

Growing Your Farming Career

Dave Swney



2006-08	Lincoln University to complete degree - Bachelor of Agriculture, Rural Valuation.
2009-12	Consulting Officer for DairyNZ. Completed one season in Whangarei and two in Matamata.
2012	Travelled overseas / contract work for DairyNZ all around the North Island.
2013	Managing parents' (Phill and Deb) 500 cow dairy farm in Te Awamutu.
2014-present	Contract milking for parents.

Farm description

Soil type	Maeroa Ash
Pasture species	40% ryegrass/clover, 60% tall fescue/clover/chicory
Olsen P	30-40
Annual rainfall	1200 mm
Breed	crossbred

Production

Year	Cows	Ha	Production	kgMS/ha	kgMS/cow
2013/14	500	124	240,000	1,935	480
2014/15	480	124	242,000	1,952	504
2015/16	440	124	220,000	1,774	500
2016/17 target	440	124	220,000	1,774	500

Farming philosophy/principles

To run a profitable and sustainable dairy farming business focusing on cow health, breeding and performance. We strive to create an environment that provides opportunities for us to all learn and enjoy the industry that we are passionate about.

- To keep the business moving forward a strong focus will be on improved profitability and performance, debt reduction and an improvement in equity to provide opportunities for all parties.

- A key focus is to continue genetic gain in our crossbred herd resulting in increases in milk production and efficiencies within the system.
- Operate a medium to high input system to manage climatic risk.
- Continue to improve pasture species thus allowing us to increase home grown feed.

Key points I have learnt along the way

- Importance of a good supportive team/network and having a finger on the pulse with what is happening in the industry.
- Attention to detail is key to achieving a high standard across the board, from mating to pasture management.
- Dairy farming can be very stressful and you can't always get it right.
- How important it is to take time away from the farm to recuperate.
- Learn from the best and surround yourself with people that don't mind you 'picking' their brains.
- Growing and breeding stock well is vital to improve performance and profitability.
- The need to save hard and be patient.
- The importance of being organized, especially for staff, and thinking ahead.
- Working with family it is important to keep and maintain a good working and off-farm relationships.

Mike O'Connor



2005	Farm assistant on a 430 Cow dairy farm in Aria, King Country.
2006-10	Completed a Diploma in Agriculture and Farm Management and a Bachelor of Commerce (Agriculture) at Lincoln University.
2010	Farm manager 240 cows on Mc & M Davey farm, Karapiro.
2011-13	Lower order sharemilker 286 cows on Mc & M Davey farm, Karapiro.
2014-present	50:50 sharemilker 300 cows for Mc & M Davey, Karapiro.

Farm description

Soil type	Maeroa Ash
Pasture species	88% ryegrass/clover mix, 12% annual ryegrass as part of a maize cropping rotation
Olsen P	30-40
Annual rainfall	1250 mm
Breed	crossbred

Production

Year	Cows	Ha	Production	kgMS/ha	kgMS/cow
2013/14	285	100	120,500	1,250	420
2014/15	296	100	136,500	1,365	460
2015/16	293	100	137,000	1,370	470
2016/17 target	300	100	135,000	1,350	450

Farming philosophy/principles

To run a low cost system as efficiently and sustainably as possible. To achieve this we do the following:

- 3 cow/ha on effective platform.
- All young stock grazed on platform and 19 ha runoff.
- 1 labour unit (myself), relief milker and calf rearer.
- Grow maize on farm to help maximize home grown feed.
- Focus on days in milk, achieving 300 days in milk.
- Big focus on production before Christmas, then OAD during the summer months to extend lactation length and maintain BCS.
- Target < 10% empty rate.
- Do 95% of contracting ourselves: fertiliser, spraying, fencing, cultivation and silage. Only require contractor for maize planting, harvesting and silage baling.
- Ensure all stock excluded from waterways and strategic effluent applications on our rolling topography.

Key points I have learnt along the way

- To enjoy the job and have a good work/life balance is vital. With a sole charge system it is important to make up time off later in the season. Booking relief staff early and OAD milking has helped to recharge and keep focus.
- Do as many jobs as I can myself, especially contracting. Have bought a lot of my own equipment and gear with the savings.
- Grow my young stock well. Having all young stock on farm has been a big success. Lifting conception rates, BCS and average live weight has meant we have been able to achieve more days in milk and therefore more production per first calver.
- Having a really good relationship with my farm owners through respect and hard work has been my greatest achievement. Opportunities have come as a result, from farm manager to sharemilker in the 6 years working for them.

James Courtman



Education/Achievements

Lincoln University Bachelor of Commerce (majoring in farm management and rural valuation).

Winner of the Hauraki/Auckland Dairy Industry Awards equity farmer/sharemilker of the year 2013.

Made Waikato/BOP regional Young Farmers final for 2013 at first attempt.

Completed the Federated Farmers Leader Programme Level 2: Shine under the Spotlight.

Entered into first equity partnership June 2013 25% share of a 90ha, 80,000 kg MS property.

June 2015 traded 90 ha equity partnership property for a 300 ha property currently producing 167,000 kg MS with lots of growth potential.

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Work History

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| 2008-09 | Working on two dairy farms in Northern Victoria, Australia for two New Zealand farmers. |
| 2009-10 | Managing a 400 cow farm for Townshend family on a peat farm at Patetonga. |
| 2010-11 | Managing a 300 cow grass-based demonstration farm in Chile, South America for New Zealand owned company Manuka. |
| 2011-15 | 23% LOSM 880 cows, 260,000 kg MS for Mark, Diane, Richard and Karyn Townshend in Ngatea. |

2015-present Contract milking 550 cows for Crescent Genetics Ltd (Mark and Diane Townshend). Herd provides numerous bulls to AI companies for genetic improvement to the national dairy herd.

Farm description

Soil type Peat very raw
Pasture species Ryegrass clover mix, summer chicory
Olsen P 20-35
Annual rainfall 1050 mm
Breed Jersey

Production

Year	Cows	Ha	Production	kgMS/ha	kgMS/cow
2011/12	860	1200	270,000	1200	14.6
2012/13	880	1049	236,000	1049	14.2
2013/14	900	1089	245,000	1089	13.3
2014/15	880	1089	245,000	1089	13.7
2015/16	550	1156	185,000	1156	12.9

Farming philosophy/principles

To operate a low cost grass based/forage system where we strive to maximise home grown feed both grown and eaten. Use a smaller animal that will harvest and convert this efficiently to MS. By doing this we will drive a high consumption of home grown feed (>12T per ha) and a lower dry matter requirement per kg MS produced (aiming below 12kgs per kg DM consumed)

To invest in land opportunities with properties that represent good value per kg DM of feed they can grow vs \$ per ha of land value or they have the opportunity for lots of upside in capital value in a short space of time 1-2yrs.

Why? I enjoy cows and breeding, growing and harvesting grass.....not so excited by machinery, rust or depreciating assets.

Key points I have learnt along the way

- Decide early in your farming career your preferred method of farming, System 1-5, then go out and work for people who perform well above the average and are willing to develop people and pass on their knowledge. Be prepared to sacrifice some income/equity growth in your early years to develop the best skills for your farming career, use their money to make mistakes not yours.

- Have an end goal but be open to different pathways of getting there.
- Invest with good people you know and trust; pool your resources/capital together with these people.
- Value staff and continually challenge yourself to grow in this area. For many it will be their weakest skillset.
- Focus on trying to developing your weakest skill set or bring other people into your business to cover those areas.
- Save hard, you will have to make sacrifices.