

Farm Managers AGM Report 2019-20

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Kia ora koutou katoa.

The 2019-20 year has been one of the toughest in recent memory. The unseasonably dry conditions across all the regions (*but notably Northland*) has significantly impacted farming practices. New Zealand recorded its 5th hottest January on record for the season and the prolonged dry conditions resulted in well below average rainfall. According to NIWA's New Zealand Drought Index, by the end of summer, meteorological drought was present across much of Northland. This in turn made the fattening of bulls and lambs challenging, with limited feed available and the added pressure on water supply.

Feed stores were also looking considerably reduced coming into winter. Once more, the year's feed stores paid dividends with the bailage totals having increased from last year, the extra was enough to carry us through the dry weather. With the change in weather patterns being predicted to become the new norm, so too will the banking of feed stores to protect us through these unseasonable changes.

The purchase of 250 calves in October significantly helped in that it meant we were able to carry more stock that required smaller amounts of feeding rather than the bigger bulls during this time.

An electric pump was also installed at the Sale Yard's side of the property that markedly increased supply, fill rates and the productivity of staff not having to service it as regularly as the previous diesel.

An ongoing lack of rainfall throughout Autumn resulted in below normal soil moisture for many parts of Northland with some respite being felt mid-March. The small amounts of rainfall gave the chicory crops a much-needed boost and returned the land to a somewhat greener pasture.

All of which was just in time for the Level 4 State of National Emergency that was issued in response to COVID19. The farm adjusting to dealing with drought conditions now had to manage level 4 restrictions, once again adapting the way the farm operates. Staff were well adept at handling such restrictive conditions after dealing with M.Bovis in 2018. Fortunately, the farm was considered an essential service, allowing us to operate with such restrictions and new protocols in place.

With restrictions easing at the end of April and new farm protocol now being implemented, our focus accordingly returned to inhouse matters with the continued efforts to improve

stock record keeping. As we progressed with this task following a stock check overseen by trustee Bill Ashby and independent stock agent Docky Phillips, inaccuracies in stock death numbers were brought to our attention. It highlighted a marked increase, 28 this year compared to last year's low of only 8. With the restructuring of roles, new staff and the lack of an official stock check, *(the last being 2018)* it has been concluded that an incorrect tally had been recorded previously making this year's numbers mistakenly high. The recent update to inhouse protocols for stock tracing using NAIT EID's, suggested quarterly trustee supported stock checks and all new staff being equipped with Farm IQ and its record keeping abilities, will mean that there should no longer be such inconsistencies in stock deaths and stock numbers as a whole. Therefore, after a quarterly routine stock check a beast that is not accounted for as a specific death with NAIT tag association or one that has been sold will be tasked as missing and should be further investigated.

The council funded south side of Patukauwea Wetland Fencing Project reached completion at the end of May in preparation for a wet Winter, that thus far on average has been New Zealand's warmest on record. Yet Kaikohe also recorded its highest 1-day rainfall of 262mm contributing to 28% of the rainfall total amount on record for winter this year. As you can imagine this produced sever flood damage to low lying fences and culverts around the farm. I will admit that flood repairs are no-one's favourite task and can be hard to find motivation, but now thankfully to a hard-working team of good, motivated staff we are making our way through the necessary repairs.

As you can imagine the summer's drought, recent flooding and COVID19 played a huge part in this year's day to day planning. Our focus had to turn to the immediate issues facing us. As a result, our yearly targets for the farm had to be put aside for a short while. Though frustrating at the time, we have shown resilience in the face of these challenges and moving forward into 2021 we will pick up many of last year's objectives. Carrying on with the refencing and repair of all internal and boundary fences, our continued endeavour to reducing our carbon footprint moving away from diesel pumps *(with now only one permanent supply pump remaining on the farm)* and through the fencing of more waterways and our continued replanting efforts.