2008 Deer Farmers' Environmental Awards

Recognising excellence and innovation on sustainable, environmentally responsible deer farms

Primary goals of the Awards:

To recognise innovative, sustainable, and profitable deer farmers.

To recognise that "sustainability is a work in progress".

NZDFA
New Zealand Deer Farmers' Association

DEER INDUSTRY NEW ZEALAND

This year's deer industry environmental awards again attracted significant support from deer farmers who value environmental sustainability as a cornerstone of their business. The NZDFA congratulate all award winners, and indeed all those who entered their properties in this year's competition.

All of us who farm deer are aware of the difficulties and challenges in protecting the environment that is a part of everyday deer farming. We should never underestimate the value of competitions such as this, which, while showcasing the successes in our industry, also act as an inspirational motivator for many of us who read this brochure and attend the winner's field-day.

There is no doubt that today's consumer, both here and abroad, is making purchasing decisions based on increasing environmental awareness. As farmers, we are going to have to do more to demonstrate the environmental sustainability of our businesses. The appointment of a Cervena® Ambassador in conjunction with this year's competition is an example of a step in this direction, and we wish Lyndon and Millie Matthews success in this role.

On behalf of the NZDFA I would like to thank our sponsors and this year's judges, and take this opportunity to congratulate Grant and Andrea Cochrane on their success.

WJ (Bill) Taylor
Executive Committee Chairman, NZDFA

Principal sponsors: Deer Industry New Zealand and Summit Quinphos Ltd.

Totara Hills, Balclutha, South Otago

Grant and Andrea Cochrane
Three-category award winner

"This predominantly deer farm is being exceptionally well managed, with an excellent balance between animal production and the wider farm environment, with development and sustainability objectives and progress clearly developed and prioritised in a formal plan."

The Cochranes are aiming to create an aesthetically pleasing environment.

Established riparian margin at Totara Hills.

- **Premier Award: The Elworthy Environmental Award, sponsored by Deer Industry New Zealand**
- ***Fish and Game New Zealand Award for excellence in riparian management***
- ***NZ Landcare Trust Award for excellence and commitment to sustainable deer farming***

Judges were impressed by "just about everything" on Grant and Andrea Cochrane's Balclutha farm, Totara Hills, which received three of the 2008 Environmental Award prizes.

Riparian: The Cochranes were rewarded for their well-planned, diversely planted riparian zones, with good use of dams to trap sediment (18 ponds/sediment traps installed) and good planting in difficult sites, such as lower paddock areas. Judges praised their "well-established riparian fencing [3.6 km of waterways have been fenced] and planting programme, with an impressive mix of natives, exotics and ponds, and a clear plan and vision of the work required to complete the riparian works on the property".

Landcare: The Cochranes showed a high level of commitment to ensuring environmental sustainability, alongside their production targets. "The owners and manager have a strong focus on protecting the soils, water quality and biodiversity of the property, which optimises the strengths of the property and ensures long term sustainability." Seventy hectares of native bush has been fenced off on the hill country.

Judges praised the good stock performance at Totara Hills, and the Cochranes' use of well-researched genetics to meet their production objectives.

Initiative was shown by the Cochranes in marketing their venison, both locally at the Otago Farmers' Market, and internationally, through new export ventures.

The Cochranes' passion for the deer industry, their energy and good relationship with highly skilled and respected farm manager Adam Whaanga were important factors in their success.

To continue improving their winning property, the Cochranes will closely monitor water quality, before, during and after self feeding from their silage area, to avoid soil erosion and run off in this area.

Key objectives at Totara Hills:

- maintain and improve **water quality**
- protect existing **native bush**
- provide **shelter** for stock in all paddocks
- create an **aesthetically pleasing** environment.
- achieve the above in the most **timely** manner whilst working within the confines of **economic sustainability** for the farm.

