures.

The Tararua District is home to some of the most efficient, low-intensity dairy farms in the country. Despite this, Tararua dairy farmers are faced with a need to make significant environmental reductions to achieve community objectives and regulatory requirements.

Find out more at [dairynz.co.nz/tararua](https://dairynz.co.nz/tararua) or listen to our recent *Talking Dairy* podcast (Episode 20) at [dairynz.co.nz/podcast](https://dairynz.co.nz/podcast), where we explore the benefits and challenges of incorporating plantain into the farm system in Tararua.

## Bay of Plenty

Thinking about using cow collar technology? Join us for a day focused on farmers' results using collars for mating over spring.

Topics covered will include how this technology works, how farmers used it, what their results were, and what they'd do differently next season.

Check out the details at [dairynz.co.nz/events](https://dairynz.co.nz/events) or phone Colin Grainger-Allen on 021 225 8345.

## Waikato

Keen to build key business concepts and skills, and gain confidence to achieve your visions of personal and business success? Come along to Mark and Measure in Taupo on May 24-26.

This course is suited to businesses, family partnerships, couples and individuals. So, if you're a farm owner, contract milker, herd-owning or variable order sharemilker, this workshop could benefit you.

Find out more at [dairynz.co.nz/mark-and-measure](https://dairynz.co.nz/mark-and-measure)



## Taranaki

Taranaki's Tracey Berquist is one of the farmers involved in a DairyNZ research project that aims to accelerate genetic improvement in fertility.

Two exciting new traits have emerged – age at puberty and AGD (distance from anus to genitals) – that could serve as early-in-life predictors of fertility performance. To find out what we've learned and what those findings mean for farmers, hear from Tracey, DairyNZ senior scientist Chris Burke and DairyNZ PhD student Melissa Stephen in Episode 21 of our *Talking Dairy* podcast - [dairynz.co.nz/podcast](http://dairynz.co.nz/podcast). You can also read more about the research at [dairynz.co.nz/pillars](http://dairynz.co.nz/pillars).



## Top of South Island/West Coast

Want to know more about freestall barns, composting mootels, stand-off pads, loafing barns, herd homes and duration controlled grazing?

These are just some of the topics that'll be covered in a farmer-led, two-day tour of farm businesses on the West Coast this April 5-6. You'll get to visit businesses that are building or have just built their first composting barns. We'll be joined by some barn farmers from Southland and Canterbury, who will share their experiences.

More details at [dairynz.co.nz/events](http://dairynz.co.nz/events) or phone Robb Macbeth on **027 524 5887**.

## Canterbury/North Otago

Canterbury-based Will Burrett, general manager of Ngāi Tahu Farming & Forestry, recently joined us on the *Talking Dairy* podcast to discuss the technologies they're using and thinking of using at Ngāi Tahu Farming, how they decide which ones to invest in, the outcomes they're seeing, and any challenges with implementing their current tech.

DairyNZ researchers Callum Eastwood and Brian Dela Rue also share their thoughts on what kind of technologies farmers are already using, why, and what the next big things are that could deliver value on-farm.

Listen to Episode 22 at [dairynz.co.nz/podcast](http://dairynz.co.nz/podcast)

## DairyNZ contacts

**GM Farm Performance: Sharon Morrell 027 492 2907**

### Northland

<b>Regional leader</b>	<b>Alison Whiteford</b>	<b>021 809 569</b>
Extension partner	Hamish Matthews	021 242 5719
Extension partner	Stephen Ball	027 807 9686
Senior extension partner	Mike Bramley	027 486 4344
Recruiting more support for you in this region.		

### Waikato North

<b>Regional leader</b>	<b>Wilma Foster</b>	<b>021 246 2147</b>
Regional partner	Kylie Brewer	027 180 03156
Regional partner	Andrew Allen	027 1800 3025
Extension partner	Jaimee Morgan	021 245 8055
Recruiting more support for you in this region.		

### Waikato South

<b>Regional leader</b>	<b>Brigitte Meier</b>	<b>027 448 3050</b>
Regional partner	Steve Canton	027 475 0918
Extension partner	Denise Knop	027 513 7201
Extension partner	Debbie Young	027 1800 3786
Senior extension partner	Phil Irvine	027 483 9820
Senior extension partner	Frank Portegys	027 807 9685
Recruiting more support for you in this region.		

