



## Case Study

# Farmer's "A" for environmental performance

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CATEGORY: News | Compliance | Environment | Farming

ZONE: SELWYN WAIHORA

Looking after the environment is an essential part of Selwyn dairy farmer Tony Dodunski's philosophy. A recent independent check shows he's well on the way towards achieving sustainable farming in a challenging area.

Tony has been rated "A" for his farm environment plan audit by Environment Canterbury. He's also achieving his production goals.

Having worked his way up the dairy farming ladder via management, contract milking and leasing out cows, Tony and his wife Clare, a doctor, bought their 190ha farm next to Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere two years ago.

To start with they thought that under Environment Canterbury's tightening environmental regulations, it would be too difficult to comply as well as make a profit.

But they needed to be within half an hour of Christchurch hospital so Clare could commute to work. "There's not a hell of a lot of farms within 30 minutes of Christchurch," says Tony.

A land agent persuaded them to view the property next to the lake. "He said, 'Tony, come and have a look at this farm and at least think about it.'"

### Complying with tight environmental regulations

Farmers in the area are in the environmental spotlight. Under the Canterbury Land & Water Regional Plan, the property is in the Selwyn Te Waihora Cultural Landscape Values Management Area's Phosphorus and Sediment Risk Zone.

In this zone, dairy farms must have a nitrogen budget done, and those leaching more than 15 kg of nitrogen per hectare per year are required to cut their leaching by 30 per cent by 2022.

The tight environmental regulations didn't faze Tony. He figured that's how farmers should be operating anyway.

"Some people have been doing it for years and definitely my family's farming philosophy is always at the forefront environmentally rather than on the back foot."

Tony says the property's previous owner was a very good farmer who had fenced off drains, planted flax and put in effluent storage. He has added to that, planting 4000 trees and shrubs as well as deepening and digging a further 8.5 km of drains.

### Achieving environmental and production targets

A Farm Environment Plan (FEP) is required of farmers when they apply for land use consent to farm. After less than a year, Tony's FEP came up for audit by an Environment Canterbury-approved auditor.

"I was really nervous because of the environmental stigma this area has and because I'd put so much emphasis on the environmental side of things. To get an A was choice," he says.

Auditors rate farms from A to D, depending on whether farmers achieve the targets and objectives set in their FEP, meeting "good management practice" guidelines, achieving nitrogen loss limits and keeping records.

As well as meeting his environmental targets, Tony is hitting the production mark too. In his first season, the farm produced 251,830 kg of milk solids from 570 cows at peak milking. This year, with 660 cows, production so far is up 16 per cent and on target to achieve 280,000 kg MS.

His "A" audit result shows he's well on the way towards environmentally-friendly farming.

In his first year on the farm he built a 700-cow concrete feed pad. The farm's heavy soils turn to mud quickly in wet weather, so Tony gets cows off pasture on to the feed pad quickly.