Sustainability strategies at Totara Hills include:

- stocking densities appropriate to land type and welfare needs, e.g. low-density grazing during fawning; cattle grazed at low densities to minimise pugging
- integrated grazing to lower need for weed spraying and reduce worm burdens
- velvet stag grazing managed to minimise fighting, pacing etc
- deer kept in age group mobs to reduce stress
- fawns tagged/drenched three weeks before weaning, to reduce stress, pacing
- self-feed silage pad to reduce damage to wider area and reduce environmental cost of making baleage and feeding out
- cropping to help paddocks recover from poor soil structure, compaction etc; crops kept away from waterways, to minimise sediment runoff
- N use reduced – now used strategically
- nutrient budgeting – has seen fertiliser use drop by 50 percent
- double-fencing waterways with riparian plantings and grass buffer
- sediment traps – have reduced *E. coli* and P in water.

Principal sponsors: Deer Industry New Zealand and Summit Quinphos Ltd.

Duncan and Company Award for excellence, innovation and vision in a demanding environment

Lyndon and Millie Matthews

"Outstanding innovation developing a pasture and management production system in a challenging climate, while not subjecting land and resources to unsustainable risk."

Puketira Deer, Waikari, North Canterbury

Millie and Lyndon Matthews.

This couple's standout quality was "sheer enthusiasm and enjoyment of their property and management achievements," according to the judges. The Matthews use a simple production system that accepts climate challenges as part of the production equation, and have implemented pasture and management solutions in tune with the productivity and seasonal drivers of deer and sheep production, while not subjecting land and resources to unsustainable risk.

Judges were especially impressed by:

- Partnership philosophy
- Balanced vision and planning
- Deer performance and production, planning and setting and achieving production targets using feed and genetics in balance to work within the climatic extremes
- Holistic overview of entire operation and challenge of climate
- Lateral view of land capability, land limitations and deer production demands
- Balance in lifestyle and farm demands and high community values
- Moisture capture and use of non-traditional species
- Knowledge of soils and systems that work in their environment
- Stock health and clean pastures.

Next steps – key decision points for sustainable management:

- Reliance on arrival of rainfall at key times
- Ability to feed through lactation
- Cost of maintaining the system
- Importance of fawn cover in some areas in balance with pasture management
- Further development and retirement of wetland areas
- Protection and planting of other ephemeral areas to assist filtration and runoff
- Amenity planting in sensitive areas and promotion of biodiversity.

Firstlight Foods Ltd Award for total commitment to sustainability: environmental, farm and social

Mike and Chris Stephens

"A thinking couple's lifetime of planning and action, profitable farming, landscape enhancement and commitment to the next generation."

Woodend Farm, Balclutha, South Otago

Mike and Chris Stephens received this all-round award for their Balclutha farm, Woodend.

Shared values and long-term planning between two generations – the Stephens' and farm manager, Chris Bunting – have contributed to the betterment of the farm. Woodend has a long history of careful, considered development, with sustainability and property enhancement in mind.

Key to their approach is the "obvious dialogue between Mike and Chris in management and decision making," the judges said.

Judges described the farm as a varied property, with an excellent mix of stock, protected bush and plantations, protected waterways and commitment to a balance of native and exotic plantings.

The Stephens' integration of farm forestry into their farming system was praised by judges. Adult stock are wintered under widely spaced trees, leaving the balance of good grazing for young stock .

The judges were impressed by the "balance of life" aspect of Woodend, seen in the Stephens' concern for waterways, action taken to improve the environment, and also commitment to stock health and productivity. This idea carries over into the lives of the farmers, who plan carefully to ensure a good work-life balance.

Adult stock are wintered under the widely spaced trees. (Inset) Mike Stephens (right) and farm manager Chris Bunting.

Mike has further shown his commitment to the industry through Otago NZDFA Branch work and his past work as a deer farming tutor and farm manager at Telford Rural Polytechnic.

In the spirit of their commitment to ongoing improvement, Mike and Chris are looking to develop more dams on their property, continue to fence out sensitive areas, and add to existing tree planting.

