

# Deer Farmers' Environmental Awards

Recognising excellence and innovation on sustainable, environmentally responsible deer farms.

**Animal welfare, the environment and the image of farming are never far from the surface in the Northern hemisphere market place.**

I am constantly asked by North American and European retail customers and chefs how we farm deer in New Zealand and what sort of feeds we use. They are very concerned about the origin and quality of food they buy, especially when it is for their young families.



New Zealand has a wonderful, clean green image in the Northern hemisphere. It is an image our industry has used vigorously in promoting our products, and an image that is reinforced and perpetuated by the many tourists who visit our shores. We as an industry must ensure all reasonable steps are in place and maintained to uphold this view. We must listen, note and act on concerns raised by our consumers as it is they, not us, who will determine our future if we don't.

New Zealand – and New Zealand venison – has a fantastic image in the market. If we want to keep this benefit we've got to make sure we live up to this promise.

I congratulate the winners of the 2002 Deer Farmers' Environmental Awards for upholding such excellence in the sustainability of their deer farming practices.

**Graham Brown**  
Executive Chef – Game Industry Board

**Again, the 2002 Deer Farmers' Environmental Awards threw up some quite extraordinary and innovative farming practices.**

And again, it is great to know that the deer industry is moving to recognise the very strong relationship between consumers' requirements for safe food and knowledge of its source, and the economics of the industry.



*Peter and Fiona Elworthy with Premier Award winners Brigitte and Brian Richards.*

This becomes more important as food scares continue to frighten consumers.

Our congratulations to the Award winners, and our thanks to the hard working project team: John Paterson (Convenor) and the independent judges Garry Morgan (Environment Southland) and Mark Sutton (Fish & Game). And not least, our thanks to all of this year's entrants.

**Peter and Fiona Elworthy**  
Sponsor, Premier – Sir Peter and Fiona Lady Elworthy Environmental Award.



## Congratulations

PPCS is proud to recognise the environmentally friendly and sustainable farm practices undertaken by many of our farmers. These efforts ensure the sustainability of our environment and ability to continue being...  
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# Special challenges faced – and met – on the Premier Award winning property

## Brigitte and Brian Richards

Sheerwater, Winners of the Premier Sir Peter and Fiona Lady Elworthy Environmental Award.

“Do it once – do it properly and leave the land in better form than when we found it.”

This is the management ethic adopted by Brigitte and Brian Richards and their five farm staff on their prize winning deer property, Sheerwater, on South Head, Kaipara Harbour.

The couple purchased the 315 hectare block in 1991. Since then they have purchased and converted three neighbouring dairy farms, planted over 37,000 native and exotic trees and fenced off an extensive area of wetlands including their Lake Ototoa boundary.

Farm Manager Richard Morris and staff run the property on a day to-day basis. He says farming the light and sandy soils has required special management. “Although there are advantages in a free draining soil, it is prone to erosion and slumping. We have fenced off sensitive areas and carefully examined the topography when positioning fences. We’ve also planted in delta-shaped belts rather than straight lines to help settle deer and discourage fence pacing.

“There is currently an extensive re-grassing project underway which will see the original kikuyu turf replaced by more modern grasses. For this we use direct drilling rather than cultivation to minimise soil loss.

“We will continue to utilise kikuyu to protect areas of high wear and tear such as banks, feed areas and lane ways but will replace pastures with more palatable and high yielding grass types. We are using both annuals and bi-annuals such as Moata, Tama, Maverick Gold and Feast.

“Re-grassing is proceeding at around 60 hectares per year. Since there are a number of modern grasses coming on the market all the time, we are constantly looking at new options.”

Fowl manure is their fertiliser of choice, being readily available and working well so far. This, combined with the new higher yielding grasses that will produce at the optimum time will help provide enough feed for the tough periods.

The area is prone to drought one year in eight, and with this in mind they have also established a large coppice of willows as an alternate feed source. Willows are easy to grow and are particularly palatable to deer.

