

Testimonials New Zealand

1. Chris and Jo Brennan, Tauwhare, Waikato, NZ.

I have been here four years and I am new to farming but have found Vaughan Jones' approach uncomplicated. The big thing is that he is strong on the lime side of things. Calcium is a major part of the soil biology, and we are taking a lot of calcium off the farm and not enough is being replaced. I have put on three tonnes per hectare and the clover response has been fantastic with denser swards and larger leafed plants. I'm looking forward to the spring growth, with a renewed hope of being able to fatten my cattle quicker. I have been feeding the nine Solmin minerals since last spring and believe the stock are quieter, require less pasture and most appear to have better coats and heads held higher.

2. Glen Bakewell, Opunake, Taranaki, NZ.

I find the info on your website very useful. I'm only in my first season on a dairy farm but I am keen to learn as much as possible so I can progress quickly. Keep up the good work.

Glen later wrote-

I visited your client's Skeet Road, Taranaki farm in November 2011. It was great to see the results from only your LimeMagPlus. There was an abundance of grass on the farm and the cows were in great condition, with only 4 non cyclers after 4 weeks AB.

I've CIDRed 20% of our herd and my return rate is huge after 5 weeks AB. It is great to see such a fast turn around as their old system was similar to our current system of more urea, and PK every year to grow less grass, have higher empty rates and less production. The best thing about it was seeing how relaxed Eric is and how much time (and money) he has on his hands now that he's not spending all day feeding out, spreading urea, treating sick cows and trying to find grass for the cows to eat tomorrow. The size of the clovers was impressive.

3. Linda Scrace, Northland, NZ.

I attribute most of the improvement in our cow health to your 3 tonnes of lime, serpentine and trace elements per hectare, plus feeding the cows minerals for 95% of the year, based on what you suggested in <http://www.grazinginfo.com>.

Although the cows are thin, because we had too many cows in our first year here, they appear to be under less stress and look healthy. I am sure another application of selenium and boron in a lime and serpentine mix will help even more. I have asked the staff to increase the zinc a bit more as we have had a few first calvers with soft hooves from the wet races and pastures.

We have not had one cow with milk fever. You may recall last year we had cows getting cast and dying, and cows getting pneumonia, but none this year - thank you.

We culled cows with very high somatic cell counts. Our somatic cell count was in the grading level at this time last year (> 400,000). Currently it is an amazing 135,000!

Regards and grateful thanks.

4. Ian Buckingham, organic farmer, Pokeno, NZ.

Thank you very much once again. You are a wealth of knowledge. Please keep posting to the list. I thank you for sharing your knowledge, it is unfortunate when egos raise their ugly heads.

5. Doug Woolerton, Hamilton, NZ.

Congratulations on your articles in the Waikato Times Farmer of 15 April 2011, they were great.

It must be a good feeling to have saved the Fernyhough family farm bankruptcy as you have done for others. It seems that there are a lot of people pushing it too hard in dairying at the moment. Your down to earth practical advice backed up by years of accumulated knowledge makes all the difference.

We lost our Peacocks Road dairy farm because of following the American confinement 'cut and carry' and bought feed. Good on you for doing all the good work.

6. Phil Taylor, Sheep and Beef farmer, Ngaroma, NZ.

For more than a decade I had believed the fertiliser science "conventional wisdom" perpetrated by our major research and fertiliser establishments here in NZ. Fertiliser science is very complex and not feeling competent in it, I always took advice from the most credible consultants, I might add. None of

these consultants would give advice without a soil test. So I have spent much money with labs like yours doing several tests each year.

