

Flexibility first

Patrick and Natasha (Tash) O'Shea, Dairy Business of the Year Competition finalists have a cost of production of \$2.16/kg milksolids (MS) well beneath the \$2.58 Waikato average.

However despite last season being their first year of a Kiwitahi farm conversion back to dairying, the Red Sky assessment of their farm business showed their profit margin, feed costs, labour efficiency and "core cost" /cow and /hectare were all in the low risk or excellent categories.

"One setback was because last season's empty rate was 22 percent," Patrick said.

This season the 256-cow herd's empty rate was back to 11 percent. The breeding worth (BW) of the herd is 142 (top 10 percent), performance worth (PW) 147 and ancestry recording 96 percent.

The couple was also surprised when the offer of a 50:50 equity partnership was made by Gordon

and Shirley Townsend, for whom they sharemilked for four years.

Unable to stretch to buying Fonterra shares, they quickly signed with Open Country Cheese to become supplier number 008.

An architectural draftsman trainee for three years before deciding to go farming, Patrick, 35 and Tash had a two-year stint at Tahuna as contract milkers before heading to the Townsend's farm at Tatuani.

Their partnership farm at Kiwitahi, about 12km south of Morrinsville, was being farmed as a drystock unit until they took over and put the 19-sided herringbone dairy back into working order and later added a dairy yard with backing gate and vet yard.

Dock crop

Widespread weed infestation is being controlled through harder grazing, but one paddock continues to grow a "crop" of dock.

Milk production last season



Natasha and Patrick O'Shea with Siobhan, 5, and Teagan, 3, and farm equity partners Gordon and Shirley Townsend.

was 1077kg milksolids (MS)/ha (Waikato average 1173kg) and 315 kg MS/cow (average 358kg). Just 5.3 percent of the cows' diet is offered in the form of grass or maize silage supplements.

Flexibility is a key – adapting and working around problems.

Strengths last season included pasture utilisation calculated at 13.9t dry matter (DM)/ha, just short of the Waikato top 10 percent, and low forage and feed concentrate costs /t DM consumed.

"The plan is to progressively buy out a bigger portion of equity from Gordon and Shirley and so we are saving every coin," said Patrick.

Tash, a former medical receptionist in Hamilton, helps with calving and looks after calf rearing and the farm's business accounts.

She is presently fully occupied with their third daughter Danielle, whose quick birth on February 25 wouldn't wait until after milking and literally left Patrick holding the baby until the midwife arrived. **D**