

2019 Deer Farmers' Environmental Awards



It has been a privilege to be part of the judging panel for the 2019 Deer Farmers' Environmental Awards. This is the eleventh year the awards have been run. They started as an annual competition in 2001 and became a biennial event from 2006.

This year we had five very strong entries. They represented a wide range of farming systems, from intensive finishing supported by centre-pivot irrigation to a complex high country business that runs several deer-based and other operations.

Each farm we visited was unique, and not just in its physical environment and the challenges and opportunities this presented. There was also a variety of ownership structures and types of deer operation, including breeding and finishing for venison and velvet, as well as trophy and genetics.

This small sampling of properties showed just how well the deer industry has been learning to manage the unique needs of deer on a diverse range of New Zealand land classes.

For all that, we found some strong common threads running through all of the farms we visited.

Building relationships

Developing a farming business that is economically, environmentally and personally sustainable requires strong relationships with others outside the farm boundaries. This includes expertise in areas such as agronomy, water and nutrient management, as well as with local authorities and agencies such as the Department of Conservation, which can give useful insights into local biodiversity. Getting involved in multi-farm initiatives such as local catchment groups can also provide support and impetus for your own efforts. We also found that building links with communities can provide positive outcomes, for example, getting local schools or volunteer organisations involved with environmental projects on your property. It's important that communities can see first-hand the good things that are happening at farm level.

Documentation

This is an increasingly common theme. Starting with good accurate farm maps and records, we found it is important to document what you are doing and record the impact of changes you've made over time. Modern technology including cloud-based computing and cellphone cameras, along with systems

such as FarmIQ are making this easier. We were impressed with the progress some farms are making in this respect.

Integration

DINZ and the NZDFA have a shared goal of all New Zealand deer farms having completed a Farm Environment Plan by 2020. Rather than being seen as a separate and unavoidable cost of being in business, your FEP should be integrated into your business planning and treated as an asset. In many cases the enhancements you're putting in place over time will have spinoff benefits for other activities, such as accommodation or farm tourism. This not only helps your business but also helps the industry build a more positive public image as people become better educated about the changes we are making. We saw two excellent examples of this, with one farm having the fundamentals of the FEP as far back as 1999. Other farms had most of the elements for a FEP readily at hand.

Working with deer

Deer have unique welfare and behavioural needs and another common theme is finding ways to work with, rather than against these traits. As industry knowledge grows, we have been seeing more evidence of farmers finding ways to do this. This includes the basics such as ensuring access to good shade and shelter or providing something as simple as a few logs to relieve boredom and aggression. Or it can be as simple as making sure deer are well fed in stable social groupings to mitigate fence pacing.

"I'm not ready"

This is a common perception, but in reality all the deer farms we visited were able to show us completed works, planned activities and current practices that all contributed to good environmental stewardship and minimised environmental risks. Running a farm to produce healthy animals within healthy environments is an ongoing process. As long as you have a commitment to healthy, happy deer in a healthy, clean environment you are ready!

The winners

As with the previous awards, all of the entrants should be congratulated for the pride they take in running their businesses which is evident in the quality of the stock and the condition of the land. They are all good ambassadors for our industry.

Our congratulations go to this year's award winners and to all entrants for being prepared to have their farms and environmental policies closely scrutinised. There has been something useful for other farmers to learn from each of our entrants and the highlights are documented here.

We also thank our sponsors for their continued support for these awards.

Lindsay Fung

**Environmental Stewardship Manager
Deer Industry New Zealand**

Evan and Linda Potter

Waipapa Station, Hawke's Bay

Premier Award: The Elworthy Environmental Award

"The vision of a sustainable farming system, ensuring long-term protection of the environment, and sustainable production and best farming practice is clearly evident."



What impressed the judges

The Potters' vision for the property 20 years ago and the work done since by starting the fencing at the back of the property impressed the judges.

