

2021 DEER FARMERS' ENVIRONMENTAL AWARDS



I was fortunate to be part of the judging panel for the 2021 Deer Farmers' Environmental Awards. Starting as an annual competition in 2001 and moving to biennial from 2006, this is the competition's 12th year. My fellow judges thought a farmer's perspective this year would be of interest.

Being a judge

While it was nice to sit on the other side of the table this time – more relaxing and less scrutiny – I soon realised judging is tougher and more detailed than I first appreciated. No stone is left unturned, information is pored over and questions asked to tease out thought processes and explain actions. This is all interpreted individually by the judges, then peer reviewed with consensus reached and entrants ranked – never an easy task!

Judging was quite a journey. We started in Southland before working our way up to Otago and ending our South Island leg with stunning views of the Maniototo. Next it was backward four wheel driving in Central Hawke's Bay, followed by the Himalayas of Taihape, relaxing of nerves on the Central Plateau fire break, then admiring scenery in Hobbit country before traversing back to one of the original live deer capture founders in the Wairarapa. The diversity of properties was equalled by the culinary experiences and scenic journeys. Personal highlights included Thai food on a Saturday night in Invercargill(!), the Old Dunstan Trail and the lovely road maintenance chap who checked there were still enough bolts in the bridge for us to cross.

Our entrants

This year we had eight entrants covering most aspects of the deer industry and many other enterprises. They varied in size, production systems, ownership structures, physical properties and environmental challenges. However, all entrants were passionate about their livestock, environment, businesses and the industry. Their enthusiasm for what they were doing, coupled with the industry good and community involvement they all exhibited, is inspiring and to be commended.

It was a privilege to view varying stages of environmental enhancement and multiple approaches by the entrants, tailored

to their properties and resources. No one size fits all; entrants were willing to think outside the box and unafraid to try something new – probably a reflection of the deer industry as a whole. Some properties were beginning their journey, some were second generation and others showed a lifetime's work.

But all entrants had things in common:

- sustainability was a key driver and was integrated through business planning
- environmental spend wasn't discretionary
- none are likely to be ever finished
- a high level of long -and short-term planning coupled with intergenerational thinking
- high-performing stock
- strong engagement outside the farm gate
- being adaptive as policy and industry norms change.

Being part of a group has benefits

It was also notable that all but one of the entrants was actively involved in a P2P Advance Party, environmental group or DFA Branch. All commented on the enjoyment and value they got from working through issues with fellow deer farmers. We hope they continue to participate in these groups and strongly urge other farmers to take advantage of industry networks. You get a group of peers who offer non-judgemental thoughts on what has or hasn't worked for whatever issue is being considered. Quite often, good lateral or left-field thinking can lead to beneficial on-farm changes. The social benefits are pretty good too!

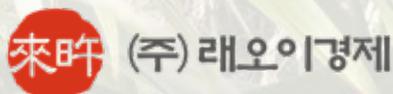
Thanks to entrants and sponsors

Congratulations to all the entrants, irrespective of the outcomes, and thank you for putting yourselves forward. You all demonstrate good farming practice and innovation and you are committed and passionate about the industry. The high calibre of entries made the judges' job extremely difficult and, as in previous years, the margins in the decisions were minuscule. I encourage anyone to enter these awards. It makes you have a closer look at your business, but you also get four individuals coming and providing a fresh perspective. Often they identify things you haven't thought of at all, or were perhaps only in your peripheral thinking (that was certainly the case with us).

We also thank our sponsors for their continued support.

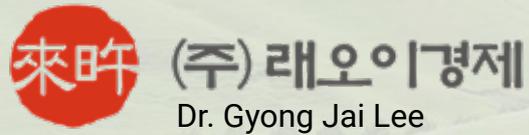
Evan Potter

Awards Judge and winner (with Linda) of 2019 Premier Elworthy Award and Gordon Stephenson Trophy



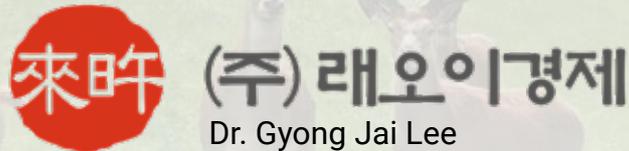
Grant and Sally Charteris Forest Road Farm, Hawke's Bay

Premier Award: *The Elworthy Environmental Award*



SP Corporation & Dr. Gyong Jai Lee Award

For leading, environmentally sustainable velvet farming



Forest Road Farm is a red deer stud and velvet operation. The deer are complemented by Hereford beef cattle and a small flock of Wiltshire sheep.

The 327-hectare property is all rolling to steep Class 6 hill country on free-draining Gwavas silt loam. The 1200mm of annual rainfall arrives in short bursts, which presents some environmental risk.

