



Raewyn Bennett (right) with Ian Williams, Pioneer Seeds.

Field day highlights nutrition, cow housing

TONY HOPKINSON

A LARGE successful field day was held on May 5, organised by Pioneer Seeds on the property of Raewyn and David Ben-

nett and their son Jeremy and his wife Lucy's farm, at Richmond Downs near Matamata.

Attendance was about 350 with busloads from Whangarei and Taranaki. "We were originally

only expecting 40-50 so this is a pleasant surprise," said David.

The buildings and surrounds were presented well, "as they always are," said Pioneer's Ian Williams.

The farmers were given handouts giving a broad view of the large farming operation – its philosophy, history and their present situation and expectations.

Raewyn and David bought their first farm in 1985 in Springdale, then sold this and bought at Ngarua, before selling and buying the 90ha present farm at Richmond Downs. This has since grown with the home farm of 258ha milking 1200 cows, and a second farm of 136ha milking 300 cows.

This is a short distance from the home farm. There is also a 57ha run-off.

Currently the farms are running a split calving system with 70% autumn calving and 30% spring calving.

"We have been supplying Open Country Cheese for the last two seasons and the winter premiums through May-June and July make it worthwhile," said Jeremy.

Raewyn says they have a lot of capital tied up in Fonterra, which they think could be better used in the farming operation, and with their final payment received in August as opposed to Fonterra's October, cashflow is improved.

The farms grow 143ha of Pioneer maize and 32ha of Pioneer lucerne. Other supplements are canola, PKE, kiwifruit, potatoes and seasonal vegetables.

The visiting farmers were divided into three groups and had 40 minute presentations in different locations.

The first group was addressed by Raewyn Bennett, assisted by key account manager of Pioneer, Ian Williams. She is

the book keeper and oversees the financial management of the enterprise.

"Lucy my daughter-in-law is gradually assuming the role and we are linked by marriage and by computer and it works well."

Raewyn stressed the importance of keeping good records and she can locate details from previous years which help her to make decisions and ensure mistakes of yesterday are not repeated.

Second stop was managed by Pioneer's Raewyn Hensley and Jeremy Bennett discussing the farms' feeding programme and their four large Herd Homes each with a capacity of 300 head.

"We had been talking to Herd Homes for a couple of years and put one down on the other farm and when we saw the results and benefits we built four adjacent to each other and close to the dairy," said Bennett.

Each was 90 x 10.3m and twin bunkers in each shed are 1.5m deep

It was a two million dollar project with the buildings, laneway and underpass to the dairy yard. It was commissioned in July 2014.

Bennett says the benefits were immediate: being able to split the herd into four and alter their feed allocation to suit the animals' lactation cycle gave annual savings of \$100,000.

Springers are brought in near calving and calve in the barns. Further savings were in feed costs, and \$16,000 by not having to pump water from the feed pad as previously. All rainwater from the Herd Homes drains to storage tanks.

"With less food waste we saved another \$260,000 and we did it with a third less staff."

The last stop was to hear David discuss labour management and succession plans for the family enterprise.

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