



Ballance
Farm Environment Awards®
Promoting Sustainable Profitable Farming

2012 NORTHLAND

Murray and Liz Walden (owners), Clive and Jorja Walden (sharemilkers)
 'Walden Farms Oruaiti Ltd'

SUPREME AWARD WINNERS



A previously non-compliant dairy farm has been reconverted to dairying after several years of dry-stock only, and has quickly won the Supreme Award in the 2012 Ballance Farm Environment Awards for Northland.

The Waldens have very impressive all-round farm development, management and environmental skills, the judges commented. In its third year of dairy farm redevelopment, the Oruaiti farm (near Mangonui) is milking 425 Holstein Friesian cows and obtaining excellent per cow and per hectare production.

It is a well-planned developing property with evidence of capital well spent on re-engineering the farm dairy, updating

the effluent system and putting in feed pad, stand-off and feed bunkers and good stock handling facilities.

Soil structure is carefully maintained with no evidence of pugging seen. Fencing and planting aims to minimise the risk of erosion of the Mangonui clay hills and livestock have been excluded from native bush areas.

Any potential soil loss would be captured by fenced and retired areas and wetlands. As the farm has half of its boundary on the Oruaiti stream, which flows into Doubtless Bay, the protection of this waterway is critical.

The judges all appreciated how much time, effort and cost has gone into this aspect and how the work on this farm is considered a model for the rest of the Doubtless Bay catchment.

Stock exclusion from all waterways and wetlands has been achieved over the short time the property has been owned by the Waldens.

The judges commented on the cohesive family unit with three generations on the farm providing mutual business and social support. The family has a good understanding with the local iwi, providing help both ways in the relationship.

A succession plan is in place and this family has the potential to showcase dairying and become leaders in the industry. "Any weaknesses in the business have been identified and measures put in place to reduce risk," the judges said.

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Regional Partner



Murray and Liz Walden (owners), Clive and Jorja Walden (sharemilkers)
'Walden Farms Oruaiti Ltd'

LIC DAIRY FARM AWARD



Careful management on a dairy farm can reduce its impact on the environment below that of an intensive beef farm, the Walden family believes.

The 420ha farm at Oruaiti, near Mangonui, had been dairied but was an intensive beef production unit from 2005, when the Waldens purchased it, until 2008 when a dairy re-conversion was begun.

Clive and Jorja are equity partners and 50:50 sharemilkers for Clive's parents, Murray and Liz.

They told the Ballance Farm Environment Awards judges that in comparison to intensive beef cattle, dairying provides financial returns which allow farm improvements such as fencing and water reticulation.

The higher standard of dairy infrastructure enables quick removal of livestock easily during critical times to reduce pugging and soil loss.

The property contains the dairy unit of 175ha, on which 425 cows are fed and milked, and a support dry farm of 125ha. It also has 70ha of native bush, 20ha of forestry and 30ha of wetlands. All waterways and wetlands were fenced during dairy conversion and planted within some of the riparian margins.

Because the access road is frequently flooded, the milk vats are twice the usual size (four milkings) and the Waldens keep in close contact with Fonterra to ensure the vat is emptied before the road is blocked.

The judges said a comprehensive farm manual has been compiled and the Waldens place a great emphasis on staff training and improvement.

Rural professionals were used during the development period and a Mark and Measure course has been completed.

Protrack is used for herd management and the cows appear to be in excellent health, backed up by a vaccination programme. The appropriate calving date is still under discussion and the in-calf rate is being worked upon.

The Waldens demonstrated a very good grasp of pasture monitoring and the feed wedge presented was exceptional.

Kiwitech (Technosystem providers) principles and equipment have been adapted for use in grazing the milking cows, allowing the block sizes to be increased according to the size of the herd and the available pasture.

The presentation to the judges was lively, with plenty of questions going both ways.

"Enthusiasm, energy and hunger for knowledge was evident and has gone a long way in the development to date," the judges reported.



JUDGES' COMMENTS

- Considerable thought has gone into the planning of this dairy farm.
- Becoming recognised for their environmental management and leadership in the Doubtless Bay catchment.
- Adaptation of beef Technosystem into dry cow management.
- Strong focus on health and safety policies.
- Riparian and wetland management excellent with extensive fencing.

John, Lurline and Peter Blackwell

BEEF + LAMB NEW ZEALAND LIVESTOCK FARM AWARD WATERFORCE INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT AWARD

The Blackwell family near Aropohue have a well-established sheep and beef property which, now fully developed, is being continually fine tuned to maximize profit while retaining the lifestyle balance currently enjoyed.



The Northland Ballance Farm Environment Awards judges emphasised the skill level apparent everywhere on the farm.

“This could be compared to a surfer who is able to stay on the crest of an ever-rising wave and avoid wiping out during droughts, long, wet winters, outbreaks of animal diseases,

and other vagaries in an industry so dependent on nature and world markets.”