They have utilised the 1999 Soil Conservation Plan and also a Land Use Capability Soil map developed in 2005. These have helped with development and also helped build a thorough knowledge of soils on the property, resulting in an excellent fit of stock to land class. In addition, the judges praised:

- Excellent long-term protection of the Hawea Stream and the smaller streams that run into it, and a huge commitment to fencing it and other areas with biodiversity values.
- Continued fencing of smaller areas, which aids stock flow and allows further planting.
- Use of willows and poplars to help prevent soil erosion, areas planted in Radiata pine and extensive areas of native bush provide shade and shelter and help make Waipapa Station a very attractive property.
- Carefully planned nutrient management – identifying areas that will not provide a productive return saves money, protects natural capital, and allows identification of alternative uses.
- Identification of critical source areas and ways to strategically graze.
- A good relationship with Hawke's Bay Regional Council. This has continued to the stage where the council brings other councils to see the work done.



Evan and Linda Potter.

- Practical support from the QEII National Trust has helped with funding and long-term protection of significant areas of biodiversity as well as sharing knowledge and help with long-term pest control.
- Seed collection, and growing of trees for replanting back into protected areas.
- Involvement in local deer industry initiatives such as the Advance Party provides an avenue to share achievements and methods with other deer famers.
- A strong commitment to the local community, e.g. instigating the Possum Control Area, involvement in the school Board of Trustees and hockey coaching.

Evan and Linda Potter Waipapa Station, Hawke's Bay

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.



Photo: Phil Stewart

Judges' suggestions for further improvement

- Identify ways of documenting (e.g. with photographs) good management practices, particularly seasonal activities like winter grazing.
- Further work with regional council staff to show value gained from soil conservation and land use capability plans, and ways these can be encapsulated in new FEMP framework.
- Work with nutrient adviser on content of nutrient management plan and alignment with Overseer.
- Periodic (e.g. 6-monthly) photographic records to show progress with regeneration and monitor change over time; this is also useful for monitoring weeds such as old man's beard.
- Involve local schools in projects such as replanting or monitoring stream health; this is also an opportunity to teach students about deer farming.
- Explore potential for farm tourism venture based on the QEII covenanted stream and gorge areas.



Long-term protection of waterways at Waipapa Station impressed the judges.



Poplars and willows have become an important part of the landscape at Waipapa Station since the Potters arrived 20 years ago.

John and Mary Falconer, Clachanburn, Central Otago

Duncan New Zealand Ltd Award

For vision and innovation while mastering a demanding environment.



Gallagher Technology and Innovation Award

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



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What impressed the judges

The Falconers have an impressive mix of deer-based business streams via trophy hunting, stud breeding and selling, semen selling, venison and velvet production. They share a passion for the animals and a strong sense of entrepreneurship.

In particular, the judges were impressed by:

- The array of technology used across the business and the Falconers' anticipation of future challenges.
- Excellent match of stock class to land use and management of extensive hill country without needing to bring in outside supplements.
- Protection of natural cover, soils and water quality.
- Extensive pest control work, helping protect biodiversity and the business.
- Efforts to manage water quality and quantity in a low-rainfall environment. (John Falconer is a director of the Maniototo Irrigation Company, working with the community and stakeholders to build shared understanding of issues.) Clachanburn's own water storage system with use of low-rate irrigation provides certainty and security; monitoring is done to check whether limits in the Otago Water Plan are being met.
- Steps taken to protect the galaxiids in the upper reaches of streams.

Judges' suggestions for further improvement

- Having the Advance Party they belong to work as an Environment Group to help all members produce a Farm Environment Plan.



