



farming people

# HRL news

Hazlett Rural Limited

**Scott checking on a crop on an LK Farms property near Darfield.**



## Helping clients with fodder beet

**The use of fodder beet as a winter feed has ballooned in recent years. Two years ago, nationwide seed sales quadrupled. The seed and chemical companies have really got in behind it, and researchers at Lincoln University have made a big contribution as well. New varieties are now arriving every year.**

The big benefit is that it will produce a big tonnage of dry matter per hectare, so you can grow a lot of feed on a small area of ground — between 20 and 30 tonnes per hectare is not unheard of. And all classes of stock will eat it.

It can be a versatile crop, with some farmers experimenting with such approaches as liftable varieties for a summer supplement. Some dairy farmers are buying sugar beet varieties, which are also burgeoning in popularity, as 'cut & carry' (you can't do this with fodder beet proper as the bulbs are too big). Others keep normal varieties going beyond the conventional late autumn/early winter feed-off period into very late spring.

But in all cases it has to be managed properly, both from the agronomic and feeding viewpoints. Because of the high establishment costs, which include precision-drilling, many farmers are using advisors to protect their investment.

Scott McLroy, who joined HRL Rural Supplies from Farmlands earlier in the year, is one of them, looking after up to 400 hectares for HRL clients. He is a great fodder beet advocate, and has made it his business to develop his knowledge of the subject: "It's the cheapest feed you'll ever grow. It only looks expensive because all the costs come at the front end."

He says high yields can be achieved "... if you follow a good process, keep your ducks in a row and don't try and cut corners to save cost as it will cost you in the long run."

For many clients he supplies a whole establishment and monitoring package, starting with paddock and cultivar selection and then walking the paddocks once a week through the critical establishment phase. It takes him about ten hours and 350 kilometres every Monday at this time of year.

"As soon as we put it in the ground, we try and establish as many weeds as we can so we can bowl them. By the time it comes to canopy closure, we pretty much shut the gate and it looks after itself.

"It doesn't have any bug pressure — yet. Even if there's a paddock of kale next door chocker with aphids and white butterfly, they won't touch the fodder beet. You do put some insecticide earlier on, but not later in the growing season."

Scott says there's no 'right' programme to use but it's essential that product is applied in a timely fashion. "A lot of fertiliser goes on it: salt, potassium and special mixes — there's now a move towards foliar feeding it with Wuxal boron, magnesium and sulphate. That helps a lot. I did a bit of that last year and I'm going to get into it full-on this year. It's got such a big leaf for uptake and the products are not expensive."

Fodder beet has a bit of history of stock health problems but Scott is adamant that "... the crop won't kill the animals, but management could." Once stock get to like it they will keep on eating it to excess. A common error in the past was to start moving the fence from day one as with other brassicas. The stock leave

half-eaten bulbs behind as they move onto fresh leafy plants; once they figure out how tasty it is they go back and eat so many of the half-eaten bulbs that they gorge themselves, potentially fatally.

**Continued on page 2...**

*Season's Greetings!*

**We fondly hope that by the time everyone sits down to the big dinner on December 25th, all drought conditions will have lifted and the lamb schedule has stopped dropping.**

**HRL Directors and Management heartily thank all our farming people for their continued support during the year. It's you that make our business successful — and extremely enjoyable.**

**The HRL team is also due praise and thanks for their tremendous efforts during another challenging year. A mighty effort from everyone has ensured our farming people have received the very best service possible.**

**We wish everyone a very happy festive season and hope that families are able to gather and celebrate what we have, which is a great deal more than millions of other folks out there have.**

### INSIDE . . .

From the GM	2
A note from DH	2
HRL Finance expands	2
Cell grazing under the spotlight	3
Hat Pic	3
Staff Profile: Sharon Hunt	4
The Blokes' Diary	4
The Blokes and Blokeses' Directory	4

Continued from page 1 ...

