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Farm Plan Stories

Burke Olsen on his farm near Argyll.



The Olsens

The right people with the right advice helped Argyll farmer Burke Olsen prepare his Farm Environment Management Plan.

“It’s great grass-growing country - really good dirt. But it’s summer dry and we farm accordingly.”

Burke and Jay Olsen and Burke’s parents Peter and Lois farm 300ha near Argyll and lease a neighbouring 68ha block.

They run 1,200 ewes including a homebred, purebred Suffolk flock, with everything going to terminal sire. They calve 80 Titiokura Hereford Stud cows plus replacements. Yearling bulls are sold into the dairy industry. One hundred 100kg Friesian calves are bought annually, with 60% sold as yearlings. The balance are carried through to kill, timed for the season and the market.

The farm is fertile, rolling limestone country. The Olsens grow 25-30ha of rape crops for the cattle with a couple of paddocks of grazing lucerne on hill country to give more dry-season options.

Part of the property is in the Papanui Stream catchment, a high priority under the Regional Council’s Tukituki Plan. Burke got on to things early and had his farm plan completed a year ahead of the due date.

There was one particular area he was worried about, a 30m strip where stock access the creek for water on a steep hill paddock.

“But Warwick Hesketh from the regional council talked me through keeping lower stock unit numbers in that paddock and looking at ways to mitigate issues there in the future.

When he left that day there was a huge weight lifted off my shoulders because I realised the farm would stand up to the scrutiny of a farm environment management plan.”

The plan was done by Colin Tyler and Sarah Sexton from Ravensdown.

“It was a simple process with no surprises. A lot of fencing had already been done and we had no issues with our limits because we were already trying to be sustainable with our cropping programmes and fertiliser.

We graze a lot of our steeper faces and gorge waterways only with sheep, but saying that, there was a little strip of creek I hadn’t even thought of being an issue that they brought to my attention.

“The plan is another cost, but at the end of the day, it also makes us more aware of how we improve the environment. It’s a tricky one. Four grand is four grand, with no direct return. But it is helping us improve the land and make things more aesthetically appealing as well.”

Ravensdown made the process easy, but Burke says Warwick Hesketh’s knowledge was the catalyst for his successful FEMP process.

“He changed my whole mind set from it being a major to being totally doable. Not enjoyable as such, but not a hard thing to do.”

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