

NZ Dairy Industry Awards

Their aims are on target

Anne Hardie • 2 years ago

g+1 0 **Tweet** 0
Share 0
Share



Helen and Peter McLaren have increased production with once-a-day (OAD) milking.

Every year Maruia sharemilkers Peter and Helen McLaren face the challenges of cold, sodden springs followed by drought.

And this season they took on the extra challenge of the West Coast/Top of the South Sharemilker/Equity Farmer of the Year – and won it.

Five years ago they won the region's Farm Manager of the Year award while working on a Dairy Holdings farm near Murchison then took the next step to a 50:50 sharemilking contract on Peter and Margaret Brooker's farm at Maruia.

Today they milk 520 cows and are strong advocates of once-a-day (OAD) milking on a farm that faces extremes in climate.

This season they've taken on another sharemilking contract nearby where they have employed a manager to milk its 550-cow herd. It's all part of a strong focus on buying their own farm in two years and entering the awards showed them they are in a stronger position to do that than they realised.

"It's not just a goal – it's a reality," Peter said of the next step to farm ownership.

"We always have achievable goals."

The McLarens were relatively late starters in dairying after Peter's former career as a shearer and possum hunter. But it has been onward and upward ever since, beginning with a job on the Brookers' farm nearly 2 years ago. In between they've worked on a large corporate farm and flipping pakihi soil on a Westport farm before approaching the Brookers three years ago about returning to their property with a sharemilking contract.

Maruia lies in a long, deep valley between mountain ranges and three out of four seasons are challenging for dairying with heavy glacial clay soils a nightmare for pugging. From the start of their sharemilking contract they followed a plan that would allow dairying to be sustainable for the land while still making a profit.

That means keeping the stocking rate at 2.5 cows/ha to protect the ground, making sure residuals never dip below 1500kg drymatter (DM)/ha or 2000kg DM/ha in wet weather while avoiding pugging at all costs.

Environmentally, OAD has worked well and it has given them added bonuses such as an empty rate of just 3% after an 11-week mating period and no intervention.

Their cows are in better condition and the McLarens are able to operate on a simple grass-based system.

The same format has been followed with their new sharemilking contract on the farm down the road, where twice-a-day (TAD) milking in the past produced 160,000kg milksolids (MS) from 550 cows.

This season it's on target for 175,000kg MS on OAD with no extra feed added to the grass-based system.

"The OAD system has blown us away with just how well it's working," Peter said.

"It's all about looking after the cows. They're our asset, so anything we can do for them, we do it."

On both farms, the herd is split into two, with one herd milked in the morning and the other in the afternoon which resulted in production of 360kg MS/cow last season.

With farm ownership nearly within their grasp, the McLarens decided to enter the awards this year to refocus and make sure they were on track to achieve their goals.

“We were becoming a bit stale and you have to keep going ahead or you’re going backwards. We’re not young any more and you can’t let an opportunity go by.”

Their son, Glen Fishburn, who works for them on the farm, came second in the trainee award and won a merit award for farming knowledge (see story, page 50).

He’s part of the monitoring and planning regime that the McLarens follow to ensure they are on track and looking ahead.

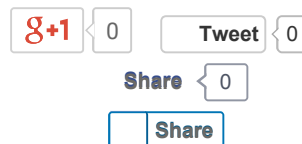
Peter said all award entrants showed the strong knowledge base gained in an area with plenty of dairy challenges and that knowledge helped the wider industry.

“They get a bit more number eight wire training here because we’re not flat, easy, irrigated properties. It’s a bit more challenging.”

The McLarens also won the DairyNZ Human Resources Award, the Westpac Business Performance Award and the Cuffs Accountants and Business Advisors Strategic Planning Award.

Second place went to Whataroa 50:50 sharemilkers Chris and Carla Staples who also won the Ecolab Farm Dairy Hygiene Award and Ravensdown Pasture Performance Award. Greymouth equity farm managers Kelvin and Heather McKay were third and also won the Meridian Energy Farm Environment Award.

Christopher and Siobhan O’Malley from Blackball won the Federated Farmers Leadership Award plus the Honda Farm Safety and Health Award. Ant and Suzi O’Malley from Kowhitirangi won the LIC Recording and Productivity Award.



0 Comments AgriHQ

 Login ▾

 Recommend  Share

Sort by Newest ▾



Start the discussion...

Be the first to comment.

ALSO ON AGRIHQ

WHAT'S THIS?

Clarity lacking on trade deal status

1 comment • 2 months ago

GDT's surprise fall offset by dollar drop

1 comment • a month ago

Shanghai Pengxin buys Northland farms

1 comment • 2 months ago

Lamb wool price hits record high

1 comment • a month ago

 Subscribe

 Add Disqus to your site

 Privacy