Grant and Sally have already fenced and planted critical source areas and most ephemeral waterways. Crops are an integral part of the farm system. Care is taken with selection of paddocks for crops, and provision of buffer strips in gullies. Break feeding is avoided to prevent soil degradation, and animals managed carefully to minimise damage from fence pacing. Higher grass covers are maintained to help minimise nutrient runoff.

More than 15,000 native trees have been planted over the past three years and Grant and Sally have an ongoing programme to fence and plant areas.

What impressed the judges

Meticulous planning, documentation and analysis resulting in excellent stock and feed management that fits a challenging climate. In addition, the judges praised:

- Strong partnership continuing to look for opportunities – excellent sustainable business and farm planning is evident.
- Completed and progressive protection and enhancement of farm environment mitigating for biggest risks through gully protection.



Grant and Sally Charteris.

- Excellent stock management driven by attention to feeding and genetic improvement.
- Excellent community and industry involvement to assist others into the agriculture industry.
- Strong use of genetics and technology to lift growth and quality of velvet production.
- Clear understanding and documentation of environmental limitations, strengths and obvious mitigation, and enhancement to enable sustainable production.

Judges' suggestions

- Plant more trees for shade and shelter (side gullies).
- Exotic/amenity trees to promote biodiversity.
- Explore opportunities for contributing to catchment improvement.



John and Mel Somerville Arawata Deer Farm, Southland

Duncan New Zealand Ltd Award

The recipient of this award demonstrates forward thinking and innovative farm practices while operating their business within a demanding environment.



What impressed the judges

An excellent property exhibiting high quality animals and pastures that meets the challenges of a long demanding winter climate while minimising environmental impacts.

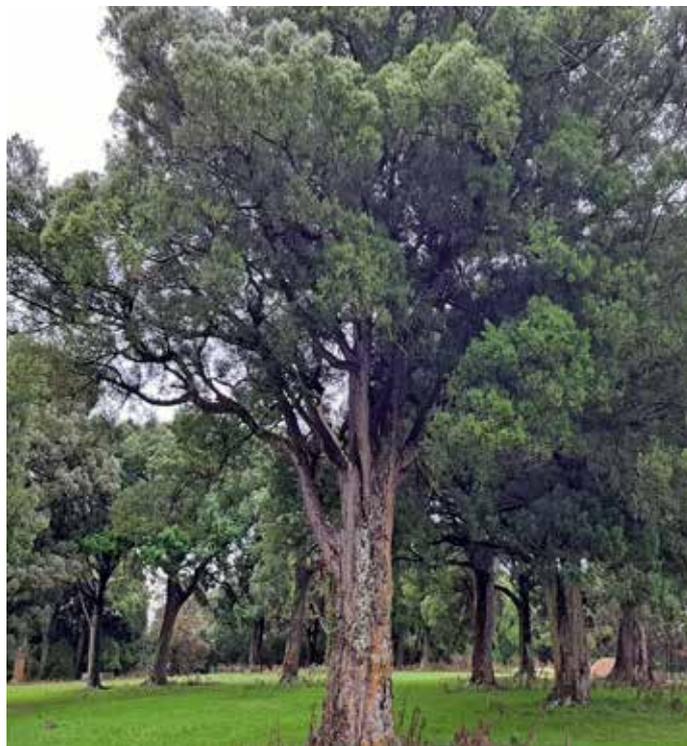
- Outstanding quality of stock showing benefits of good genetics and excellent feeding over a long period of time.
- Excellent management of environmental effects in a challenging climate by protection of wetland gully systems and critical source areas. This includes the long-term use of wintering barns and a self-feeding silage pit
- Excellent riparian management and enhancement with a range of native and exotic plant species.



Mel and John Somerville.

Judges' suggestions

- Macroinvertebrate monitoring below sediment traps.
- Investigate greenhouse gas emissions numbers and possible mitigations.
- Install a camera in wintering shed to observe behaviour.
- Consider succession planning.
- Investigate covenant for native forest remnants.



Top: Protected natural wetland

Above: Critical source area fenced and planted

Left: Mature podocarp remnant forest.

William & Karen Oliver, Three Rivers, King Country Mike Ferrier, Manager

Gallagher Technology and Innovation Award

For excellent utilisation of farming technologies to improve on-farm productivity and manage resources.



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**NZ Deer Industry
Environment Awards**

Three Rivers, bought by the Olivers in 2012, is driven by a vision for a profitable, sustainable and resilient business.

The 950-hectare property has 200ha of regenerating native bush plus 20ha of exotics. Sheep, cattle and deer (velvet and venison) are run.

A formal Farm Environment Planning process was initiated in 2017, using Google Earth Pro, and completed in 2019. The plan focuses on water, soils, biodiversity and climate change. The Maoritanga aspect of farming in the Maniapoto rohe is also being taken into account.

