

### Milk price and exchange rate

As predicted, when Fonterra tells everyone that the milk payout, or the milk production, are up, the NZ exchange rate rises, as it did again to US\$0.83, so dairy farmers get little more net income. Beef and all exporting farmers and others also suffer. Do the imported fertiliser or fuel prices drop? Not by as much, if at all.

The only way to stop this is to stop allowing buyers to set the price they choose to pay us for our milk at auctions, which also tells the world how dairying (so New Zealand) is doing. When well, more people invest in New Zealand, which strengthens our exchange rate.

Fonterra's job is to process milk to the finished product stage in tins, not in large bags of powder, to customers' orders, for the highest price possible by marketing them with expert marketers, not price takers, and setting the prices a lot higher than they are now, without disclosing or boasting about prices and volumes. No other business uses their lazy system of selling. It is not marketing.

The 31 January 2012 Straight Furrow had more complaints from farmers and others against the government and Fonterra than I have ever seen before which shows sadly, the dissatisfaction of our dairy farmers.

### Free milk for some schools

What other organisation, already selling at below the cost of production, gives away products?

If necessary, free milk in schools is necessary, then all in NZ should pay for it through the government, not just the dairy farmers. It was done by the government in New Zealand to all schools for decades, so can be done again. The cost would be a small fraction of what the government already spends on social services. Then John Key could earn his keep by getting China to also provide free milk in their schools. The demand for dairy farms would skyrocket, as would NZ land prices, so young farmers can't win, but don't give up, there is no better life, just be firmer with Fonterra to market for higher prices and the government and Others to be fare to farmers. Others? Yes, since rehabilitation after the war, urban home buyers were charged lower interest rates than farmers, and still are.

### High land prices

In the last few decades land prices have risen to unprofitable levels, so interest is now a major cost, and have created severe inheritance problems. Both are almost without solutions.

The high price of Waikato land is mainly because of the many lifestyle blocks which are almost solid for five km around Hamilton, and even increasing on the Whatawhata hills. I wonder if anyone has worked out how long it will take for the central Waikato to be all lifestyle blocks? No other country I know of allows them. 90% of lifestylers only want an acre, but councillors had not worked that out. Initially they thought that 20 hectares minimum would stop it, but it didn't, then four hectares and now they allow one hectare.

Los Angeles and Hawaii (and I'm sure others) have people wanting enough land to keep a horse or two, each on about an acre, adjacent to each other. Then there is not the lifestyle problem of some blaming those with a horse for breeding flies.

### Occasional lifestyle problem

Some lifestylers use sheep or calves to keep their grass under control with no problems, but if your soil gets so wet in winter (NZ rain season) that it turns to mud, then it can be a severe problem. A solution can be to reduce numbers and do on-off graze. If the small fenced off areas, which should be the higher drier areas, turn to mud, a grating may be necessary. Have it on skids so it can be dragged around, and use sheep pellets in troughs to get them onto it each time. A roof should be added for protection against rain and sun. A down pipe into a bucket can give water, which can also be filled with a hose.

If possible, improve the drainage of the whole area with shallow wide V drains grassed right through. See Soils > Drainage.

Mud around your house can be a nuisance which may need sowing in a turf grass like Colosseum ryegrass which covers bare patches and is very slow growing, or a twitch which will frost in winter so stop growing and not need grazing. In all cases do what is recommended in Pastures and in Gardens & Lawns.

The same can be done to a lesser degree with a small number of pigs. Locking them on slats for most of the time reduces pasture damage.

#### More on Lime

Based on pasture analyses and visual inspections (hardness, structure, crumbliness, earthworms), most pastures world-wide are starving for lime and its synergisms I now call Lime-plus. This is the best, soft, finely ground agricultural lime available with other elements needed. They will usually be magnesium (Serpentine, if available, is the best. See Elements > Magnesium.), boron, salt, etc., based on the Pasture Mineral Analysis and Lime Nutrient Planner.