"It generally takes about 14 days to transition the animals onto the crop. There are lots of ways of doing it, but I recommend putting up the fence and having a grass paddock beside it with the gate open; you have to push them onto the beet morning and afternoon at the start. After 13–14 days, they'll stay on the beet and leave the grass alone entirely. Main thing is to leave the first break in place until everything is eaten."

## A NOTE FROM DH

**I note with great interest a few comments about new tech in this issue. I am increasingly convinced of the ever-growing value of technology to this business of farming: the value of being able to measure your business through the use of technology — measuring your paddocks, your stock, your inputs and outputs, your financials, indeed your whole business — is, well, immeasurable.**

It's enlightening to see how our farming sector is roaring ahead in leaps and bounds through the use of technology in all facets of what we do. This has to be a positive. There is no question these valuable measuring tools are improving the logistics of farming and boosting production, all the while, which is equally important, reducing the costs of that production.

To even start describing all the tech options available to us right now would be way beyond the scope of this newsletter — just about every item of hardware you buy these days has at least a smidgeon of tech — or the option to extend its utility by tech add-ons. Just think for example of the drafting gates your father had and compare them with what we're using now ...

To turn a blind eye to all the possibilities out there that are capable of sending our industry to the stars would be a weakness. Our goal should be to combine the tried and true values that have seen us through in the past with the new technology and all it offers us. The future is now and we must grasp it.

On a more earthy note, I'm not sure what things out there in the paddocks will look like by the time you read this but just remember that next week will always bring its challenges: it's preparing for next year and those beyond that will see us through. Things will come right! They always do...

**David Hazlett** Rural Bloke

## FROM THE GM

**The volatility mentioned in this column in the last newsletter is still well and truly with us.**

The lamb schedule opened better than I thought it would but it's dropping faster than I thought it would. I don't know where the bottom is, and I'm not sure that those 'in the know' know either. Beef has come down off those dizzy heights of over \$6/kg but it still looks strong to me.

Frosts in November — what's that all about??? A mate of ours in town takes daily weather observations and he says the Guy Fawkes Day job, -3° at his place, was only his third November frost in 20 years. I don't know where our reliable summer heat has gone; cold and miserable for the first two days of the Christchurch Show is unheard of. The lack of heat has slowed growth right up, so here we are in a green drought again.

So the volatility in the markets is matched by volatility in the weather. It's one thing to say we've got a massive El Niño on our hands, but quite another to say with any certainty what it will bring... dry sou'westers if recent experience is anything to go by! It looks like we're facing another roller-coaster season.

Most farms are weaning slightly earlier, and some can't wean fast enough to beat the schedule drops. Those who weaned early will be pleased they did and probably did reasonably well out of it.

Our thanks to Jonathan and Annabelle Austin for allowing us to host the field day on their property. I think what Jonathan is doing with his cell grazing is serious food for thought, excuse the pun. And the fact that so much of what he is doing can be managed with his cell phone is extremely interesting. It shows the power and control that data can give us if we use it to the fullest extent that is currently possible (and who knows what's around the corner in that regard?).

On that, it has been interesting and encouraging to observe the changing attitudes of many farming people to electronic animal performance recording. Earlier on, it was typically seen as merely as a cost but now increasing numbers are really starting to recognise the power and value of that captured data for their livestock management decision-making.



If we are to succeed in the newly evolving farming environment, looking at the possibilities in front of us rather than the problems is what will get us through.

On the staff front, Hamish and Sarah Marshall and their three boys are relocating from Hororata to Amberley to enable Hamish to provide a better service for the many North Canterbury clients he is now working with.

**Ed Marfell** General Manager

## HRL Finance expands

**Finance products were initially offered 4½ years ago and have since become an integral part of the HRL reps' product offering. Their flexibility, simplicity and competitive interest rates have ensured a steadily growing demand for livestock finance. These products enable our farming people to quickly respond to seasonal and market conditions at highly competitive interest rates.**

More recently the product range has extended to rural supplies deferred payment, enabling the timing of income and costs to be matched, working capital facilities to cover peak period requirements and insurance premium funding to enable our insurance clients to pay monthly as opposed to one large annual lump sum.