After reading these tests, invariably the advice was, more P some K and N out of season to fill the gaps. With a pH of 5.8 no lime was needed! Using these recommendations I have wasted as much money in the last 12 years as it would have cost me to buy the 1,000 acres next door. The result of this has been few earthworms; a 2-inch root bound thatch, little to no growth in the winter and early spring, and areas of inert lifeless soil evidenced by green urine strips running down the yellow, hills standing out because no legume nitrogen cycle was working. The lack of lime, and applying water-soluble superphosphate that washed off, caused my P levels to be below 30, K medium and all other soil tested elements and minerals ranged from very high to very low. After application, pastures would give a boost then the farm would go into a lull which was as though the environment had been poisoned.

Animal health problems frustrated me. I had nitrate poisoning in my cattle, ill thrift in the autumn, low copper problems, not enough selenium absorption, and poor sodium intake by the cattle even though sodium levels appeared to be OK in the soil. Still the obsolete advice continued such as more and more superphosphate based on the recommendations from soil tests. There had to be an end to this sort of ill-advised expenditure. The cost of the fertiliser was bad enough but the loss from sub-clinical health problems in my cattle was probably the greatest cost.

At a chance meeting with Vaughan, I explained my problems regarding fertiliser and fertiliser application on my Taupo ash soils. He recommended 3 tonnes of lime per hectare immediately, took a pasture sample, not a soil sample, and gave a complete recommendation for six months. It was no more expensive than previously. The farm soon greened up and started improving. Neighbours noticed it. The next two fertiliser applications I spread were also his recipes. The results have been that animal health problems have almost gone. Earthworm activity increased so dung patches quickly turned into 60 cm diameter green patches. The post grazing patches are now being eaten. The thatch is disappearing and roots now penetrate the soil to 9 inches or more. Green patches in the early spring have almost gone, without the use of artificial N and hillsides are greener.

Recent pasture tests reveal that all levels are up, in spite of no application for the 3 years. Not only that, all the elements including manganese (which used to be toxically high because of low calcium) are in the medium to high level and balanced according to the tests. The conclusions I came to are that either the tests are not to be believed or there has been a catalytic response from the Vaughan Jones' recommendations of starting with lime and using reactive phosphate, elemental sulphur, salt and trace elements.

When it comes to making money in today's beef industry all the recommendations given must give a cost/benefit based on pasture testing and observation. I hadn't had value for money over the years until Vaughan arrived. For four years I no longer apply any potassium as I don't need it, which is saving me thousands of dollars.

7. Joe Gillson, Ashburton, NZ.

Thank you for doing the great work of creating and adding to your Grazinginfo.com web site. I have found it a place to find in depth and extensive clarity on many topics. With all the contradictions around and almost thoughtless actions on farms, your information has always brought light, clarity and most of all, sense to many issues. Thank you again for your great effort, NZ farming is richer thanks to you.

8. John, Waikato, NZ.

Vaughan, you have been my only link with sanity in all of this. For that and your support I thank you. Your message is getting out there. At a field day yesterday they had said they had started a liming programme because of you and during discussion I brought up the article on chelated minerals that you showed me.

9. Ben Troughton, Waikato, NZ.

I think it is great the work you're doing to raise awareness of poor soil health.

10. Barry Brunton, Hamilton, NZ.

My stock buyer paid you a nice compliment a few days ago. The occasion was drafting 16 white face heifers for Affco. He remarked that he had seldom seen a mob of cattle in such a clean condition (none with dirty tails) and very fine coats.

11. Matt W, Rukuhia, Waikato, NZ.

Your site is just what I have been looking for. Your advice is well received.

12. Amanda Withers, NZ.

Thanks so much for your reply. We are really keen on making some changes, and Don is reading your articles, he is well read already, but some of this information we have never been told. Your articles are just brilliant!

13. Donald Withers and his wife (Sheep Farmers), Porangahau in Central Hawkes Bay.

We are impressed with the results since applying 2,000 kg per hectare of lime with trace elements twice over the whole property for the past 2 years. There has been a remarkable increase in clover growth and a huge increase in earthworm numbers. The earthworm count per spade spit before liming was 12 and is now up over 30 and the dung droppings are being recycled back into the soil far more quickly than before. Pasture is more palatable and there has been a general improvement in stock health with fewer metabolic issues. The lime has been very cost effective and has delivered excellent results so we plan to continue with annual applications.