Environmental work to date has included retiring areas and identification and management of critical source areas. The farm's carbon balance has been independently assessed.



William and Karen Oliver with manager Mike Ferrier (right).

What impressed the judges

Thorough planning, documentation and actions to protect and enhance the natural resources in a challenging environment.

- Innovative thinking to meet the challenges of the farm environment with a water wheel to power the stock water system and Guinea fowl to overcome ticks.
- Excellent biodiversity protection and engagement with community to share knowledge to help with identifying and managing values.
- Excellent nutrient management to meet pasture and crop needs within a steep environment with high rainfall.



Water wheel powering stock water system.

Goudies Station, Pāmu, Bay of Plenty

Tim Bowron, Manager & Chris Smith, Deer Manager

Firstlight Foods Ltd Award

For total commitment to farming sustainably with a strong customer focus.

The recipient demonstrates a passion for the land and strong environmental stewardship. They actively work towards ensuring the land is left for the next generation in a better state than when they started. It is clear from their business decisions that they have the end customer in mind.

First Light



What impressed the judges

Total integration and management of an extensive property building on its strengths and knowledge within the team to provide a high achieving sustainable business. The judges were also impressed by:

- Exceptional stock management with multiple stud breeding programmes requiring excellent records, use of technology and huge attention to detail.
- Excellent infrastructure allowing integration of farm management and retirement of gully systems.
- Excellent pasture and crop management to meet feed requirements for a range of stock classes through the year resulting in a highly productive business. The deer were in fantastic condition and well on the way to meet chilled venison prices.



From left: Angus Irvine, Pāmu business manager genetics, Chris Smith, deer manager Goudies, Tim Bowron, manager Goudies, Chris Tidey, farm specialist: environment.

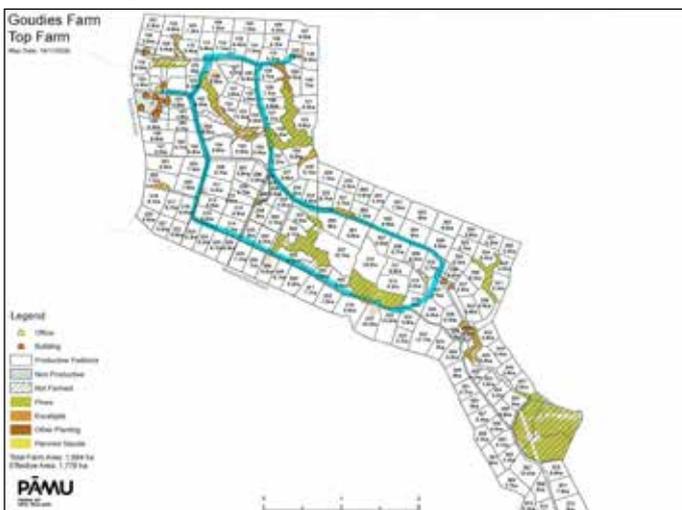
Goudies Station in the central North Island is elevated (450–55-metres asl) and has cold winters with hot summers. Deer have been on the property since the early 2000s. The main stock class is sheep, with beef cattle also run.

No feed is brought in and there is an active pasture renewal and crop programme. Older hinds are mated to terminal sires and younger hinds to red sires for breeding replacements. It is a productive deer operation, with high weaning rates.

Judges' suggestions

The awards judges had several suggestions for improvements at Goudies Station:

- Provision of more shade for livestock.
- Trapping for stoats in gully corridors.
- Biodiversity mapping.
- Staff upskilling using Primary ITO deer courses.
- Careful placement of fences to help mitigate soil losses.



Goudies Station has a long, narrow layout.

Andrew and Pam Peters, Balquhiddier, Taihape

NZ Landcare Trust Award

For excellence in sustainable deer farming through action on the ground.

The recipient of this award has demonstrated a strong level of leadership through identification of risk areas on their property, implementation of mitigation tools and adoption of farming systems to ensure long term sustainability.

NZ
LANDCARE
TRUST



Andrew and Pam Peters.

What impressed the judges

Exceptional management of a challenging property protecting soils, biodiversity and water quality while enhancing the environment with thousands of trees resulting in a stunning mixed livestock farm. The judges were also impressed by:



Poplar planting in gully.

- Long-term planning and vision for a sustainable farm business is strongly evident. A good match of stock class and stocking rate to land class underpins this.
- Excellent leadership within the Otaihape catchment to engage the community in environmental monitoring and enhancement.
- Progressive retirement and enhancement of gullies and critical source areas resulting in excellent habitat of native and exotic plants. A farm forester's dream!

Balquhiddier is on 430 hectares of steep hill country in the central North Island. The deer enterprise is mainly a breeding operation, complemented by a small velvetting herd. The farm also runs 1,400 breeding ewes plus replacements and 70 18-month cattle.

