

Quality the key

A good farm, progressive players and a high-quality manager are the three key ingredients to the success of Railside Farm, 10km north of Oamaru.

The equity partnership is the South Island winner in the Dairy Business of the Year competition.

The 90ha effective farm milked 353 cows at peak in the 2005/06 season to produce 156,886kg of milksolids (MS) or 1743kg MS/ha and 444kg MS/cow.

A total of 230t of palm kernel and 206t of grass silage was fed to achieve an operating profit of \$2436/ha.

The business was initially formed as a partnership between Intelact consultant and veterinarian Helwi Tacoma and his wife, Akky van der Velde, and large-scale dairy farm owners John and Michelle de Veth. Helwi is the de Veth's consultant and when both couples decided to look at opportunities Railside had good quality pastures, reliable

irrigation, an adequate dairy and was well laid out.

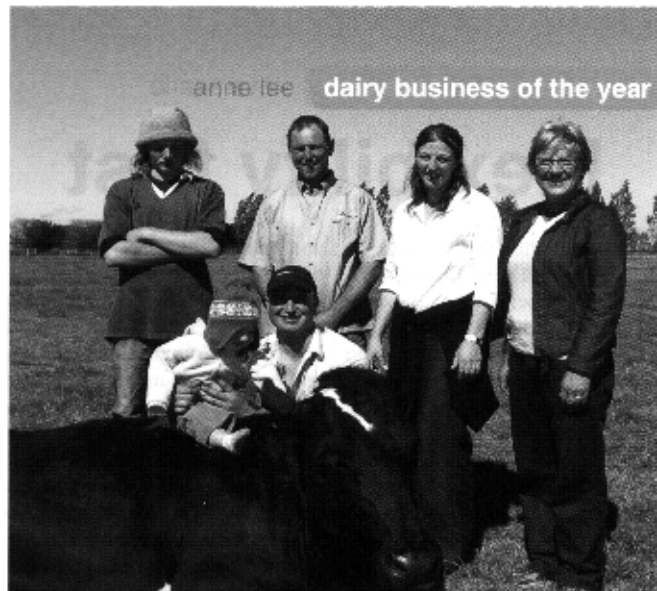
They employed managers Chris and Jenny Stuart as lower-order sharemilkers this season. Railside plans to lift cow numbers to 380 from this season's 360. Production of 170,000kg MS will be targeted, up from this season's 165,000kg.

John favours palm kernel because of its ease of feeding compared with grain, and low capital cost of feeding-out equipment.

Helwi has known of cows consuming up to 12kg of palm kernel and 12kg dry matter (DM) of grass/day.

On Railside, palm kernel consumption peaks at 6kg/cow/day around October. It is fed ad lib to maintain the peak production at over 2kg MS/cow/day.

High quality grass silage is also used to maintain or push out round lengths. Heifers are slowly introduced to it but once the animals are happy to feed on higher quantities



Some of the Railside team: from left dairy assistant Nick Tomsett, Helwi Tacoma, Jenny Stuart, Akky van der Velde and Chris Stuart with Noah, aged 1.

they never need to be retrained, even from season to season.

Railside contracted the supplement at \$210/t this season and, based on megajoules of metabolisable energy (MJ ME), costs 1.8c compared with pasture silage at 2.2c to 2.4c/MJ ME.

Palm kernel is likely to be dearer for 2007/08, meaning some re-

working of the profitability of feeding such high levels.

The farm is irrigated by K Line irrigators using water pumped from the Lower Waitaki scheme's irrigation channel. Already the group is looking to take on a lease block where most cows can be wintered, grass silage made for the milking platform and youngstock reared. **D**