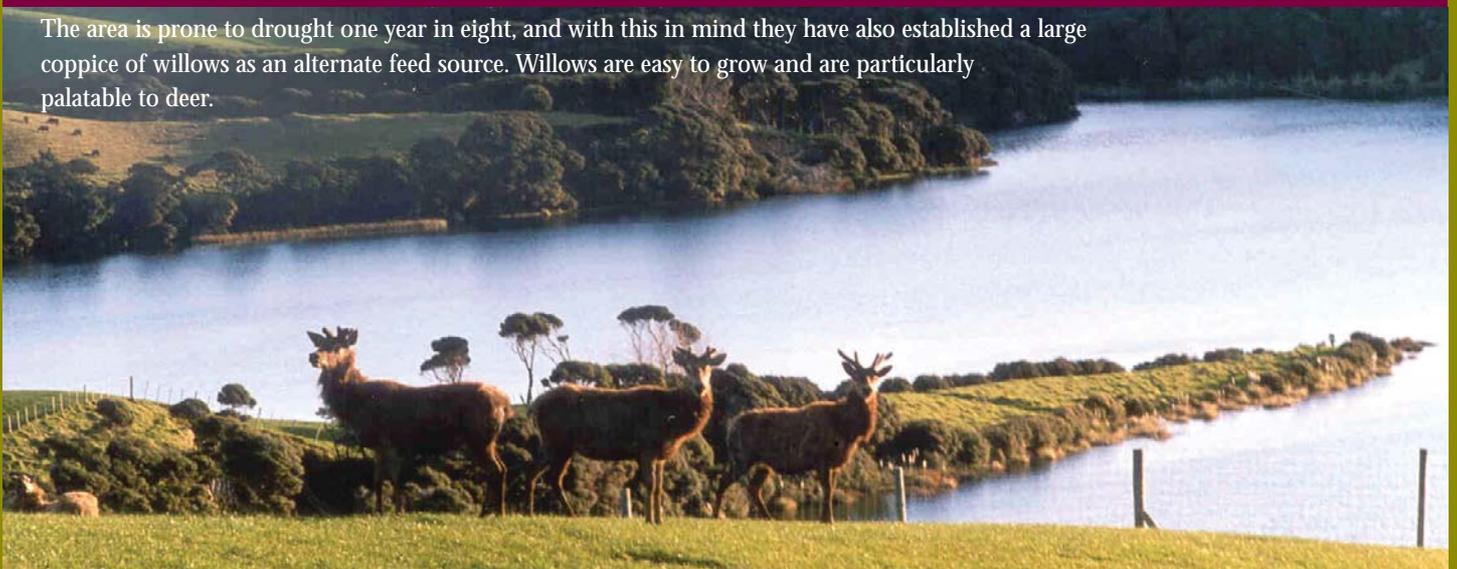


*More than 37,000 trees have been planted at Sheerwater.*

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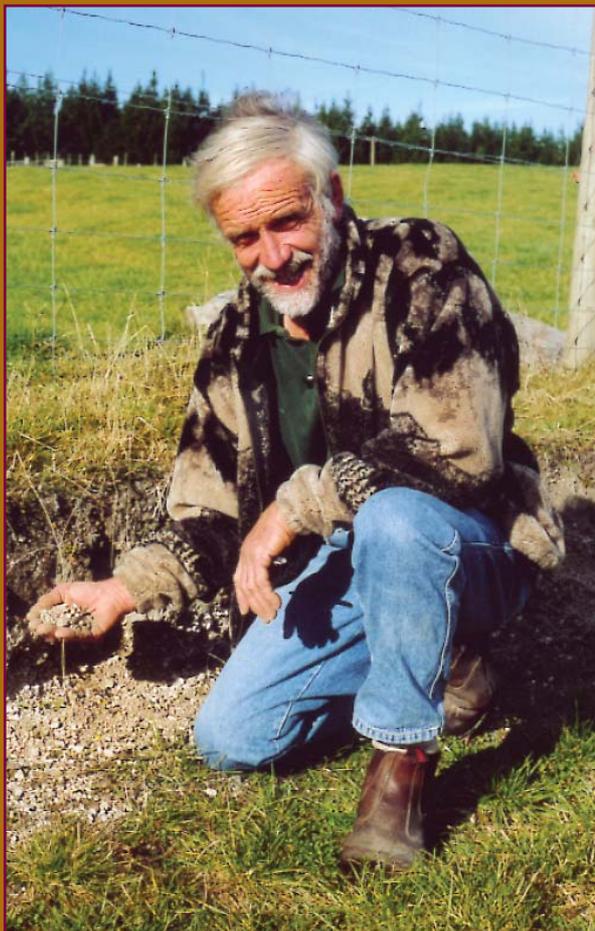
Environmentally-friendly farming is good for deer and the land, and creates a good place to live and work.

