

# ‘Doing things differently’ is working



Mick O'Connor – wanted to be in top six but won.

## Karen Trebilcock

ak.trebilcock@xtra.co.nz

Contract milker Mick O'Connor was hoping to make it into the top six in the Canterbury/North Otago farm manager of the year competition. But he won it on his first time entering to gain more knowledge and improve his business while pushing outside his comfort zone.

Since February last year, the 31-year-old has been milking 840 mainly crossbred cows on 255ha effective at Rakaia for Dairy Holdings with a staff of four. Production was budgeted at 1118kg milksolids (MS)/ha for this season but is on track to reach 1250kg MS/ha.

“We’re doing things differently to how they’ve been done in the past and it seems to be working,” he said.

Next year the aim is to increase cow numbers by 60 to push production even higher.

“As a team, we have put massive amounts of work

into getting the farm to a presentable level and this is something we believe is a strength. I take great heart knowing that every staff member feels a sense of pride in the farm.”

Cows are milked through a 48-aside herringbone with staff rostered so they milk only once a day “which everyone seems to like”.

Five Roto-Rainers provide irrigation in the traditionally dry area.

With his fiancée Kirsten Wyatt, who works at Westpac, he’s keen to either go 50:50 sharemilking or enter an equity partnership in the future.

“50:50 jobs are hard to find at the moment so we’ll see what happens.”

Although she works off-farm during the day, Kirsten helps out on the farm in the weekends and keeps an eye on the couple’s farming finances as they increase their asset base.

Dairy Holdings allow staff to buy any calves once 25%

replacements are born on farm and Mick is taking advantage of the agreement, as well as buying in extra animals and leasing them back into the Dairy Holdings herd.

“It’s allowing us to grow our asset base which is what we need to do if we want to progress further in the industry.”

O’Connor grew up on a sheep and cropping farm originally owned by his parents and always knew he wanted to be a farmer.

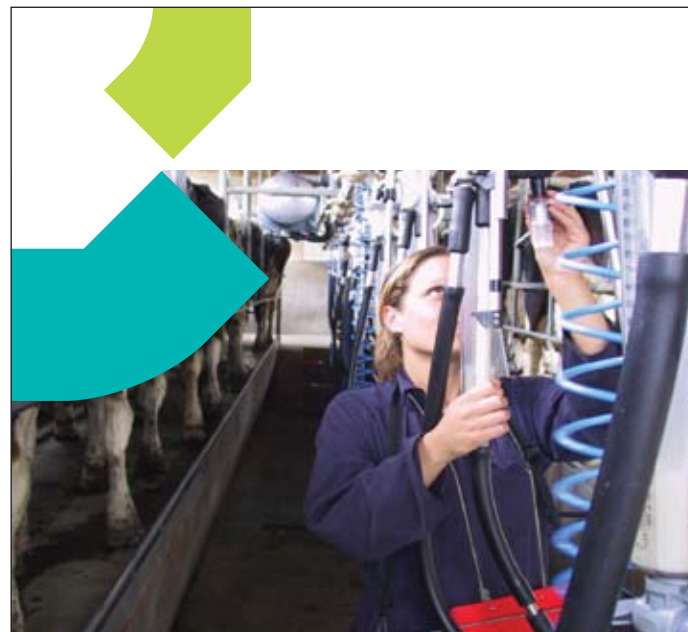
“I watched a lot of my mates go and work on big sheep stations,” he said, “but the money is not there. There are guys managing sheep farms

who are only getting paid \$40,000. So unless you’re going to be given a farm by your parents ... dairying was the only way to go.”

He started out by offering to work for nothing for two weeks on a dairy farm to see if he liked it, and hasn’t looked back.

Now his short term goal is to achieve budget and be the top financially productive farm/ha within Dairy Holdings. His ultimate goal is farm ownership.

Rakaia farm manager Athol New was second and third place went to Ashburton farm managers Jason and Paula Strawbridge.



## THE BEST FARMERS MAKE THEIR OWN DECISIONS.

See what’s really going on and make the right decisions for your business with CRV Ambreed’s herd testing and recording.

[www.crv4all.co.nz](http://www.crv4all.co.nz)

BETTER COWS | BETTER LIFE



Make farming ezy... [WWW.TECHNIPHARM.CO.NZ](http://WWW.TECHNIPHARM.CO.NZ)