### Bay of Plenty

<b>Regional leader</b>	<b>Sarah Speight</b>	<b>027 1800 4222</b>
Senior regional partner	Kevin McKinley	027 288 238
Senior extension partner	Ross Bishop	027 563 1785
Extension partner	Ian Burmeister	027 593 4122

### Taranaki

<b>Regional leader</b>	<b>Charlie McCaig</b>	<b>027 244 7915</b>
Regional partner	Gill Haenga	027 1800 3605
Regional partner	John Baylis	027 210 2137
Extension partner	Ashley Primrose	021 246 5663
Extension partner	Talissa Squire	027 1800 3499
Extension partner	Katie Starsmore	027 1800 3707

### Lower North Island

<b>Regional leader</b>	<b>Mark Laurence</b>	<b>027 704 5562</b>
Regional partner	Michelle Greaves	021 280 8405
Senior extension partner	Gray Beagley	021 286 4346
Senior extension partner	Abby Scott	021 244 3428
Extension partner	Janine Swansson	027 381 2025
Extension partner	Francesca Bennett	027 702 3760

**South Island – Head: Tony Finch 027 706 6183**

### Upper South Island

<b>Regional leader</b>	<b>Rachael Russell</b>	<b>027 261 3250</b>
Regional partner	Antoinette Archer	027 1800 3122
Regional partner	Anna Hall	027 411 5663
Senior extension partner	Robb Macbeth	027 524 5887
Senior extension partner	Mark Shadwick	021 287 7057
Extension partner	Heather Donaldson	027 593 4124

### Southland/South Otago

<b>Regional leader</b>	<b>Guy Michaels</b>	<b>021 302 034</b>
Regional partner	Stuart Evans	027 393 0114
Extension partner	Nathan Nelson	021 225 6931
Extension partner	Keely Sullivan	027 524 5890
Extension partner	Karen Duthie	027 358 7579

## DairyNZ directors

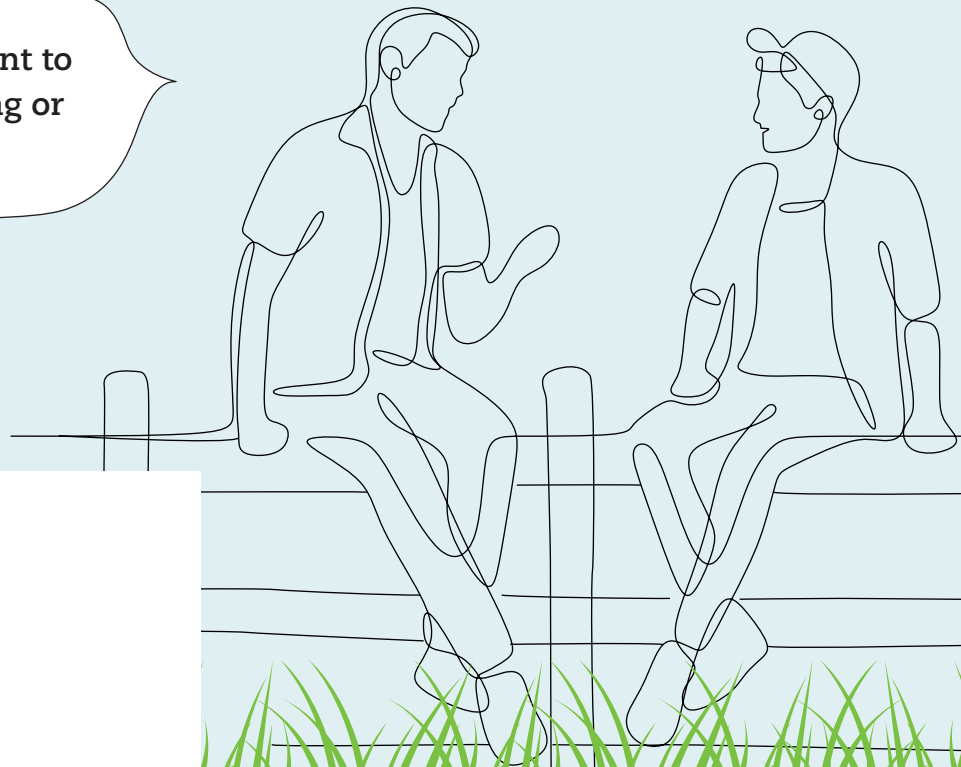
Jim van der Poel	021 848 484
Elaine Cook	027 223 2049
Colin Glass	027 486 4064
Jacqueline Rowarth	027 694 4334
Peter Schuyt	027 557 4242
Tracy Brown	027 291 1716
Mary-Anne Macleod	021 923 332

# Want to provide the best workplace and attract the right people?

Ask your team these two questions for a quick pulse check:

Where do you want to have more training or responsibility?

What could we do to make you happier in your work and improve your work-life balance?



And to go deeper, use Workplace 360 to get a full health assessment of your work environment in about 25 minutes.

[dairynz.co.nz/workplace360](https://dairynz.co.nz/workplace360)

Sender: DairyNZ, Private Bag 3221, Hamilton 3240, NZ

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