The environmental development is a work in progress with fencing and subdivision of a bottom gully, retirement of some watercourses still to be done and poplar planting ongoing.

Judges' suggestions

The awards judges suggested the couple turn their minds to succession planning and also try to get more time off the farm. They also noted that their experience using poplars could be a good example to other farms in similar terrain.



Native trees like Kaihikatea provide habitat in wet areas.

Sophie and Heather Atkinson

Atkinson Family Trust, Wharerata Farm, Wairarapa

NZDFA Next Generation Award

For outstanding performance across environmental, financial and social aspects of the business.



What impressed the judges

Excellent protection and enhancement of biodiversity and respect for the land and substantial family legacy and values strongly evident, while willing to learn and innovate in a complex business. The judges were also impressed by:

- Excellent records and attention to detail in a challenging business with diverse income streams that utilises family skills and knowledge.
- Excellent family leadership to share knowledge and encourage community protection of biodiversity. Strong adherence to family values underpins this farming business.
- Passion for the land and the property is clearly evident in meeting the present and future challenges.

The Atkinsons run an interesting mixed enterprise involving deer (venison and velvet), sheep, beef, dairy grazing, cropping and honey production on 220 hectares of easy to rolling north-facing country in south Wairarapa.

The property has been certified organic since 1990 and in the same year covenanted 7.9 hectares of regenerating bush to the QEII Trust. A further 3.2ha was covenanted in 2010.



Heather (left) and Sophie Atkinson.

The family is strongly involved in local environmental initiatives, including their co-founding of a biodiversity group and collaborative planting projects. Their environmental work has been formally recognised in recent years.

Judges' suggestions

The judges' suggestions were focused on the human side of the operation, with a recommendation to engage an independent facilitator to help map out future succession and leasing arrangements.



Deer are part of a diverse mixed enterprise at Wharerata Farm.



The plastic sleeve on this poplar will be recycled.

Further entrants

The judges also acknowledge the high standards set by these entrants. Their endeavours, along with those of our 2021 award winners, provide excellent examples of ways to meet environmental challenges on deer farms in a variety of landscapes.

Tony, Michelle and Kate Roberts, Maitland, Southland

A highly motivated family committed to their community, ensuring protection and enhancement of the farm environment combined with thorough planning and recording provides a strong platform for a sustainable farm business.

- Strong strategic planning with a clear vision and undertaking actions to achieve that in a short period of time. Intergenerational involvement in management is a major strength.
- Excellent engagement in industry and community activities to share and gain knowledge.
- Excellent business planning and farm environment plan providing ongoing records of activities.



John and Mary Falconer, Ranfurly, Otago

Well integrated, diverse business showing innovative thinking and excellent stock management that fit different land classes while minimising environmental effects.

- Scale, scope and management of native hill country that protects soils and biodiversity while supporting additional sustainable segments of the farm business.
- Excellent innovation and use of technology to enhance stud breeding
- Excellent stock management with particular attention to animal nutritional demands throughout the year.



Judging panel



Janet Gregory (Lead Judge)



Lindsay Fung: Environmental Stewardship Manager, Deer Industry New Zealand



Tony Pearce: Producer Manager, Deer Industry New Zealand.



Evan Potter: Winner, with Linda, of 2019 Premier Elworthy Award & Gordon Stephenson Trophy.

Elworthy Award: Previous winners

2001: Victor and Margaret Clark, Reporoa

2002: Brian and Brigitte Richards, Kaipara

2003: Wayne and Tricia Aspin, Manukau

2004: George and Mary Scott, Southland

2006: Murray Neutz and Keith Natrass, Geraldine

2008: Grant and Andrea Cochrane, Balclutha

2010: Tim and Trish Smith, Te Anau

2012: Brian and Jacquie Wellington, Te Awamutu

2014/15: George Williams and Laura Billings, Hawke's Bay

2017: Steve, Judy and Chris Borland, and Bob Sharp, Oparau

2019: Evan and Linda Potter, Hawke's Bay

Further information

The Deer Industry Environmental Management Code of Practice 2018 is a comprehensive guide to good management practices at farm level. The code is available free to all deer farmers. To request a copy, email info@deernz.org or call the Deer Industry New Zealand office on 04 473 4500. Alternatively the code can be downloaded from the DINZ website:

www.deernz.org/deerhub/farm-environment

Other general resources, are also available on the above page.

Several Deer Fact information sheets focus on the environment, including titles on:

- Fence pacing
- Protecting waterways
- Intensive winter feeding
- Trees for deer farms
- Farm environment plans
- Nutrient management
- Making native bush sing
- Planning for winter.

These can be downloaded from www.deernz.org/deer-facts For further information on the Deer Farmers' Environmental Awards contact Amy Wills: amy.wills@deernz.org