14. A GrazingInfo subscriber and organic dairy farmer in the Waikato wrote:

You have been so generous with your advice. Using your methods is saving us heaps of money and obviously benefits the planet.

15. Akaroa, Canterbury, NZ.

First off all a very interesting web site. I signed up after a friend in Germany talked about some of the write ups on you GrazingInfo web site. It has made me think a lot on things. We farm near with 3,500 sheep, some sold as fats others weaned and sold as stores for someone else to finish (fatten).

16. Roy Bellingham, Pukekohe, NZ.

Just like to say the farm is looking good, a lot more clover coming back into the pasture, cows are milking well. The Rorisons LimeMagPlus applied in April 2012, has worked into soils very well. Soils are now very friable and roots have gone down past 20 cm. Thanks heaps.

17. Jeffrey McDonald, Auckland, NZ.

Your papers have helped me understand many things I did not know about pasture management so I look forward to following your advice, as soon as I can get the funds to catch up on 20 years without a lime application on our ex dairy farm, I will send some pictures and stats of the before and after.

19. Mary & John Gijsbers, Upper Hutt.

Well done on your fantastic work. We thoroughly enjoy your style of writing and appreciate your knowledge and willingness to help.

We did a pasture test in Feb 2012 with horrendous results. All were low except K which was high.

20. Rick Cameron, Milton, NZ.

Vaughan, firstly, we all on the farm really enjoy your intelligence and just the other day I encouraged a room full of thinking farmers to join up.

Please accept a knighthood to you both for your services from 'a sheep cocky down south'.

21. Joe Gilson, Ashburton, NZ.

Thank you again for all the effort you, your wife and your team have, and are doing with grazing info. It is, as always the only place that consistently give true, reliable, honest and unbiased information on dairy farming (and so much more).

22. Glen.

I first subscribed to grazinginfo in my first season as a dairy assistant 5 years ago. I'm now lower order sharemilking a 500,000 kgMS job in Mid-Canterbury and apply your basic principles everyday. My philosophies on profitable pasture based dairy farming are all based on the information in your eBook . Thanks again. Sent: July 13, 2013.

23. Tim Lloyd.

I was at Fieldays 2012 and was lucky enough to hear your talk. I was more than impressed with what you had to say. I have bought a lifestyle block (17.5 ha) at Pauahatanui near Wellington. I am very keen to hear and find out a lot more about biological farming as it is the only way ahead that I can see.

24. Matthew & Tania Wilkinson of Rukuhia.

Farm is great. 2nd year with 1 tonne per ha Limemag 4 x1 on surface. Clover galore. Worms galore. Grass galore. Buttercup now almost non-existent with no spraying and penny royal present, but no longer dominant. I could rave on all day, but am rushing around looking to buy heifers to consume all this extra feed we have grown. All new grass now gets 3 tonnes of LimeMag. Our maize on peat gets 10 tonnes worked in before planting. The runoff now has palatable feed and clover everywhere, in stark contrast to when you started. The young stock are monsters. I am your fan and drop your name into conversation where I can, but people are slow to learn. Both my neighbours have asked what I use, so they now use Lime Mag. One is 800 cows next door. His weeds are gone, but his pasture is still weak because he uses urea in excess and won't wean off it, and he is overstocked. Keep up your good work.

No nuisance weeds came up in the new grass paddocks with LimeMagPlus, but I still sprayed them with baton. That was a mistake. It wiped out the masses of clover. Now there are none. Animal health is brilliant. Stock look great and are milking very well.

25. Sue from Katikati. 19/2/2014.

Just as an extra note which I thought of after sending the reply. A huge thank you for your advise which I feel has made such a difference to the farm and has been miles superior to the advise from Balance. Thank you for the great work you do, and for the news letters that give up to date information and advice about products that come on the market that are rubbish wrapped in glamorous packaging and the better seeds to purchase for longevity.

