

NEW APPROACH TO DROUGHT PASTURES

A change in managing dry northerly faces has gone against the grain of everything Puketapu farmer Phil Alexander's been taught about pasture management. And it's working.

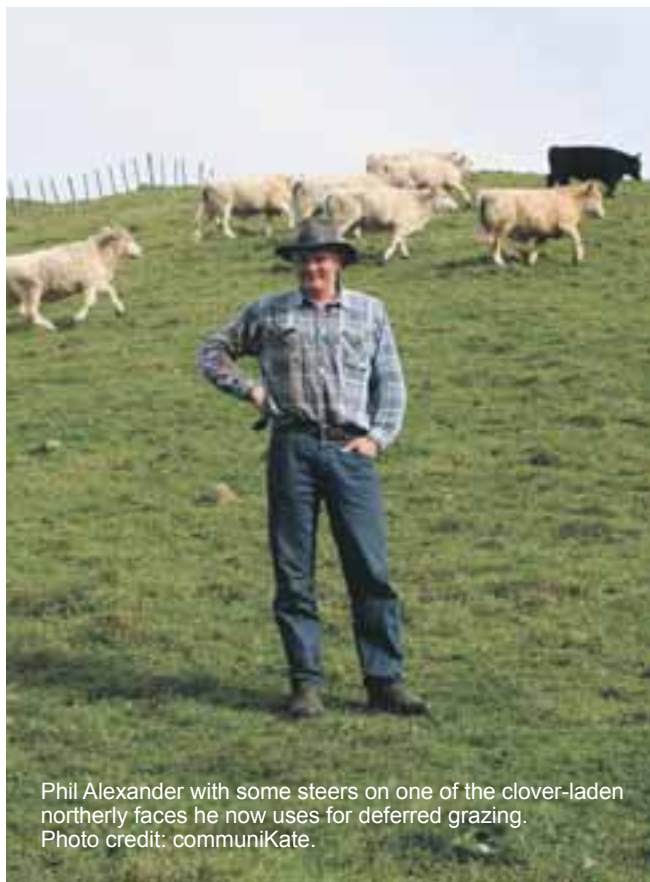
Suddenly his northerly faces, that have always been the barometer of summer for locals, are producing quality feed full of clover. The new mindset is leaving pasture longer to recuperate, resulting in longer residuals, deeper roots and more seeds - a drought message being promoted by Council's land management team.

Four years ago, Phil and Louise Alexander aspect-fenced all of the north and north-western faces, accounting for about a quarter of the 440ha farm, with stock removed from mid-October.

"If you close the gate at the right time you can harvest two to three tonne a hectare off those faces when you do graze them, whether that's through winter or autumn."

It has given the pasture a chance to compete with ratstail - and it's winning. The increased clover is one key to the improved performance off those faces. The Alexanders have managed to farm through the drought with a full complement of stock, although 100 cows have been grazed off.

A lot of what goes on below the soil surface (organic matter, deeper root systems and particularly the ability of the soil to absorb and retain moisture) is affecting our ability to cope with dry summers... or not.



Phil Alexander with some steers on one of the clover-laden northerly faces he now uses for deferred grazing. Photo credit: communiKate.



Down to earth: Diane Mathers from the Sustainable Farming Fund and MAF's Gillian Mangin during a regular visit to talk with the farmers involved with the Huatokitoki project. Photo credit: communiKate.

HUATOKITOKI SFF PROJECT UNDERWAY

A Sustainable Farming Fund (SFF) project is underway within the 12,000 hectare catchment of Wallingford's Huatokitoki Stream.

The project aims to help the community evaluate and redesign aspects of their farming systems to become more resilient.

"It's an area that has been smacked by drought in the past three seasons and under climate change scenarios we expect it to get drier. The project includes many bona fide hill country farms, some with flat and some with rolling, covering a range of land types and farming systems, so it will be very useful," says Council land management advisor Ian Millner.

Community meetings have recently started for the project, which has secured \$455,000 from SFF, as well as other funding from agencies such as the Hawke's Bay Regional Council.

SFF project advisor Diane Mathers says the Huatokitoki project fits well with the SFF ethos because it's working proactively with farmers to improve the sustainability of their businesses and the good relationship between MAF and the Regional Council is one of its strengths.

"The work programme is being driven by farmers' needs - what they say their needs are. It's being driven from the ground up."

ON THE HORIZON - TREATY SETTLEMENTS



It's often easiest to focus just on the day-to-day management of a business particularly when that business is dependent on natural resources and nature itself in the form of our climate. Sometimes we need to look up and see what's coming for our region in the short-medium term. This is a chance to spend a few minutes doing just that...

A number of Treaty settlements are on the table in Hawke's Bay and the settlement process is gathering pace. The Crown is in formal negotiations with Ngati Pahauwera (Mohaka, Waihou, Waikare) at the moment. Five other large natural groupings of iwi in Hawke's Bay are preparing to begin their settlement discussions. These groups cover the remaining areas of Hawke's Bay.

One of the key themes emerging from formal and informal discussions with them all is their passion for natural resources and a strong desire to be involved directly in resource management decision making.

The Regional Council, on behalf of the community, will have to make some significant decisions around how iwi involvement in decision-making can be aligned with ours.

From Council's point of view, the Treaty settlement process is not about ownership of the natural resources but about how the common goals and aspirations of iwi and the wider Hawke's Bay community - for a clean, healthy and economically strong environment - can be best delivered.

PEST PLANTS

Burdock, Bathurst bur, and Horehound are bothering some landowners. These plant pests are often ignored by landowners until it is too late and hard burrs have been formed. These seed-head burrs attach themselves to animals (or people's clothes) and spread to uninfested sites. The burrs are difficult to remove so significantly reduce wool value, clog horse tails and manes, and mat dog hair.

Large areas of pasture can be smothered by these plants particularly in summer when feed is needed the most. In cultivated land, infestations of Bathurst bur can swamp crops.

Control: grub isolated plants, and spray large infestations with suitable herbicides.



Burdock (*Arctium minus*). A strong growing perennial, up to two metres, producing 2cm spherical burrs.



Bathurst burr (*Xanthium spinosum*). Compact, one metre, hard burrs have many hooked spines, stems have groups of three-pronged yellow spines at the base of each leaf or branch.



Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*). A bushy perennial, up to 50cm, small white flowers, dry flower heads adhere to wool, fur and clothing.