The drought and product prices have put pressure on the cashflow of many farming people and we are keen to talk to anyone who requires assistance with their working capital funding.

**If you are interested in understanding any more about these products please contact Jo Manson at [jmanson@hazlett.nz](mailto:jmanson@hazlett.nz) or phone 03 929 0317.**



Jonathan Austin demonstrates his bird-proof calf feeders.

## Cell grazing under the spotlight

Some 75 clients and others enjoyed a stimulating field day staged by HRL — the first time the company has organised one — on Jonathan and Annabel Austin's Aroha Downs at View Hill at the end of October.

The couple have been farming the property on their own since 2000, after some years in partnership with Jonathan's late father, John. The field day was aimed at presenting to clients some non-traditional thinking on improving profitability from cattle finishing.

Ed Marfell said changing land uses and intensifying pressures on farming people meant it was time for fresh thinking. Since this year in Canterbury has been one where a lot of bobby calves have been held back for rearing it was topical to look at a successful bull-beef operation.

Over recent years Jonathan has boosted productivity on their 639-ha property by around 40%. He recalled to the gathering how in 1992 the farm carried 4500 ewes plus 1800 hoggets, 200 deer and 100 cows. Now the ewe flock is just 300-strong, the deer have gone but there are over 1600 head of cattle of varying ages and classes spread around the farm.

The catalyst for shifting gear on the place was participating in the 2003 Rabobank Farm Management course: "I soon realised how much I needed to change and how much I needed to learn. Before then it was head down and bum up. I hoped that the harder I worked the better I got. But I wasn't making good decisions and I had to spend more time working on the business."

Two years later he did a meat course, learning about business strategies. This led to the bull-beef operation in place today. Basically, Jonathan aims to finish bulls after keeping them for one winter only. He sources the calves at four days old and rears them through to 18-20

months and then they're gone.

The field day toured the various stages of this operation, starting with the converted hay-barn where the calves are kept for about a week, getting as much milk as they can drink. They go down to four litres a day after about a month, by which point they are fed as much meal as they can eat. At 85-90kg they are weaned off milk and at 120 kgs weaned off meal. "To achieve our target of getting them through that first winter, we have to feed them really well."

The Austins also run heifer calves, Jersey bull calves and carry-over cows, but the point of interest for the field day was how the beef finishing has evolved into a variation on the Techno system. Jonathan has set aside a 90-hectare block subdivided into a cell system whereby 350 bull calves get a fresh pick every two days. The fencing and management is geared to ensuring each two-day cell can be sized according to the feed on offer and the requirement of the animals at their current bodyweight.

A sign of the times, the size of the next break can be calculated on a couple of phone apps that measure the paddock and crunch the mob number, liveweights and grass cover on offer.

The key to the success of the system is back-fencing — just as it is for the fodder beet feeding discussed on the front page. "It's not rocket science," says Jonathan: it's simply ensuring that once the cattle have taken the best off it, it can start growing again for maximum pasture quality at the next grazing 25 days later.

He has established that the same number of bulls putting on .95kg/day in the heat of summer on 10ha

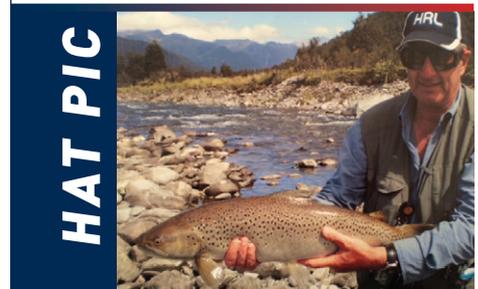
of cell grazing require 17 hectares of open grazing to put on .4kg/day. "That difference is the key. And we've realised we can do the same thing with the heifers...."

Jonathan has invested in irrigation to set up a similar system for grazing dairy heifers. He has installed two pivots on a 110-ha block facing Woodstock Road. The two squarish blocks are each divided into four quadrants around the pivots; each quadrant has three troughs along a centre line, enabling those quadrants to be further subdivided into six strips — or even more, given the careful placement and design of the troughs.

