



Ballance Farm Environment Awards

Promoting Sustainable Profitable Farming



Judging in progress on Peter and Pam Kelly's west coast farm.

Peter and Pam Kelly, beef farmers at Omamari Beach, north of Dargaville, have a very impressive farming approach, with a very good meshing of stock policy to land type.

Judges for the Ballance Farm Environment Award commented on the superb overall job being done of farming on sandy country on Northland's west coast.

Physical and financial indicators are among the top 10% of farms, they commented.

The farm achieves nearly 400kg/ha of annual meat production, which is bordering twice the Northland average.

The Kellys purchased the Lands and Survey settlement farm nearly 30 years ago and have tried many farm policies before settling on today's successful formula.

On the 300ha property they have dispensed with breeding sheep to concentrate on intensive beef finishing.

Supplementary policies include calf rearing, young cattle, heifer finishing, lamb finishing and farm forestry.

Stock health is excellent, with an impressively low per head cost.

Habitat improvement and sustainable development have been planned, with dams and ponds, sink holes and pipes, shelter belts, amenity plantings, forest blocks and erosion control.

Erosion risks are actively managed by matching stock classes to soil types, frequently shifting cattle, keeping bulls off erosion-prone areas and planting trees.

Young cattle are confined to steeper, more fragile country and heifers and dairy cows to lighter sandy country in which bulls could incur soil and pasture damage.

When cattle dig holes, Peter renovates with a rotary hoe, followed by new grass.

The judges also commented on the Kellys planning for extended periods away from the farm, touring many places around the world. They leave detailed instructions for the relief farmer, and work in closely with neighbours.

The standard of record-keeping is very high and preparation for the visit of the Ballance Farm Environment Award judges was detailed.

Before widespread adoption of Technosystem, a smaller area was trialled successfully and impressive meat production figures obtained.

Technosystem now occupies 100ha during the winter, loaded in May with 18-month-old bulls.

They are stocked in mobs of about 20 at 1300kg/ha and tightened up as they gain weight on the spring growth. The objective is slaughter weight of 330-340kg carcase weight before the summer dry hits.

Technosystem was also introduced to gain control over kikuyu, which was quickly spreading over the farm. All of the easier country is now under an intensive beef system, which is controlling the kikuyu, and some 40ha was retired into forestry.

The re-vegetation in difficult coastal conditions also drew praise from the judges, who were impressed by the tui and other native birds.