

Watch out for your neighbours

The milder weather over the last three weeks has certainly been most welcome, especially now that calving and lambing are underway in most districts.



For some, spring has arrived but many are still in the no growth zone, with feed levels on most farms still very tight, particularly for cattle. This winter has been a challenge, but most farmers have handled the situation well, although unfortunately some have not taken the steps needed for this type of season.

It is important to remember that we all need to take time to communicate with our neighbours and friends to see how they are coping this season. The coming months are going to be very difficult financially for many, so good communication is vital. David Scott, at the East Coast Rural Support Trust, offers free, independent and confidential advice to

farmers to help them work through situations like we are currently experiencing. Please do not hesitate to contact David on 868 4840 if you have any concerns.

Enthusiastic and proud to be the Gisborne/Wairoa provincial president is the best way to describe how I felt last week once I had the chance to think about how successful our three 'step up and become an agricultural leader' meetings went in Ruatoria, Gisborne and Wairoa.

It was great to have so many farmers turn up (about 45) and to hear that people are willing to take up the challenge of becoming a bit more involved. The fact that our province has set up three electronic branches is definitely a keen lure for some. To be able to have your say at a time of your own choosing is the perfect solution for some of us.

Gisborne/Wairoa province now has three electronic branches set up and two people have come forward willing to chair these. They are:

- Agnes Walker, who farms at Koura Station in Ruatoria.
- Jo Alexander, who farms in Wairoa.
- I am more than willing to chair the Gisborne group until someone else steps forward.
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Some of our Ruatoria & Wairoa pod members.

If you want to become part of our electronic branch, please get in touch with me. The province is keen to have you on board.

I wish you all a well deserved and favourable spring.

**Hamish Cave -
Gisborne/Wairoa President**



Feed shortage in Wairoa

Most of Wairoa is desperately short of feed, with the worst affected areas being the farms hit by last summer's drought. Farmers are assessing livestock needs on a day-to-day basis and feeding hay and silage where possible.

The recent rain was needed despite being hard on new born lambs. It has given the feeling that spring is close by and it also had the welcome effect of washing away some of the copious quantities of pine pollen.

On the cropping front, there is no news yet on the maize price for this season and it is only a few weeks before spraying off starts so growers are looking at their options.

How much grain will be imported this year in favour of local product?



Cedenco's recent meeting with growers in Wairoa revealed a drop of \$20/tonne for sweet corn and less area required.

It is disappointing the Wairoa District Council has opted not to undertake some much needed traction seal work, but they will be meeting with stakeholders to discuss rural roading options.

We have had good support from farmers and their partners who were invited to join our new online group or pod.

The pod, made up of about eight members under the guidance of a pod leader, will keep in touch through an online chat room. This should make communication relatively easy once it is up and running and will give me good feedback on what is happening in the Wairoa district.

John Ross - Wairoa Chair

The People's Times

Project manager Rebekah Brumwell says she is delighted that several Federated Farmers groups are now using the People's Communities service to help farmers use internet chat rooms and stay in touch. This provides a forum for the discussion of local, regional and national issues.

"This is exactly the kind of grassroots organisation we had in mind when the People's Times was set up. Many farmers and other rural residents have to drive long distances to get together and the nature of farming means it's not always practical to get away for meetings. At the same time, the farming community face a range of pressing issues around the economy, business compliance, district planning and the environment, to name just a few. It makes sense to discuss and respond to these as a group," says Rebekah.

"The People's Communities service offers Federated Farmers' members the opportunity to set up their own private, autonomous spaces online where they can share information, news and views and participate in discussions 24/7, without leaving the farm."

Services include:

The People's Times (News) – instantly publish original articles and pictures to your online newspaper, or share stories and videos from other websites

People's Communities – join a network of simple, ad-free, community 'hubs'. As well as displaying contact details and general information about your group, each hub has easy-to-use tools built in (members can publish blogs and articles, post photos and notices, store and share files or chat in private forums). Plus anyone can search communities to find local groups.

People's Notice board – browse, search, post and subscribe to notices across a range of community-oriented categories.

All services are free, it only takes a few minutes to register and you don't need any special skills or software.

For more information, visit www.peopletimes.org.nz or contact Rebekah Brumwell at info@peopletimes.org.nz, or phone: 04 382 8711 (we can call you back if you're outside Wellington).



Ali Undorf-Lay and Rebekah Brumwell get together to discuss pods.

No such thing as a free lunch

A couple of weeks ago we published the following article in the Friday Flash:

In a year when East Coast farmers were desperately de-stocking to combat difficult drought conditions the last thing they needed were uninvited guests – ones they are legally unable to ask to leave at that!!

Paradise duck numbers on one particular property were reaching around 2000 to 3000 in February with numbers now around 500 to 600 since March. That's a heck of a lot of scarce grass being eaten by birds not sheep. With Fish & Game's attention proving difficult to get, one innovative East Coast farmer has asked them to put their money where their birds mouths are, sending them an invoice for grazing formulated on an average daily duck population over the last four months. With escalating Canada geese and paradise duck numbers causing significant problems for farmers around the country, perhaps it's time for other farmers to follow this lead.

