

Introduction

My name is Jean Forrester

I have worked in the farming industry all my life and for better or worse all of it farming in Omihi Valley.

My husband Robert and I own and manage a 478ha property in Omihi and a 405ha hill block in the Waipara Gorge. We have farmed together since 1980 starting off leasing a small block with Robert away shearing and then doing contracting.

We have also run a calf rearing operation on our farm for 12 years between 2000 and 2012 and this will be started up again this year.

We have three children who are all involved in farming or farming related industries.

In 2013 we won the National Hogget competition with our composite hoggets.

We have been involved in many committees in our district over the years.

Farming Operation and Drought Effects

Our 478ha property should carry 2700 composite ewes and 800 hoggets. Due to two years of severe drought we have wintered 1300 ewes on our farm this winter

600 ewes and 730 hoggets are grazing in Rakaia. The hoggets have been home for one month since December 21st 2015.

All our lambs are sold prime and 70% are sold when they are weaned from their mothers.

Our ewes, weaning percentage is between 140 to 165% and our hoggets between 99 to 122%.

100 calves from our hill block come down to Omihi each year and are kept until they are sold prime between 15-24 months. 20-30 of the heifers are kept and put in calf and calf in Omihi, as R2 and go back to the hill block as R3 in calf heifers.

This year they are away grazing in Rakaia and we sold 50 Steer calves as Calves.

Our hill block normally carries just over 100 cows but has only carried 70 for the last two years.

We have 55 trading cattle grazing in Rakaia.

Importance of Feed

Performance of our sheep is critical to the profitability of our farm. To perform well our sheep need to be feed, especially in winter and spring. The better they are fed, the better their performance is and I believe that most sheep in NZ are underfed in this critical period. I also believe that there is a big gain to be made to the financial performance of most farms in NZ if sheep were fed in this period.

The ram breeders in NZ have done a really good job of producing sheep that can produce 2 or 3 lambs each and grow them to good weights. The only thing stopping this performance is feed in late winter and spring. To grow this feed we need reliable autumn crops and to do this we need rain and historically these autumn rains have proved to be unreliable. This is why irrigation is so important in this area if the farming community and district is going to prosper.

We grow good producing dryland crops like lucerne, fodder beet, bareno broome grass, cocksfoot, plantain, chicory and sub clover but all these feed crops have suffered from lack of rain in the past two years and in most cases have been failures. We also lamb early so we don't have too many lambs on as it gets dry in late spring. None of this has been enough to stop our farm been affected by the dry. Irrigation would be an amazing help. Our soils are clay soils and I think we could get away with putting on 0.3L to 0.4L/Ha/year and just giving those dryland feed crops the extra moisture they need to keep producing in the hot, long summers that we get in our area. It would also guarantee autumn feed which is so crucial to our stock and farm.

The 55 Trading cattle in Rakaia have been really well feed and recently 5 out of 7 of these cattle, that were killed, meet the grades to qualify for the SFF eating quality grade. That is 71%. Normally we get 33 to 40% in that grade and the national average is 33%. Last year our cattle were grazing at a place where they were not as well fed and less than 20% qualified. This shows once again the benefit of quality winter feed. We are aware of soil compaction on our farm and if we get wet conditions we prefer to take our cattle off a break and onto a sacrifice area and fed baleage, if it has rained enough for us to make surplus feed or spread them around a grass paddock, if it has rained in the autumn and the grass has grown.

In a normal year we are have about 5 lots of sheep and 2 lots of cattle behind breaks to conserve winter feed, let the rest of the farm grow for lambing and to get the best performance we can out of our stock.

Farm Plans

We have completed a farm environment farm, but more can be done in this area.

Michael Bennett from Ecan has been around our farm. He thinks that our farm is not causing many issues in the catchment.

We have most of the Omihi Creek fenced off and we have ordered some poplars this year to stop the slumping in one area of the creek. Hopefully we get some rain or it will be a waste of time.

Some old willows need to be removed but we are worried about what to replace them with to stop stream bank erosion if we ever get another flood and it will cost money to do this job.

We mostly direct drill our crops and use Soil Matters fertilizer to try and improve the structure of our soils. This is not to say the other way is bad, it is just what we choose to do.

We use fertilizer reps, seed specialists, the local vet and go to Beef and Lamb field days and read some of the many farming papers that come through our mailbox.

We have recently started Agri360 farm plan on our farm.

We have not done an overseer yet, mostly due to the cost, as the bank account has had a hiding farming through this drought and the figures will be minimal.

Conclusion

We have had stock away grazing for 2 years and the drought has cost us \$700,000.00 in grazing, feed and loss of income. If you multiply that figure by the number of farmers in this area you come up with a large, number, that could have gone a long way to building an irrigation scheme.

We have been involved in trying to get an irrigation scheme into our area for well over 10 years. We have submitted to various consent hearings. Most of our evidence seems to be ignored as we are only farmers. I hope for the future generations of farmers in this area we are able to irrigate this dry but good farming valley we live in. I know some of the practices used in the past have not been ideal but good farmers are quick to adapt to GMP if they are introduced in sensible way. We have purchased 218 shares in the HWP which will irrigate between 200 to 300ha. The long term predications are for Canterbury to get drier and West

Coast to get more rain. Don't you think it makes sense to irrigate these already, moisture deficit farms. As I see it the HWP is our only chance to get irrigation into this district.

Finally the Maori meaning for Waipara is muddy, silty, sediment water way and I am not sure how many years ago the river was named but I would suggest it was well before domestic animals were introduced into the area.