NZDFA Award: Highly Commended for commitment to continued excellence

Hamish and Anna McKay

Parkhurst Farm, Geraldine, South Canterbury

At Parkhurst farm there was an excellent working relationship between past and present owners, providing continuity in the drive for sustainability. The McKays were commended for their amenity and shelter planting, integrated with a passion to produce a top deer performance unit in tune with both environmental and productivity goals.

Judges were especially impressed by:

- Planning and implementation of goals and objectives in three short years.
- Research on all aspects of production and property care and willingness to try new things
- Established trees and shelter
- Self-feed silage pit
- Balance of livestock and complementary uses
- Use of trees and wooded areas for fawning and the planned use of council forestry
- Fencing and planting of stony piles
- Direct drilling
- Calculated use of fertiliser
- Fencing of water courses
- Use of quality genetics to improve efficiency
- Self sufficiency in feed supply and harvest
- Feeding well.

Next steps – key decision points for sustainable management:

- Soil care, maintaining the quality and annual needs of trees for shelter/forestry and amenity
- Protecting nearby water race from any runoff from the silage pit
- Document planning and operations through a written farm plan and soil map
- Monitoring fawn weights and other deer production data
- Knowledge of where stream runs to as part of riparian management programme
- Fencing and planting remaining native bush areas
- Utilising local nurseryman to propagate trees through cuttings and local seed collection
- Protecting trees to add value.

Summing up

For the 2008 awards, a record number of eight entrants set universally high standards in their delivery of planned, innovative and committed sustainability programmes, encompassing the complete range of riparian, shelter, shade and amenity plantings and soil and landscape management.

While some of the properties were challenged by drought and demanding environments, all demonstrated fine examples of deer and other livestock management systems benefiting from commitment to sustainability programmes, while operating at high levels of return from deer enterprises.

All entrants showed strong social commitment to their industry and community, leaving the judging panel very impressed.

Major features and programmes will be displayed and discussed at field days on the winning properties, to be held later this year in association with the award sponsors.

Practical tips from this year's judging comments:

It's not all about fencing and planting (although that's a big part of it). Farming sustainably requires:

- Good communication, understanding and a shared vision – between owner and manager, partners, generations, former and new owners.
- Balance: good work-life balance is as important in sustainable farming as it is for stressed city workers. Get that right and you'll be better placed to benefit your farm.
- A well thought-out and documented plan, shared with others. Environmental improvements can take years. Success requires a good plan and willingness to adapt to changing conditions (e.g., climatic, economic challenges).
- Willingness to think outside the square, e.g. use of non-traditional pasture species such as bromes for dry areas, biological controls for weeds like gorse, direct drilling.
- A good understanding of your animals' social behaviours and welfare needs, e.g., use stock class separation or integration as appropriate.
- Willingness to invest in good genetics to advance economic goals and free up resources.
- Get to know the ecosystem on your land before making big changes – identify the at-risk areas; do a biodiversity survey and identify how you'd like to enhance values.
- Use soil mapping, nutrient budgeting and a targeted fertiliser approach.

2008 Awards judging team

Nicola McGrouther, Otago Regional Council
Janet Gregory, Landcare Trust
Murray Neutze, 2006 winner
Julia Laming, Environment Canterbury
Ken Drew, Judge, Ballance Farm Environment Awards
Bruce Moynihan, Otago Regional Council
Lindsay Fung, DINZ
Tim Aitken, NZDFA
Ian Millner, Hawke's Bay Regional Council
Tony Pearse, DINZ

Further information

The Deer Farmers' Environmental Awards are part of the deer industry's environmental awareness programme, and help with the dissemination of practical knowledge. The awards entrants demonstrate the principles found in the industry's major information resource on environmental matters: *The New Zealand Deer Farmers' Landcare Manual*, published in 2004. For further information on the awards or the Landcare Manual, contact: Tony Pearse, DINZ Producer Manager, 04 471 6118 or 021 719 038, tony.pearse@deernz.org

Principal sponsors: Deer Industry New Zealand and Summit Quinphos Ltd.