”



## Bruce and Allison Simmonds – winners of two Merit Awards

Duncan and Co Environment Merit Award for implementation of sustainable land use philosophy. Velpool Environment Merit Award for excellence in planning an environmentally sustainable deer farm.



*Bruce Simmonds shows the erodible volcanic scoria soil type that characterises his property.*

Extensive planting to provide shelter for stock and protect the exposed land was one of the first priorities for Bruce Simmonds when he, and wife Allison, purchased their 283 hectare farm at Rerewhakaaitu, near Rotorua nearly 30 years ago.

Bruce initially developed the sheep and cattle property into an integrated stocking system, converting part of the farm to high production deer farming in 1978. Since then he has carefully built up ground cover and substantial shelterbelts to protect the land.

More recently Bruce has concentrated on individually spaced plantings to complement the traditional shelterbelt plantings. These have under-plantings of flax, lemon wood and camellia. To minimise damage to sensitive areas, stock has been excluded from gullies and steeper faces, with oaks, pampas grass and lupins planted to stabilise the soil.

Shade and shelter provide the deer with a natural environment in which they can maintain their body temperature and, with high quality feed for growth, they do well. There is a series of paddock-by-paddock microclimates, and the additional shelter has positive effects on production. The visual barriers between paddocks reduce fence pacing.

“Farmers may lose 7-10% of their land in establishing shelter belts but in the long run they get 20-25% extra production for doing so,” Bruce says.

He uses sheep and cattle to control surplus pasture and weeds. Silage and winter crops are grown and the poplar trees also provide valuable additional fodder.

Bruce and Allison have proved that top quality and profitability are compatible with sustainable farming.

## George and Diana Steven

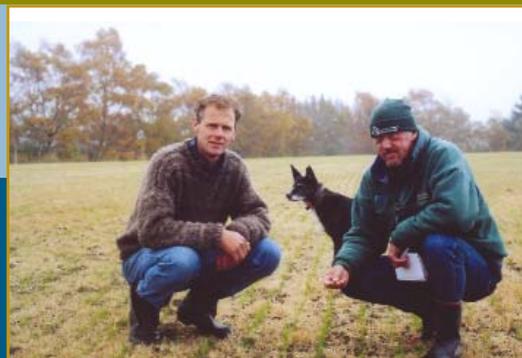
Summit Quinphos Environment Merit Award for excellence in land use management and innovation.

Soil and water conservation has been one of the major factors on George and Diana Steven's property near Timaru. As they have developed the property they have been trialling techno-grazing with the long-term ambition of minimising fence line soil degradation.

Sensitive gully areas have been fenced off to prevent erosion. Wide lanes cater for moving stock with sheep and cattle used to keep these tidy. For the past five years George has been protecting the soil structure from erosion by direct drilling new grasses.

He has fenced off valley floor areas as filter zones and has imported 500m<sup>3</sup> of soil for remedial work. He also has plans to lift sediment from pond areas and spread it on sensitive areas around the farm. George utilises seasonal surpluses when providing supplementary feed to his deer – he uses lupins, barley, grains, maize, and silage as well as bulk onions, which provide a high protein supplement to their normal diet.