We thought members would be interested to know the coverage triggered contact



from the Dominion and subsequently, Fish & Game. Unfortunately a cheque wasn't in the mail, but at least the previously ignored lines of communication were forced open and a further opportunity to educate the organisation was grasped with both hands by our East Coast farmer.

Time will tell whether their assurances that something will be done are hollow or not, but we can assure you that paradise duck and Canada geese will continue to be in our sights until the pressure is no longer needed. If you want to know more about this story or want to send Hook and Bullet a similar message then please contact Hilary Walker on 0800 327 646 or hwalker@fedfarm.org.nz

Temperate check - overlay 3A land

It has been a year since the Gisborne District Council plan to regulate land use on the worst eroding land in the region has been in place. Whilst not all of you will have Overlay 3A land (the worst eroding) identified on your property, many will be aware of friends, family and neighbours that do. The regulation requires some form of effective tree cover be established on the land identified as Overlay 3A. To show how this will be achieved all affected landowners will need to have 'works plans' certified before July 2011.



Federated Farmers want to know what experiences you are having out there with regards to the works plans e.g.

1. Have you done them yet? If not, why?
2. Are the 'effective tree cover' treatment options workable for you and your farm management plans?
3. Have you utilised the East Coast Forestry Project funds? If not, why?
4. Has MAF been actively involved? If so, how did you feel about that?
5. How have you found the council staff?

Hamish and I are keen to have a meeting with council to discuss the process and we will make sure any feedback provided is brought to their attention. You can provide feedback either by phoning me, Hilary Walker, on 0800 327 646 or via Hamish's POD forum (refer to Hamish's article on the front page)..



INVESTING IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

The Rural Communities Trust recognises that living in a rural community can also mean facing barriers to education, health and other services.

Each year the Rural Communities Trust approves grants to individuals, families and community groups with a diverse range of needs who live in rural areas.

WE WANT TO HELP YOU!

Find out more about our funding criteria, grant applications or how to support our work by visiting

www.ruralcommunitiestrust.org.nz
or phone 0800 327 646

Next funding round closes
31 October 2009

Lambing & calving well underway

As this goes to print, many farms will be in the middle of lambing and calving. A warm wet spring would be most welcome after previous slow difficult seasons. Sheep and especially cattle have been under pressure for a considerable length of time, even with reduced slicking rates. Many farmers will have limited ability to convert current high prices into cash. (Will these prices last, given market pressure margins and exchange rates?)



Hamish and I attended a recent Gisborne Hill Country Sheep and Beef Model Industry meeting. These are run by MAF and bring together various groups to try and accurately

predict production trends, prices and expenses. Lyall Evans, a local accountant, encouraged farmers to work closely with their tax advisors. Drought relief measures can give substantial tax mitigation on drought driven capital sales.

A banker present at the meeting warned of the temptation to spend unwisely when you are cash rich. Banks are shifting their emphasis from equity to cash flow and profits.

It appears Wool Partners and Elders will not be merging in the immediate future. Having two big players does give some transparency of price through on share competition.

The highly regarded New Zealand wool clip faces a number of threats. Low pricing, new fat lamb breeds, widespread use of raddles and labour costs to name just a few. Please keep wool preparation to a good standard, as the clip, once degraded, will be much more difficult to market.

By now the results of the contentious Meat and Wool New Zealand referendum vote will be in. It's now a matter of where to from here.

Len Hall - Gisborne/Wairoa, Meat & Fibre Chair

More emotion than fact in driving age debate

The Government's release of a discussion document on road safety has reignited the debate over raising the driving age. Given the problems posed by the boy racer phenomenon (a potent mix of alcohol, high-powered cars and youth), the desire for public debate is understandable.

Decisions however, need to be based on facts, not emotion.

Fact: it's not age that's the crucial factor in determining a driver's propensity to have an accident, it's how much experience they've had behind the wheel.

Statistics show that newly unsupervised drivers (i.e. drivers who have just moved from their learner to restricted license) are the most accident prone group, regardless of how old they are. If you look at countries with higher driving ages, there is still a spike in accidents where people begin driving alone, they're just older. If we were to increase the driving age here in New Zealand we would simply be shifting the problem to an older age bracket.

Federated Farmers has thus opposed any suggestion of increasing the driving age. We did however, support the previous Government's road safety initiative to increase the length of time a learner license must be held from six to 12 months. We believe that more time behind the wheel supervised by an experienced driver will lead to fewer crashes



when driving unsupervised on a restricted license.

Increasing the driving age would curtail the freedoms of young people in rural areas. It's too far to bike or walk and there are no buses or public transport systems. It would mean relying on mum or dad to drive teenagers to rugby or netball practice or to after school jobs and other activities, and farming families are pretty pressed for time during some parts of the year.