A lively discussion centred on the question of which is the better bet, raising bull beef or grazing dairy heifers. For Jonathan Austin, it's a non-issue. Comparing the two over a five-year period, he reckons they would work out around the same; some years would be better for bulls and others for heifers.

"My answer was that it depends on how much risk you want to take: my risk management is to not have everything in one basket. If you have heifers, you're completely reliant on being able to meet the contract obligation; whereas if you have some bulls, you can start getting them away earlier and you reduce your risk.

"Having them both is quite a good thing to do; for instant cashflow the heifers are good whereas with the bull you're reliant on market prices. It's not so much what's better or what's worse, it depends on what suits your individual farm and farming nature, and how much risk you want to take. I would always do both."



HAT PIC

Dan Pinckney of Southland with a prize trout. The fish was actually caught by Mick Burdon, but Dan spotted it first so we're wondering who the champ is here. The two anglers are, of course, long-time and very close fishing mates of the late Denis Hazlett. They've asked that the \$250 donation go to the Cancer Society.

## The Blokes' Diary ...

<b>16 Dec</b>	<i>Mayfield Ram Sale</i>
<b>17 Dec</b>	<i>Coalgate</i>
<b>21 Dec</b>	<i>Coalgate</i>
<b>7 Jan</b>	<i>Coalgate</i>
<b>14 Jan</b>	<i>Coalgate</i>
<b>20 Jan</b>	<i>Coalgate</i>
<b>21 Jan</b>	<i>Rakaia Gorge Lamb Sale</i>
<b>28 Jan</b>	<i>Coalgate</i>
<b>29 Jan</b>	<i>Hawarden Ewe Fair</i>
<b>1 Feb</b>	<i>Castle Ridge Lamb Sale</i>
<b>4 Feb</b>	<i>Coalgate</i>
<b>11 Feb</b>	<i>Coalgate</i>
<b>12 Feb</b>	<i>Central Canterbury Ewe Sale</i>
<b>18 Feb</b>	<i>Coalgate</i>
<b>25 Feb</b>	<i>Coalgate</i>
<b>3 Mar</b>	<i>Coalgate</i>
<b>4 Mar</b>	<i>Cheviot Cattle Sale</i>
<b>10 Mar</b>	<i>Coalgate</i>
<b>17 Mar</b>	<i>Coalgate</i>

## Staff Profile . . .

### Sharon Hunt *Admin*



Sharon will have been with HRL for two years at the end of next month. She divides her time between insurance and finance in the office and brings a wealth of rural business experience to her role.

Originally from the Taieri plain, she worked for the BNZ in Dunedin for four years after she left school. She was transferred to Christchurch, but she became fed up with the strike-ridden culture in the banks in those days, so she moved to Wrightson Grain & Seed in Princess Street for two years. Then she moved to Lincoln as p.a. in the farm management department where she stayed for ten years. She returned to banking part-time for 4-5 years, while returning to a rural lifestyle at Dunsandel where she and Grant milked cows and reared calves; Sharon also looked after their own small block at Weedons where they ran cattle and horses. They then moved to a bigger (40ha) block at Leeston and Sharon worked in the Synlait office when it was still based at Te Pirita. In 2008 she moved to PGGW Finance where she spent nearly six years until that business was sold to Heartland.

Sharon and Grant breed and finish cattle, and breed and train racehorses; they grow a lot of crop, much of which is oats for their chaff that is in demand from Canterbury's leading trainers: "Once they use our chaff, they don't seem to be able to go back to what they'd been feeding previously." They have two children who are active in sport: Morgan, 21, is on the road for a seed company, and Grace, 20, has just completed animal care training. The family like to get away with their jet boat whenever they can —which certainly isn't every weekend given everything they're doing. When she gets into town on workdays, Sharon usually goes for a 5-km run before starting work.

# HRL

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