

# High-tech way to good profits

**W**alton dairy farmers David and Raewyn Bennett have an operating profit of \$3714/ha, more than four times the Waikato average of \$780.

The winners of the high input class of the Dairy Business of the Year run 940 Jersey-Friesian cross cows on their 232ha property, 180ha effective with the balance growing maize, lucerne and young stock. They also lease a 40ha runoff 8km away, where they grow 22ha of maize.

They moved on to their farm 13 years ago from Ngarua after farming at Springdale. They bought 90ha at Walton and added a neighbour's property five years ago building a 54-bail rotary with feedpad used for maize silage and other supplements. Their dry matter (DM) harvested at 14.3 tonne/ha is over 2t/ha up on the Waikato average. The average cost of all consumed feed is \$249/t DM.

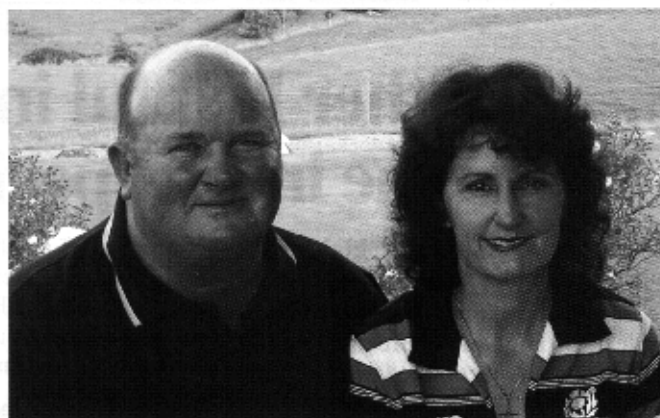
In the 2005/06 season the farm produced 515,820kg of milksolids (MS) meaning 549kg MS/cow or 2866kg MS/milking ha.

They have a split calving of 60 percent in spring and 40 percent in autumn. The herd is being bred towards a crossbred animal, with average weights of 480kg. At average production of 549kg MS/cow they are producing 1.14kg MS/kg liveweight.

Soil has been tested regularly and now, with nutrient budgeting, fertiliser applications have been cut back to 145kg of nitrogen (N)/ha.

None goes on to the 110ha where effluent is sprayed from two storage ponds.

The Bennetts have trialled a range of new technology in partnership with the Waikato Innovation Park (*Dairy Exporter*, May 2006) including a Protrack system, Gallagher weigh scales and a wireless connection at



David and Raewyn Bennett on their Walton farm.

the dairy so data can be entered directly on to the internet.

"We think the more information on cows the better the decision on culling," David said.

With the more recent use of a Resolution mapping system, the area of maize and lucerne grown can be accurately estimated. They

have also trialled 14ha of AR37 Commando ryegrass.

As well as a constant stream of visitors to the property they have recently achieved an even wider audience – visitors to the Innovation Park can get a real-time view of what's happening in the Bennett's dairy by video link. **D**

# Prospering despite the floods

**W**ith the possibility of having 40 percent of their 420ha dairy unit submerged by floodwater at any time of the year, the McErleans, of Foxton, have had to learn to live and prosper with supplements.

Peter, John and Karen McErlean's Poplar Partnership is the lower North Island winner in the Dairy Business of the Year Competition. They have an operating profit/ha of \$2367, compared to the Manawatu-Wairarapa average of \$482/ha and top 10 per cent figure of \$1492/ha. Their operating profit/cow is \$651, compared to the region average of \$169 and top 10 percent of \$468.

Split-calving with a small winter quota, they produce 706,599kg MS through an 80-bail rotary from their 1520-cow Friesian herd (465kg MS/cow, 1682kg MS/ha).

The partnership was formed by the two brothers out of their own farms to boost profitability and efficiency, to combine milking through one dairy, and to alleviate flood problems.



Peter, right, John and Karen McErlean

The unit comprises both family-owned land and 154ha of Moutoa Floodway, a spillway that takes flood peaks from the Manawatu River.

When the floodgates are open – sometimes two to three times a year – much of their pasture can be inundated and their stocking rate can move from 3.62/ha to 9/ha with 80 percent of the herd's diet made up of supplements.

In 2004, they lost 161ha in February, which had to be regressed, and another 40ha in August.

"We get little warning and we've got to put the hours in. During the last flood we didn't get to bcd. We had to get the fences down and stock out and by then it was time to start milking again."

Their major supplements are grass, maize silage and hay, 80 percent of which they grow themselves and use both to fill the gaps caused by flooding and to extend lactation. They also use some palm kernel when the price is right. "If it's cheap we buy it."

Their average was about 20

cents/kg DM, although rising to 22c this year.

At present, without irrigation, they apply fertiliser according to soil monitoring and a nutrient budget while regressing their development blocks.

With a 450kg winter milk quota "to eliminate wastage" they calve 1300 cows from July 20 and another 170 for three weeks from April 1.

The three, all in their 40s, share the farm workload, Karen doing the administration, milk harvesting and calf rearing, John looks after the young stock, doing the run development as well as making supplements, and Peter runs the dairy operation. They have five fulltime staff.

The McErleans' total operating expenses as a percentage of gross revenue are 48 percent compared to the region's average of 72 percent. Their operating profit margin amounted to 28 percent, compared to the average of 11 percent.

Their success has been such that they are now planning another equity partnership in their area. **D**