Young adults in rural areas have also had exposure to vehicles from an early age and tend to be more competent drivers as a result. So if the driving age was raised, we would hope that some sort of exemption could be negotiated.

How would rural communities be affected if the driving age was raised? We're keen to hear your view. So either join our pod discussion or get in touch with William McGimpsy at Federated Farmers in Wellington (0800 327 646).

Encouraging young farmers to step-up



Hilary Walker, Hamish Cave & Bruce Wills

Bruce Wills, Federated Farmers Meat & Fibre chair and Hilary Walker, our local policy advisor, visited the province to help us shoulder tap a group of young farmers that we are keen to see get more involved in local farming issues.

At the meetings, Bruce was able to talk about his experience with national farm lobby work, while Hilary drew a pretty scary picture of what the council's local resource management documents could look like with no farmer input.

The Gisborne/Wairoa provincial executive worked hard to identify younger farmers in our region to invite to these meetings. We have made a list of people that we hope will enjoy the challenge of stepping up in to agricultural leadership.

Our list has by no means made an exclusive group so if you, or someone you know, would enjoy getting more involved, please ring me or Ali Undorf-Lay (0800 327 646). We'd love to hear from you.

Hamish Cave - Gisborne/Wairoa President

STOP PRESS: FOUR PLACES LEFT

There are only a few places left on the Federated Farmers level two leadership course, 'Shining Under the Spot Light'. It would be great if some of our members took up this opportunity (places will fill quickly, though), so if you are interested in attending, get in quick.

This course is ideal for members who are currently active in community leadership roles and are looking to reboot their skills, increase their level of spontaneity and smarten up their public speaking. The two day course is held in Wellington and is guaranteed to be interactive, challenging and fun.

Fully funded by Agmardt these courses are valued at \$1000. Federated Farmers will pay your flights, accommodation, food and course costs. Please ring me (Hamish 07 863 9861) or Ali Undorf-Lay (0800 327 646) if you are interested.

Policy vaccine low key but effective

A difficult aspect of advocating for farmers is that they're often too busy to realise you're doing it. Like the anti virus software on a computer, good advocacy means picking up on the dangers and addressing them before they become actual threats. Not many folk even think of their virus software each time



they successfully use the internet, but they're sure to curse it if it fails. New Zealand's strongest farming advocate, Federated Farmers, can also suffer in the silence that greets quietly achieved successes, but the everyday monitoring of policy – local and national – is just as essential.

And that is no easy task. Just at the local level, there is an astonishing amount of regulation and policy pouring out of councils every day. The Federation's local policy staff add value to the business of farming by monitoring national policy statements, regional policy statements, long term community council plans, district plans, air plans, water plans, soil plans, one plans and pest management strategies, allowing members to get on with farming secure in the knowledge that someone has their back.



The successes are quietly achieved because when we're most effective, we can actually stop or temper the development of bad policy so the rural community need never be aware of it or have to deal with it. The often frustrating and time consuming commitment that this level of involvement requires is a testament of how seriously the Federation takes its responsibility to its members. The fact is the development of those statutory policies and plans will continue regardless of whether there are any farmers in the room or not.

Being involved is crucial. Federated Farmers adds the farmer viewpoint to any local process as well as building and maintaining

relationships with external groups. Rightly or wrongly, there are numerous environmental groups like Forest and Bird, Fish & Game (and DoC) who have equal or more opportunity to influence the policies and consents affecting landowners. The better all parties understand farmers, the better the business environment.

The danger in all of this is becoming complacent. Resource management policy is far from static and like computer viruses, policy threats continually change their appearance as new case law develops, new planning graduates take up positions in council and new direction is provided by central government. In recent years, resource management legislation has largely ignored property rights. Federated Farmers is working very hard to ensure the National-led Government addresses the issue of property rights in the current RMA reforms.



At the recent National Conference, Don Nicolson succinctly likened the Federation's work as helping farmers manage substantial off-farm risks. Just as you have a duty to keep other internet users like friends in your inbox safe from passing on computer viruses, farmers have a custodial duty to keep an eye on the regulation rolling across their farm. Norton takes care of one of those duties for you and Federated Farmers takes care of the other.

**Hilary Walker -
Federated Farmers of NZ,
Policy Advisor**



Federated Farmers Farmday 2010

is set down for
SUNDAY, 28 MARCH

Please mark this date in your diaries as we would appreciate members support.



Federated Farmers members have the opportunity to influence the safety, visibility and comfort of children waiting on local bus routes thanks to an exciting new initiative.

Every year, farm building company Totalspan donates bus shelters to rural communities through their Undercover Kids Programme. This year, with the support of Federated Farmers, they are extending Undercover Kids to include three additional shelters.

Federated Farmers members (who can nominate local bus routes or schools they believe would benefit) will determine the location of these shelters. Nominations close on October 31st, and application forms can be downloaded from fedfarm.org.nz/ourwork/undercoverkids

Each of these new shelters will have a plaque acknowledging Federated Farmers' involvement.



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