26. Noel Bridgeman, Research Co-ordinator.

Graze-L List Manager, Taranaki Polytechnic, New Zealand.

I agree with your comments about academics. Often it is the donated research dollar that gives direction (and what happens when sponsorships come from commercial firms)? Rather than profit per acre. The "publish or perish" syndrome of scientists has a lot to answer for!

Thank you for your very generous support of Graze-L

27. Tania and Brendan Fernyhough, Walton, Waikato.

We were about to go bankrupt, because the bank would not lend us money to pay debts, and Vaughan Jones taught us how to grow more grass by using LimeMagPlus, reducing our herd numbers and feeding no more than 2 kg per cow per day of palm kernel extract and to feed Solmin soluble mineral mix.

Growing more of our own feed improved our bottom line considerably. I sure wish Vaughan had been consulting for us 10 years ago. I started e-mailing him with some questions and it went from there. I suspect our cash flow would be a whole lot healthier than it is right now, and I know our animals would be. We are not buying in tonnes and tonnes of palm kernel extract like we used to and our feed bill is less than half of what it was. I still shudder to think of where we would be right now if not for Vaughan's massive input into us and our farm. Vaughan saved our business for our children, by changing a \$244,000 a year loss to a profit and then \$300,000/year profit in three years.

Sifting through the mountain of information available about farming is no easy feat, especially when you have a farm to run and three young children to raise.

We were milking 400 cows on 120 ha. In our third season of ownership we, following 50/50 sharemilking on the family farm were just about to give up farming.

If we had another spring like that I would sell up or plough the farm and plant maize, Brendan said.

Selling the farm would have been a huge decision, given that Brendan's father and grandfather farmed the land before him.

I didn't want to be the generation that lost the farm because we did not farm well enough.

A high incidence of milk fever, mastitis and calving difficulties amongst other health problems for their herd saw frequent visits by the vet, too many dead cows and high costs.

Many of our animals did not look well.

While the drought had hit hard, our lime hungry poor soils didn't help pasture growth so we had very few clovers and lots of ryegrass pulling.

We had problems with clover root weevil, clover flea and grass grub, aggravated by mineral deficiencies. The few earthworms that we had were sick and sluggish with no slime so soil stuck to them, which we now know is a calcium deficiency sign.

Although blanket spraying the farm for weeds and facial eczema control, Tania says they still had weeds including dandelion, buttercup, pennyroyal and low fertility wire weed. Vaughan's liming program eliminated pennyroyal and reduce buttercup.

A high reliance on urea (around 200 kg/ha/year) pushed costs up and heavy use of bought supplements such as PKE, saw costs rise while production didn't. Our biggest vet bill was \$7,000 and one month's feed bill topped \$65,000.

At our wits end, I read everything I could find to get solutions. There is so much information out there and every dairy magazine has a different take on the same issue. It's really hard to sift through that information and pick out which is right for your farm.

Changes in farming practices on the advice of farm consultant Vaughan Jones gave us a renewed passion for farming.

I'd been searching the internet and came across Vaughan's website, www.grazinginfo.com

After lots of convincing, he got asked to reduce cow numbers from 400 to 350 which saved a loss of \$65,000 from milking 50 cows too many, at a cost of \$1,300 per cow, for no extra production, because they were overstocked.

One of Vaughan's first recommendations was to take pasture samples and as a result of those, to apply lime and serpentine with trace elements, that he now calls LimeMagPlus.

Before liming the pH was between 5.4 and 6.1 so fertiliser reps (selling high cost fertilisers instead, and some getting \$12 per tonne commissions) had not recommended lime. When we did Vaughan's pasture analyses, it showed the need for calcium, magnesium, selenium, boron and cobalt, so we applied Vaughan's Lime Nutrient Planner recommendation of Rorisons fine and soft LimeMagPlus (75% lime, 25% serpentine with trace elements) at 3t/ha in September.