They said the property is beautifully balanced with good subdivision and excellent lanes. It makes great use of harvested and stored water, with dams, low-energy water supply systems and monitoring of use by way of meters.

“It is an excellent example of how to collect, store, reticulate and monitor the consumption of high quality stock water in a water-short district,” the judges said. Micro troughs are used in the intensive bull system.

The 345ha farm carries 600 MA ewes and two-tooth ewes and a further 233 ewe hoggets, which are mated. The ewe flock lambs in early August, achieving 140-150% lambing, and the ewe hoggets a month later at 117%.

Friesian bulls are farmed intensively and more than 600 were stocked over summer. The Blackwells are also finishing 25

Wagyu-cross steers and 14 heifers. The bull policy involves purchasing the bulls as autumn-born calves and finishing within 20 months or their second winter.

Excellent stock weight records are kept, utilising computer software programmes Endeavour, Cash Manager and Farmax.

A summer cropping programme with brassicas enhances the farm’s ability to finish lambs and starts the regrassing of 10ha to 30ha into permanent pasture sown in autumn.

This farm has been kept kikuyu free by quarantining all livestock brought in and regular spot spraying and regrassing. The property is self-contained with no brought-in feed, as silage is made on the farm and fed out during autumn and winter.

The Blackwells have a good understanding of the key risks to their business, being personal, climatic and market, and have the appropriate insurance policies, including summer cropping and regrassing, plus a good meat company supply relationship.

The judges also complimented the Blackwells on their awareness of different soil types and the appropriate livestock management, which boils down to cattle grazing on the lighter soils and sheep on the heavier.

Erosion management is good with approximately 12 ha planted in pines and other areas retired from farming and planted. Poplars and willows have been used to control slip, gully and tunnel gully erosion, and to provide shade for stock.

Potential soil disturbance by the bulls minimised by moving the stock daily, keeping small mob sizes and addressing any damage through regrassing.



JUDGES’ COMMENTS

- Good awareness of nutrients/inputs required relative to production/outputs.
- Excellent shade, shelter and erosion control on the property.
- Long-term water plan with ability to use a second dam.
- Personal development and community involvement first-class.
- Presentation of property excellent and the judges visits well-planned.

Kevin and Christine Strawbridge 'Northland Forestry Nursery'

HILL LABORATORIES HARVEST AWARD

Exceptional production quality, careful management of soils and water and very good employee training and relations have earned Northland Forestry Nursery in Kaikohe three farm environment awards in the 2012 Northland series.



The business is now supplying 70% of Northland's annual pine seedlings and has grown from 1.2 million produced in 2005 to an estimated seven million this year, 6.5 million of which are pre-committed for sale.

Kevin and Christine Strawbridge are justifiably proud of their 95% seedling success rate (survival of seedlings as trees after planting out) when the industry standard is 85%.

The reliable count of seedlings per box and length of roots are strengths of their production system and a credit to both Kevin's training of his casual staff and the work ethic of these staff members.

The pine nursery operates on 16ha of planted area, which is cropped annually, seeds sown in September and seedlings lifted from May to August the following year. The judges observed that the business, founded on the current site in 2004, has grown by taking business from competing nurseries. This is credited to

the quality of the product and the exemplary relations Kevin has with his customers.

Prior to going into business for themselves, Kevin worked for 20 years, mainly in retail management for Carter Holt Harvey, before becoming a nursery manager in Kaikohe.

"This close working relationship with customers, extending beyond simply supplying quality trees on time, is undoubtedly the strength behind this very successful business," the judges said.

The nursery employs one person full time, to whom more responsibility is being devolved, and a larger work force of up to 10 people during the harvesting season.

Kevin is very much hands-on, because he enjoys the work, although he and Christine do not want to expand further. "They are confident that the scale of the operation and the current business model provide them with the financial security they require," said the judges.

Business risk is reduced through retained loyalty by attention to customer service, careful crop management, and by growing a proportion of the crop from seed supplied by and grown under contract for the customer. The business is not reliant on any one customer. Kevin and Christine believe that it could sustain a downturn of demand for seedlings for a year or two.

The property has a significant wetland with a high ecological value associated with the Papahawaiki Stream along the western and southern boundaries. The wetland is fenced and the weeds controlled on the Strawbridge side.



JUDGES' COMMENTS

- Excellence in business management.
- Attention to detail in staff management to ensure high quality.
- 95% success rate of seedlings planted to trees grown.
- Quality of seedlings is a testimony to a thorough and cautious system.

BALLANCE AGRI-NUTRIENTS: NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT AWARD MASSEY UNIVERSITY DISCOVERY AWARD

Kevin Strawbridge of Northland Forestry Nursery has a good understanding of optimum soil nutrient levels and the crop requirements, commented the judges of the 2012 Ballance Farm Environment Awards in Northland.