- Consider FarmIQ to help with recording and documentation, especially with the different business streams. It may also help with biosecurity when bringing in outside stock, provide an option for an FEP, and safeguard essential information.
- Get advisers together yearly to work as a team.
- Look at regular water monitoring where it enters and exits the property, e.g. four times a year would pick up seasonal differences, particularly in spring (coming out of winter conditions) and summer when a lot of the Otago Water Plan limits apply.
- Stream health assessments: these only cost time, but complement the N, P, and E. coli tests.
- Engage an ecologist or botanist to compile a plant list on the hill block to help identify any threatened species and advise on how best to protect them.
- Develop a plan for the wetland/riparian area where the stream exits the property, including riparian plants to shade the stream and dryland plants to add appeal for visitors to the garden of significance.

Adam and Sharon Waite, Northbank Station, Canterbury

Firstlight Foods Ltd Award

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



NZDFA Next Generation Award

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



What impressed the judges

The Waites' planning of the re-development of the property is bringing benefits to the livestock and farm business and, eventually, the farm environment. Planned changes include improved irrigation, pasture covers and planting of new native shelterbelts. New fruit trees and ornamentals will beautify the property and provide shade. The judges were also impressed by:

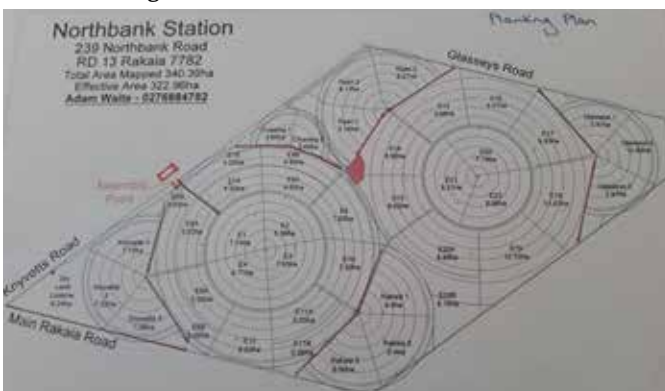
- Extensive documentation. FarmIQ has helped with recording, documentation and biosecurity with the frequent animal movements.
- Involvement of the local community, including sourcing trees locally, a local beekeeper, local contractors and identifying the need for firewood for workers at Mountain River Venison (Northbank Station's owner).
- The land is well suited to deer finishing.
- Good management of the intricate relationship with Mountain River Venison, which can provide benefits but also challenges with scheduling of stock alongside cropping and feed management considerations.



Adam and Sharon Waite.

Judges' suggestions for further improvement

- Work with adviser on nutrient budget and look carefully at figures for the new development, particularly that they don't blow out above the baseline, especially with the requirements for the Selwyn Zone. The increase in livestock weights may also affect contaminant loss. Use Overseer FM to check some of this.
- Establish photo points across the property before the existing trees are removed to provide a record of the changes. This will be important for the new shelterbelts to monitor growth and changes, and for auditing.
- Pasture improvement and removal of taller trees that provide shade for deer in hot summers could lead to more wallowing by deer. Consider fast-growing species in the mix that tolerate topping or pivot irrigators.
- Consider taking an irrigation manager's course.
- Another deer shed on the east block would mean less travel for deer, easier weighing and velvetting and less labour.
- Schedule some off-farm time to stay fresh.



Kiri Rupert and Josh Brook Leamington and Scotland Farms, South Canterbury

Highly Commended

For excellence in business planning, farm environment planning and farm succession.



Kiri Rupert and Josh Brook with their children June (1) and Liam (4).

In making their Highly Commended recommendation, the judges complimented Kiri and Josh for having achieved a lot of their objectives in the short amount of time they have been managing the properties. In particular they liked:

- An excellent document that included a Farm Environment Plan. This outlined business objectives and strategies for managing risks.
- Regular updating and inclusion of photopoints to monitor progress.
- Dedication to care of a QEII covenant and significant natural areas and connection to the Orari River Protection Group.
- Interest in raising trees from collected seed
- Planting being done in fenced-off areas to provide screening, shade and added biodiversity.
- Plans for purchasing another block of land suitable for hind fawning.
- Impressive pasture on Leamington, with a good mix of species providing excellent covers going into winter.
- Good farm succession planning, definition of roles and teamwork.