We applied the cheaper Gafsa, a reactive phosphate fertiliser, with trace elements for our crops.

The payout dropped to six dollars so we realised that we were going broke.

In the following February and March they applied another 3t/ha of Rorisons lime (93% lime, 7% serpentine) and more trace elements on the basis of further pasture analyses.

We did no more blanket spraying for weeds and facial eczema. Summer crops of 10 ha of Nutrifeed, Pasja, white and red cloves, chicory and plantain were sown, which Vaughan showed is a more balanced and practical forage crop than turnips on their own.

We also chisel ploughed before sowing the summer crop and the maize rather than using rippers and a rotary hoe.

Buying a mixing wagon and building a concrete feed pad with troughs when the payout was at its peak are decisions Brendan, with hindsight would not have made. We will not sell the mixer now but when things are good one buys a lot of stuff.

Tania says high inputs got them through the drought but as soon as their maize was available in the next season they stopped feeding the expensive total mixed rations.

I am a nurse and I know how often we treated the symptoms rather than the underlying cause with people. We were doing the same thing with our animals.

Vaughan recommended Triffid, a natural form of Nitrogen soil conditioner that helps soils hold moisture on maize and forage crop paddocks. We achieved excellent results and didn't need any

artificial N on those paddocks other than the 18 kg/ha of DAP (Di-Ammonium Phosphate) we used as a starter fertiliser.

One of the bigger decisions we made was to revise their stocking rates. "We de-stocked to 2.9 cows per ha from our peak of 3.5 cows/ha, to reduce the amount of supplements we were bringing in and just to allow us to feed the cows without going bankrupt," Brendan says.

Tania agrees and says she is amazed they have been able to benefit from Vaughan's improvements of a \$¼ m loss to \$½ m profit in three years.

Financially things are still tight - their bank had said they would not lend them any more. However stress has diminished and they reduced their mortgage by \$100, 000 in the third year and bought a second hand car and a larger tractor to help grow more forage crops at half the price of buying supplements.

See their costs which are attached.

In mid August they had calved 120 cows and not had a single case of milk fever. "Last year we had four cases in the first 35 cows that calved and a dozen deaths in the season." Tania said.

Feeding the soluble mineral mix Solmin halved the cell count and mastitis, with fewer cows have requiring assistance at calving. Calves thrived without worm drenching.

"From Vaughan's blood and liver testing we saw that PKE's toxic copper and manganese levels had caused toxic levels in cows," Tania said.

Despite applying very little artificial Nitrogen, the farm now produces good pasture growth. "There is much more clover and the ryegrass is softer and more palatable for the cows so no pulling and thanks to the increase in earthworms we have had no facial eczema."

Brendan and Tania are the first to admit they did not put enough emphasis into treating their farm as a business before using Vaughan's spreadsheets. "I think there are probably many family farms run more as a hobby rather than a business," Tania said.

Brendan said the tight times they had have been a good thing. "Good payouts can give one an inflated view of what you can spend. Now that it's tight again it is a true indication of what we can do and make money out of, i.e., growing more pasture rather than buying more unprofitable supplements and buying lime-plus trace elements for longer term and better pasture growth rather than urea.

"It has been a hard road", said Tania, "but now that we have good advice we are looking forward to the future. I have learnt more in the last six months than I have in six years and farming has become enjoyable".

I went for a walk to the back of the farm today. The pastures that had hardly a single clover plant, are now full of clovers covering bare patches where there were weeds. It's such a fantastic sight. Thank you so much for encouraging us to apply 3,000 kg of LimeMagPlus per hectare twice, and to oversow with the best clovers and plantain. It has worked wonders after having applied none for decades because the pH was 6 to 6.2. You have done more for us in six months than anyone else has done for this farm in at least the past 10 years I have been here, in truth more than anyone has done for at least the past 20 years that the family has owned it.