The extra pasture grown from applying it, rather than phosphate fertiliser has to be seen to be believed, and Lime-plus costs less. Lime-plus also makes some of the millions of tonnes of phosphorus and potassium sitting in our soils available.

Lime has saved, and is saving many of our farmers thousands of dollars annually because on most NZ farms now, Lime-plus grows more and better pasture than any fertiliser or any other product, AND it releases some of the fixed P in soils, and with 50 kg per hectare of coarse agricultural salt which is in almost all Lime-plus mixes, reduces the leaching of the very expensive potash costing about NZ\$800 per 1,000 kg.

In the 1960s pastures were healthier than now, a ton (2,240 lb) of agricultural lime per acre every three years was enough, but that was on previously correctly limed soils which MAF and farmers accepted was necessary, which is 2,600 kg per hectare every three years, which almost no farmers in New Zealand now apply because of high pressure fertiliser companies sponsoring research scientists and farm consultants with \$12 per tonne.

Milk production per hectare has almost doubled so more lime is now needed, and three tonnes per hectare is the minimum, but 4,000 or 5,000 kg per hectare is likely to be needed to start with on most lime-starved farms. The success I achieved of roots down to 35 mm and double the pasture yield for Brendon and Tania Fernyhough shown in Elements > Calcium, came after applying 8,000 kg per hectare. See Elements > Calcium.

Fernyhough's pH was close to 6 because potassium was 4% instead of 2.7%. After three years of not applying any potash, it was still 4% which is toxic to clovers and animals. Feedlots in the northern hemisphere aim for 1% in their total mixed rations (TMR or TMFeed in UK). 1% is no good in pasture because it would not grow enough and clovers would suffer.

I've done many on-farm trials with Lime-plus to convince farmers that they need it. One I visited this week on an old pasture of ryegrass and Paspalum, where I had applied 4,000 kg per hectare (3,568 lb per acre) equivalent, on 10 m<sup>2</sup>, two months before showed all plants growing faster and more lushly and had not rushed to seed as plants outside of the limed area had. Hungry unbalanced plants reproduce more quickly, so when your pasture runs to seed in spring, don't blame the ryegrass, blame deficiencies, which are highly UNLIKELY to be low P or low K, unless based on soil tests which are a main cause of the problem we are dealing with, at the high cost to farmers and to the delight of fertiliser companies.

When your ryegrass pulls out, don't blame it or insects, such as Grass Grub, Argentine Stem Weevil, Porina, Black Beetle which have all been blamed over the years by the seed suppliers and the establishment. Today you can't believe sales people. Use a spade to see why the ryegrass pulls, and you'll find shallow roots, sometimes growing horizontally at 10 to 15 cm because of aluminium restricting ryegrass roots, caused by insufficient lime, and don't forget the synergisms that make lime work better.

Bonuses are that -

1. Bad insects don't like lime. I'm studying this more. Your findings with photos will be appreciated.
2. Cattle eat buttercup and other weeds that have been limed adequately.

3. Earthworms increase and eat weed seeds.

See 48 more benefits in Elements > Calcium.

Borrowing to apply Lime-plus can be highly profitable, but if your bank is influenced by fertiliser companies, don't tell them that it is for lime, but for fertiliser, which is what Lime-plus is - sometimes in a big way with highly profitable results - that is provided enough is applied, based on pasture analyses, and getting calcium in ryegrass leaves up to 0.8%.

Most North Island farms have been starved for Lime-plus for decades, so I recommended 4,000 kg per hectare, then another 3,000 kg, and the best results have come after a third application over three years. Look at Elements > Calcium for roots down to 35 cm (previously they were only 10 to 15 cm deep), and see Beef for the results of increased pasture and beef production, and their vastly improved health of pastures, animals and domestic ducks (look at the improved sheen).

VaughanJones  
GrazingInfo Ltd