- Fencing of all waterways with planting plans to benefit biodiversity, water quality, livestock and aesthetic values.
- Efforts to reduce nutrient loss rates and find ways to protect soil.

The judges suggested that Josh and Kiri consider the following actions:

- Running different scenarios through Overseer FM to see what will reduce nutrient loss rates.
- Given the excellent grass covers and composition, consider whether it is necessary or sustainable (cost and environmentally) to feed extra silage and PKE at current rates.
- Investigate whether bats are visiting covenant and native areas (more assistance may be available to help restore these areas if they are found there).
- Engage with the Orari River Protection Group and share what they are doing with the local community.
- Consider allocation of tasks and employing more staff if another property is purchased.



Home-grown *Pittosporum* and *Hebe* seedlings.

Alf and Phyllis, and Bryce and Sophia Kinzett, Murchison



From left: Sophia, Bryce, Alf and Phyllis Kinzett.

Award judges visiting the Kinzett's acknowledged the many years of hard work and careful management evident across the property. In particular they noted:

- Fencing and shelterbelts providing shade and shelter suitable for different seasons and screening different stock classes to reducing fence pacing.
- Protecting existing trees using corrugated iron.
- Providing excellent feed and careful selection of genetics, contributing to a lift in velvet weights.
- Farm succession, acknowledging skills and common goals of all involved, with addition of new areas of adjacent land allowing further development, challenges and opportunities.
- Maintaining good condition of hinds and fawns despite a challenging drought.
- Use of matting in outside pens at the deer yards, and development of laneways along the long narrow property.
- The plans for developing new hill blocks to balance the flats and give scope for hind breeding.
- Sending R2 stags away for winter grazing, benefitting stock and pasture management.

- Fencing and planting ephemeral seepage areas and creation of sediment traps.

The judges suggested that the Kinzett's consider the following actions:

- Documenting good management practices through a Farm Environment Plan (FEP), using FEP workshops and the Environmental Management Code of Practice as a reference.
- Obtaining a farm map that also covers newly purchased areas.
- Permanent fencing or hot wires for seepage areas in crop paddocks (rather than temporary fencing), plant wetland species to help filter runoff and use more small sediment traps.
- Consider other options to avoid stock crossings over the busy road that bisects the property.
- Document through photographs the logging work above the property, work done in culverts and stream protection as it enters the property.
- Document changes and growth over time, and photograph winter grazing management.
- Explore opportunities to involve tourists in planting and sediment trap work to share the farm story of work to protect biodiversity and water quality.
- Investigate getting carbon credits or explore options for a tourist walk in native forest.
- Get Bryce and Sophia (the younger generation) off farm regularly to share what they are doing, learn from others, or upskill, e.g. through the DFA Next Generation programme.



Logging above the farm can have an impact on water quality.

Deer Farmers' Environmental Awards 2019

Judging panel



Janet Gregory (Lead Judge)
Regional Coordinator
(Canterbury) NZ Landcare Trust



Lindsay Fung
Environmental Stewardship
Manager, Deer Industry New
Zealand



Phil McKenzie
Deer Industry Environment
Group Coordinator, Deer
Industry New Zealand.



Steve Borland
Co-owner of velvet breeding and
growing business, Shabor, at
Oparau, Waikato and winner of
the 2017 Deer Farmers' Premier
Elworthy Environmental Award.

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, e.g. on climate change, are also available on the above page.

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

- Fence pacing
- Farm environment plans
- Protecting waterways from wallow and feed pad runoff
- Nutrient management on deer farms.

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

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 Nattrass, Geraldine
- 2008: Grant and Andrea Cochrane, Balclutha
- 2010: Tim and Trish Smith, Te Anau
- 2012: Brian and Jacque Wellington, Te Awamutu
- 2014/15: George Williams and Laura Billings, Hawke's Bay
- 2017: Steve, Judy and Chris Borland, and Bob Sharp, Oparau

