



Dairy lessons for *Super Fund farm*

Stopping stock wastage of bobby calves and increased biosecurity are behind a beef and bull breeding unit developed in Southland. Karen Trebilcock reports.

FarmRight is using lessons learnt on its dairy farms to develop and manage a large beef and bull breeding operation in Southland for the New Zealand Super Fund (NZSF).

The 1222-hectare former sheep and beef block at Kaiwera near Matura was bought in March this year and between then and May underwent \$1.25 million development in fences, stock water and yards. The farm is to work with the NZSF dairy farms in the area, also managed by FarmRight, raising calves for beef that would otherwise have been bobbied and to supply service bulls to the dairy farms.

At a field day at Kaiwera on October 9 FarmRight farm investment manager Tony Cleland said the purpose of the farm was to stop wastage from the dairy units and to increase their biosecurity.

“It’s just not Mycoplasma bovis that has made us think of this, it is Johnes, BVD and every other disease that cattle movements can bring on to a dairy farm,” Cleland said.



Kaiwera farm managers Sam and Renata Woodford with their children Nia (9) and Louis (7).

NZSF has been diversifying its \$900m portfolio into dairy, beef and a vineyards with \$400m of those assets managed by FarmRight.

As well as needing a 7% return on

investments, the NZSF also wanted to be sustainable, ethical and environmentally sound, Cleland said.

More than 300ha of the Kaiwera farm has been retired by FarmRight from grazing

with gullies, steep slopes and all waterways fenced off.

Working with regional council Environment Southland, phosphate and sediment traps have also been incorporated into the farm plan and with the winter cropping area reduced from 110ha (80ha kale and 30ha fodder beet) in 2018 to 70ha of fodder beet planted this spring for next year, nitrogen losses have been reduced.

As well, by using only fodder beet which has a low protein content, nitrogen from urine patches will be reduced even further.

Steeper areas will be planted in trees in future to further reduce nutrient runoff from the top paddocks.

“Between the first of March and the end of May we did 100km of fencing creating 220 paddocks.

“We put in 500 gateways, laid 48km of water pipe, putting troughs in each paddock and put in a yards with drafting and weighing in what used to be the covered sheep yards,” Cleland said.

“We had a lot of people working here on the development and it’s been one of the most exciting projects I’ve worked on.

“It will be a win-win investment for us in many ways.”

With waterways fenced off, stock water is pumped to tanks at the top of the farm from a creek using a solar 4kw, three-phase pump powered by 17 270W solar panels with no battery storage.

On cloudy days the pump doesn’t work

FARM FACTS

- NZSF Kaiwera
- Location: Mataura, Southland
- Area: 1222ha (900ha effective)
- Altitude: 220m-500m
- Contour: rolling to steep
- Cattle wintered: 2800 mix of steers, bulls and heifers
- Calves raised: 1700 (from three weeks)

but enough storage is at the top of the farm to meet stock water demands.

Troughs are in the centre of each four-to-five-hectare paddock with reels and standards set up to divide the paddocks in four over the troughs.