As well as taking great care with their soil the Stevens have established some impressive stands of English and mixed species trees and have continued with an extensive planting programme to provide shade, shelter and visual screens for their stock to keep them content.



*George Steven (left) and judge Garry Morgan of Environment Southland looking over the direct drilled pasture.*

## Clint and Shelly Thomsen

Fish and Game Environment Merit Award for best riparian management practices.

Clint Thomsen is a third-generation farmer who intends to leave his Takapau deer farm in a far better condition than when he took it over.

Clint and wife Shelley have fenced off and undertaken extensive riparian planting along the Manipopo Stream which runs through the farm. They have another wetland development project in progress on a recently purchased adjoining property.



*The Thomsens have done extensive planting along the stream running through the farm.*

The predominantly flat property features a steep terrace slope running through the centre and it's this area that has required the most attention. "The deer played on the slope and dug it up badly so we fenced it off and started planting trees there," Clint says.

Keeping the trees alive in the first few years was a mission. They chose hardy varieties such as cedars (deodora), wattles and poplars; they also scattered acorns among the seedlings which took hold and grew well. To give the trees maximum assistance to get started they scooped out a dish around each planting to catch and hold moisture. Despite the difficult conditions they had an excellent strike rate.

In addition to the river bank area they have also established good shelter-belts elsewhere, using an attractive mix of species. These provide both shelter and shade for stock as well as a commercial timber return.

## Peter and Sharon McIntyre

ANZ Environment Merit Award for environmental awareness and implementation.

Peter and Sharon McIntyre farm in Eastern Southland on Waikoikoi silt loam, a wet soil type that is prone to bogging and pugging. To counter this they have modified their approach to land use.

They have undertaken an extensive drainage programme through tiling and mole ploughing. They have also decided not to use bulk silage due to the impact on the land. They tried dairy grazing for a short time but will not continue with it because of the damage caused to the soil structure in wet conditions.

They have fenced along drier ridgelines rather than gullies and have established a number of woodlots to provide protection for their deer. One woodlot is used for fawning.

As part of their on-going conservation plan the McIntyres have completed several planting programmes using native plants ideally suited to the area. They have set aside several wetland and pond areas and preserved a small area of peat swamp, red tussock and sphagnum moss on their boundary. This acts as a filter and helps remove nutrients from water flowing off a neighbouring dairy conversion.



*The McIntyres maintain several wetland areas on the property.*

## Tips

- Set an achievable annual budget for environmental work as part of your farm plan.
- Fence off sensitive areas where deer can cause adverse effects to the environment.
- Protect waterways – riparian areas add value to the farm and increase the diversity of wildlife.
- Fenced-off swamps serve to filter and strip nutrients from paddock run-off water.
- Clean, reticulated water is best for animal health.
- Direct drilling (rather than cultivation) reduces the risk of soil loss.
- Modify your management techniques (e.g. planning fence lines) in consideration of your topography and soil types.
- Additional shade, shelter and visual screens keep deer relaxed, content and up to 25% more productive.
- Trees planted for the deer (shade and shelter) can provide a commercial timber return.
- Content animals do not pace fences.
- QA accreditation is a good start towards environmentally friendly production.
- Use biological controls for weeds.
- Use slow-release fertilisers (RPR).

## Further information

©NZ Deer Farmers' Association, PO Box 5646, Wellington, August 2002. The Deer Farmers' Environmental Awards are part of the deer industry's Sustainable Farming Fund project, The Deer Farmers' Landcare Manual. The completed manual is expected to be available by the end of 2003 and will feature many of the examples developed by the environmental leadership featured in these annual awards. For further information on the Awards, or the Landcare Manual, please contact the project convenor, John Paterson, ph 07 332 2093, email john-p@wave.co.nz