He uses a resin-coated slow release fertiliser and believes “a little and often” applications would reduce loss of nutrients from the soil.

“He has excellent knowledge of soil fertility and crop requirements and searched for years for a coated fertiliser which suits his system.”

Silt traps are utilised to capture sediment and nutrients. Soil management is very important, with regular soil and foliage

testing, including soil organic matter monitoring.

Organic matter is returned to the soil with roots and seedling tops left in the field. As a recently leased land area comes into production, Kevin is considering a rotation involving spelling blocks and growing green crops like ryecorn to build soil organic matter.

Extreme care is taken with timing of harrowing and deep-ripping to reduce damage to soils. Lighter Polaris vehicles with wide tyres, rather than tractors, are used during the harvest season and for day-to day-tasks to avoid compaction of soils.

The use of a Polaris rather than heavy tractor is not a common practice in the industry however this helps to reduce soil compaction, which is essential on this property as the soil, while having good structure, is technically clay.

Care in establishing and maintaining the correct and essential mycorrhiza association is a critical component to the success of the nursery and its seedlings.

“Kevin has shown a real strength in his understanding and management in this critical area of root conditioning and plant performance,” said the judges.

He has also modified the precision seed planter for the soils and seed beds to ensure

ideal growing density and altered the wrenching machinery to perfect the harvesting and cutting regime.

It is evident that maintenance of infrastructure and machinery is very good and the property is aesthetically very tidy.

The application of chemicals is carefully planned after regular plant monitoring and different products have been trialled to ensure the best results for this business.

Monitoring and the use of low spray rates on a regular basis controls infestations while still at low levels.

Experience, professional manner and attention to detail have ensured this business has grown into one of New Zealand's largest and most successful suppliers of pine seedlings.



JUDGES' COMMENTS

- Attention to soil management providing the means for ideal root conditioning.
- Congratulations on employing and training staff members in an area without good employment prospects.
- Continued growth in the business while always trying to perfect techniques.
- Works closely with machinery companies to deliver his requirements.
- Remains in close contact with customers, monitoring the performance of his seedlings so as to ensure an even better service in future.

Hancock Forest Management (NZ) Ltd

NORTHLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL WATER QUALITY ENHANCEMENT AWARD

Detailed and careful management of waterways, wetlands and biodiversity have won an environment award for Hancock Forest Management, which manages over 60,000ha of Northland plantation forests.



The judges for the 2012 Ballance Farm Environment Awards in Northland were impressed by the planning, consent compliance and attention to detail evident in the Maungatapere and Ngunguru Ford Road forests, especially at the time of harvest.

Such efforts mean there is minimal impact on waterways, wetlands and biodiversity during logging, by working closely with the Northland Regional Council staff members.

All waterways are rated prior to harvest, from low risk to high, all indigenous wetlands are identified, resource consents obtained where required, and compliance with permitted activity performance standards in respect of logging methods, areas to pull across and ongoing monitoring.

Controls over water during logging operations, and through the life of the forest, include hydroseeding, cut offs and swale drains, sediment traps, decanting earth bunds, silt fences, rock-lined water tables, fluming and slash placement.

“There were many examples of this during our visit (to the Maungatapere Forest) and the controls were well-placed and effective,” said the judges.

They also said the forest was an outstanding example of a land use and land management systems carefully matched to the class of land, and execution of best practice.

Hancocks has an inspiring level of planning, recording, reporting and therefore ability to communicate past, present and future operations to all stakeholders.

All pastoral farmers could learn from Hancocks in this respect, the judges observed.

They also recommended that Hancocks hold regular open days, when locals could be invited into the forests to be shown what happens and why.

“Demonstrate to the public how a well managed forestry resource on land rejected by the pastoral sector contributes to the whole community and the effort you go to mitigate impacts on their environment.”

As regards biodiversity, the Maungatapere Forest provided an example of the 443ha site, of which 289ha is planted under pines and the balance of 154ha is in native bush.

Most of that native bush is category two protected by the landowner, Whangarei District Council, and is contiguous with similar vegetation outside the forest.

It consists of totara and kanuka stands with scattered rimu, kahikatea, rewarewa, towai, tawa kauri and puriri.

Some 25ha is under riparian management, category two waterway shade.

Annual possum control and goat control is carried out.

A wetland trial is being conducted in conjunction with Northland Regional Council, with positive results regarding harvesting and log extraction and wetland restoration.



JUDGES' COMMENTS

- Robust production management systems and outstanding estate knowledge from the staff.
- Excellent records of the growing forest resources and the harvest outcomes.
- Very high management systems, matching best practice to variable land conditions.
- All fertiliser applications calibrated and GPS tracked.
- A good knowledge of all forest health aspects within the staff.