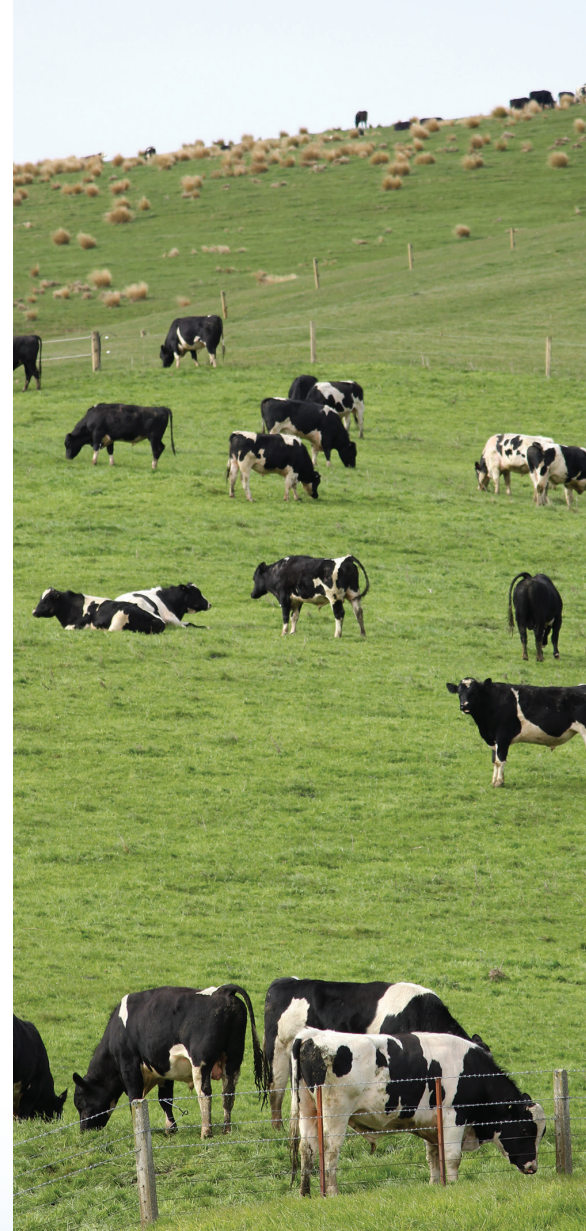
“We’ve done it that way to make shifting the mobs easy. We’ve got 26 mobs of cattle on this farm which is a lot of shifts,” Cleland said.

The farm is managed so every mob is shifted every two days with no back grazing.

Round lengths are determined by the calendar month with the shortest rounds in October through to December at 27 days stretching out to 60 days in May and 70 days in August.

In June and July all 2800 cattle still on the farm will be on crop.

FarmRight consultant Blair Hamill said



Some of the two-year-old bulls on the farm.

Environment Southland land sustainability officer Karl Erikson (left) and FarmRight farm investment manager Tony Cleland talk at the October field day on the farm.



paddocks would be grazed to residuals of 1500kg drymatter (DM)/ha and stock would go into them at 2800kg DM/ha which, dairying had taught them, was the ideal covers for maintaining pasture quality, quantity and persistence of grass species.

“We can do this with the refencing and we should increase growth from the nine tonnes DM/ha/year that has been grown here to 11t DM/ha/year and produce an extra 27,900,000 megajoules of metabolisable energy justifies the cost of this development,” Hamill said.

Stock, including calves following weaning, are weighed every six weeks to make sure the weight gain is reflecting the extra MJ ME being produced on the farm.

Two full-time staff are employed, farm

managers Renata and Sam Woodford, with casuals for wintering and calf rearing. The Woodfords were managing a NZSF runoff at Mossburn in northern Southland for FarmRight before taking on Kaiwera.

Cattle will be fed grass only, with all balage (2200 bales) made on farm.

Wintering will be on fodder beet.

“The aim is to get most of the cattle up to weight before their second winter to lower wintering costs but there will be a percentage we are expecting to have to carry through as two-year-olds,” Cleland said.

Also on the farm are 200 empty dairy heifers from NZSF dairy farms. Of them 170 were inseminated with wagyu semen and 115 were scanned as pregnant due to calf in January and February.


FarmRight and the NZSF are working with Alliance Group to develop new meat markets including marbled beef using the wagyu breed.

The farm has also bought 185 Angus heifers from nearby Mount Linton Station which will be used to produce bulls for mating on the NZSF dairy farms.

“We’ve chosen Mount Linton Angus because of their proven ease of calving.

“We’re going to be using these genetics on our dairy farms to produce beef animals which we can take to weight at Kaiwera instead of sending them on the bobby truck from the dairy farms.”

Bought-in cattle on the farm include 500 26-month-old bulls and 360 26-month-old heifers or steers, as well as 1100 yearling beef bulls and a further 500 yearling beef heifers. Total cattle on the farm in October was 4695.

“While we were fencing the farm in April and May some of these stock were arriving. They certainly didn’t respect electric fences then. We’re hoping by next winter they will,” Cleland said. 

‘We had a lot of people working here on the development and it’s been one of the most exciting projects I’ve worked on.’

A solar water system has been installed to pump stock water up the hill.

