

**BEFORE THE HEARING COMMISSIONERS
AT CHRISTCHURCH**

IN THE MATTER of the Resource Management Act
1991 ("**the Act**")

AND

IN THE MATTER of the Resource Management Act 1991
and the Environment Canterbury
(Temporary Commissioners and
Improved Water Management) Act
2010

AND

IN THE MATTER of the hearing of submissions on the
Variation 3 to the Proposed Land and
Water Regional Plan

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF DONALD BUTLER (BUTLER'S FRUIT FARM
AND THE WAIMATE STRAWBERRY FARE) FOR HORTICULTURE NEW
ZEALAND**

25 SEPTEMBER 2015



ATKINS | HOLM | MAJUREY

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1. My name is Donald Butler. Together with my wife Jackie I own and operate Butler's Fruit Farm.
2. We started Butler's Fruit Farm in 1967 when we first decided to grow strawberries and sold them out of a small fruit stall on State Highway 1. The business today comprises 68 hectares in three titles which all border the Hook River. Plantings include 5-6 hectares in strawberries, 10 hectares in summer raspberries, 5 hectares in autumn raspberries, 25 hectares in blackcurrants, ½ hectare in Karaka blackberries, and small amounts of gooseberries, pears, quince plums and vegetable crops which provide some variation in the shop sales. Our aim in the past has been to only sell what is grown or manufactured on the property, but lately we have been challenging ourselves on this idea! We also graze about 400 lambs during the winter and have been selling silage off the hectares that are being spelled. In addition to the growing operation we operate a café, homestay accommodation, Pick Your Own during the summer months, and a shop selling jams and chutneys made onsite using farm grown berries. In 2015 we have had to downsize their operation somewhat, despite many unsuccessful attempts to encourage the next generation to take on this business.
3. The main uncertainty in the growing side of this venture over the last two to three years has been the inability to guarantee the supply and cleanliness of the ground water supply. This year we had to close down the cafe in the autumn when tests proved the water to be badly polluted. We have relocated to another water supply and put in UV filtration systems in order to be able to re-open and continue trading.
4. At the height of the picking season we employ up to 70 people, including pickers, supervisors, market sellers and café staff. An essential element to our operation has been the provision of good accommodation to house casual labour. Young people taking their O.E. have been an invaluable resource and have provided us with a motivated and fairly stable workforce over the summer months.
5. Waimate, for over a century, has been known as having the climate and soils suitable for the growing of strawberries and raspberries. It is well placed geographically as the "Berry Centre of the South" being equidistant by road and rail to the main markets of Christchurch and Dunedin. Whereas in the early 1900s there were 50-70 small growers in the area, now

there are only two or three. The marketing of the fruit has changed from having 6-8 large growers in the 1980s and 90s, each supplying 200-800 trays a day to the pre-Christmas markets and included exporting to Australia and America with the January to April crop. Now, the remaining growers seem to prefer supplying Farmers Markets and local events. That way, they have more control on the price they receive for their produce. In times of over-supply the fresh fruit is frozen, for sale during the winter months, or for processing. We will drive down with a truck load of frozen berries to Dunedin weekend produce market, and our frozen product sold this way is still very popular.

6. It was to tap in to the over-supply period (the 1st and 2nd weeks of December) that the Strawberry Fare was started in about 1980. It has grown to be a major drawcard for Waimate attracting 10,000 to 15,000 visitors to the area annually and a great source of pride to this family who having started the event. We take great pleasure in seeing what has come out of a simple marketing idea. For the first two years the festival was run onsite as Butler's Berries before being taken over by the council who have run it ever since. Donald has been part of the organising committee on and off over the years.
7. The future of growing berryfruit in this area is wholly dependent on the supply of clean unpolluted water. With Auckland growers supplying the pre-Christmas market throughout NZ with export over-runs, there is a growing opportunity to tap into the supply of autumn berries for both local and overseas markets.

Donald Butler

25 September 2015