Alistair, Lyn and Christine Candy

PGG WRIGHTSON LAND AND LIFE AWARD



All members of the Candy family show pride and passion for the farm, their animals, indigenous biodiversity, water quality, and for their community, according to the judges of the Northland Ballance Farm Environment Awards.

“Work to Live, and Not Live to Work” is a motto of the house, enabling everyone to follow their own particular area of interest – car restoration, horse riding, tennis and fishing.

The Candy’s 206ha effective dairy farm and run-off at Okaihau has been chosen as a DairyNZ Monitor Farm, with the intention of improving animal performance and as a community responsibility.

The judges have praised the Candys “outstanding efforts” as they have protected over 70ha of native bush and scrub with a QE II covenant and diligently controlled pests in that bush and adjoining areas. “You also give up your time to share your passion for our native bush and by your example you encourage others to do the same.”



“You are great pastoral farming ambassadors and display the pride which Northland farmers have for the natural resources that are inextricably entwined through our businesses,” the judges said.

Both on-farm and off-farm members of the family participate in this environmental care work. “The family has inspired and provided guidance to landowners in the district and within the local community pest control group.”

The farm milks 320 Jersey cows on 106ha milking platform, backed by the 100ha run-off. The dairy unit is on an easy to rolling plateau while the run-off is easy to steep and stony.

Animal health is excellent, including a good vaccination programme. No inducing or docking is carried out. The cows appear very well fed, with a new meal feeder and the calf rearing facilities are excellent, with good monitoring.

“Extensive shelter, woodlot and aesthetic plantings, along with native bush blocks create a very picturesque and well sheltered property,” the judges said.

Water quality management is also a highlight of the property, with sediment and nutrient traps and good riparian zones.



JUDGES’ COMMENTS

- A clear passion and willingness to share with others.
- Very good use of fenced nutrient and sediment traps.
- Pest control is outstanding, with all members of the family involved.
- Care taken to avoid pugging and erosion of different soil types.
- Rising to the challenge of being a DairyNZ Monitor Farm.

THE AWARDS

The Ballance Farm Environment Awards are designed to encourage farmers to support and adopt sustainable farming practices. The awards are now held in Northland, Waikato, Bay of Plenty, East Coast, Manawatu/Whanganui, Wellington, Canterbury, Southland and Otago.

This is their seventh year in the Northland region.

THE AIM

The aim of the Ballance Farm Environment Awards is to encourage and support farmers to pursue good environmental practices. When farmers enter the awards, a team of judges visit the farm and discuss the entire farming operation. The awards are designed to be a positive experience for everyone, an exchange of information and ideas, and a chance for farmers to get information and advice from the various judging representatives.

FIELD DAY

The field day will be held at the 2012 Supreme Winner's property.

Name: Murray, Liz, Clive and Jorja Walden
Walden Farms Oruaiti Ltd

When: Wednesday 2nd of May

Time: 10:30am.

Where: 40 Windust Road, Oruaiti, off SH 10 near Mangonui.

For details, contact:

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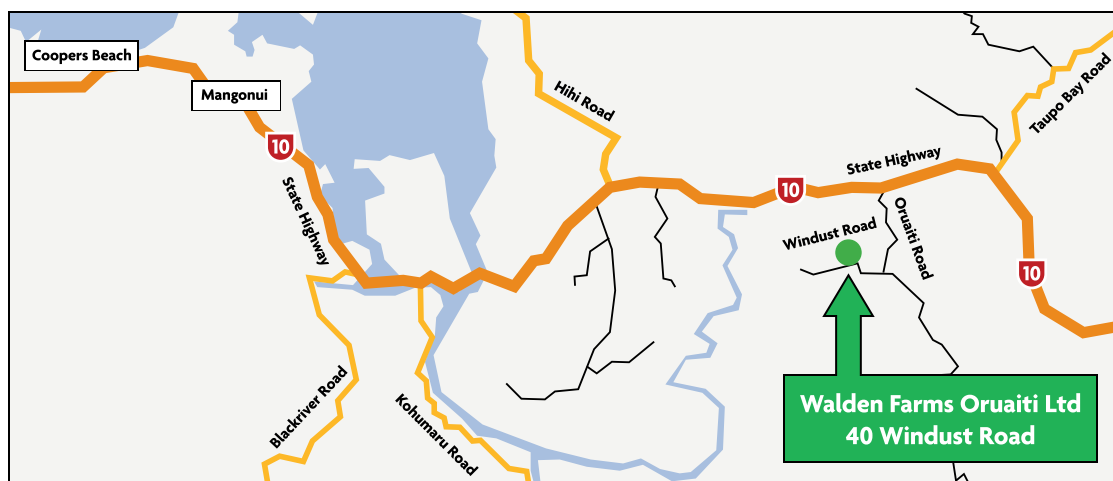
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