

Fewer tedious chores, higher milk

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BAY OF Plenty farmers Shaun and Fiona Kehelys' milk production last season was up 120,000kgMS due to a \$1.1 million investment in two HerdHomes.

The Kehelys, who farm at Oropi, near Tauranga, say their farm management practices have remained the same. However, since commissioning the two HerdHomes the workload has eased, cows are more comfortable in shelter and milk yield has soared.

"It was nice to have done 356,000kgMS last season," Shaun told *Dairy News*.

The farm is 900ha with 430ha for the dairy platform, 100ha of native

bush, 100ha of plantation pines and the balance a cut-over forestry block. The two HerdHomes, 90m long x 12.5m wide, and the dairy shed, a 20-aside herringbone, are at 335m altitude and the highest paddock is 450m. They trade as Oropi Bushlands Ltd with Shaun's parents Graham and Joan.

The farm has 35km of races with the furthest paddock 3.5km from the milking shed.

He says it was hard on staff and stock to achieve 220,000kgMS two seasons ago.

Feeding out was a full-time job on the farm, the tractor running 12 hours per day.

"Sometimes we had to carry feed to the last paddocks – an hour trip and fuel costs on top of

that. I had to change a flat tyre every week; we've never had flat tyres since we put the HerdHomes in."

The Kehelys started looking at a HerdHome six years ago; doing their homework they saw its potential for their farm. "And when all HerdHomes users we visited said they increased production by at least 20%... it was a factor in us committing to the project," says Shaun.

Shaun says they looked at other concepts but HerdHomes ticked all the boxes. "For us the most important thing was to get away from the daily chores like scraping effluent and feeding out."

Kehely says the HerdHomes option was the most expensive; a basic HerdHome for



Each shed can feed 300 cows.

No changes to farming system

HERDHOMES CHIEF executive Hamish McMillan says the shelters have been perfected over the past 12 years.

It has been designed by New Zealand farmers for New Zealand conditions, to enhance pastoral farming systems, he says.

"This design is so unique it is patented, even the name 'HerdHomes' is a trademark.

"What this means is the only buildings that can be called HerdHomes shelters, are ones built by us. Clients are able to provide animals shelter from adverse climate conditions, meet desired pastoral residuals, protect soils, simply contain effluent and reduce their environmental footprint.

"Most importantly, clients are able to improve their bottom line."

HerdHomes shelters are able to be funded through greater cash flow, not capital; with quick pay backs being demonstrated throughout New Zea-

land.

McMillan says users are not changing their farming system to suit the building. Instead they are able to farm the way they have always wanted to by protecting their animals and the environment.

"Pasture is still and always will be the focus. It is the cheapest source of feed and pasture yields can increase through an improved management system. Soils are easily protected and overgrazing is stopped meaning that there is a quicker bounce back from droughts or wet periods.

"By using a HerdHomes shelter, nitrogen leaching is significantly reduced as less urine is deposited on paddocks. Rather than high concentration patches, effluent can be lightly applied to land when it suits both the environment and the farmer.

"Using effluent decreases the artificial fertiliser requirement on the property and because HerdHomes

manure is high in organic matter this also helps with soil structure."

The "clever design" of the HerdHomes shelter is able to naturally cool animals during hot weather and during cold weather provide a warmer, drier environment. Not only does this mean animals are more comfortable, but it means they also produce better. Less feed is directed to controlling their temperature and more can go to towards production, this is of great benefit to both animals and farmers.

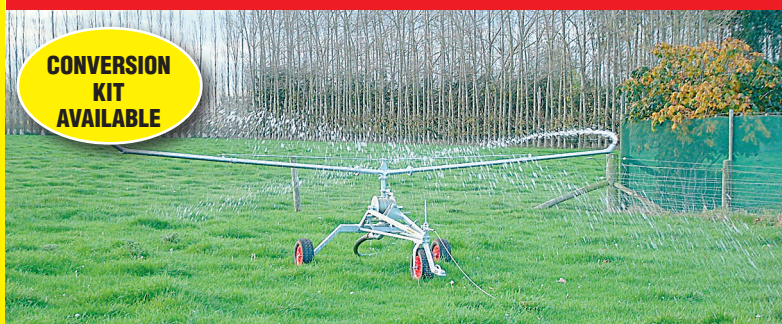
According to McMillan no other forms of standoff provide such a user friendly effluent system.

"Not only do the animals tidy their own effluent away, but the product is stored in its own natural state. No water is contaminated, nor is any power required. This full proof system is a relief to users, they can pick when they want to apply their manure to suit their pasture."

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production

his farm was going to cost \$450,000. Other costs included concreting driveways and earthworks.

The first cows used the structure in April 2013. The parallel HerdHomes have feed strips on each side of both sheds. In the middle, running the length of each shed, there is a mounded base of pumice/sand mix from the farm, with stalls and railings. Each shed can feed 300 or sleep 250 for 12 hours or house 200 for 24 hours.

be spread on the forestry conversion block.

The cows are now fully fed, eating fewer supplements than last year as all feed is consumed and there is no wastage.

"We're on a 60-day round and we have grass to burn. We're spending only one hour per day feeding out compared to six hours daily under the old method and getting by with two staff instead of the usual four."

Other initial benefits include a dramatic drop

would have been quicker with a bigger milking shed."

He says last year's drought also affected his farm. "If it had been a normal season and the grass had grown normally we would have done better."

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Shaun and Fiona Kehely's million dollar investment is paying off.



"A lot of people would have ripped out that cow shed and put in a bigger shed but they would have got little advantage."

Slatted floors over effluent holding pits 1.5m deep are reckoned to last 12 months before needing cleaning. There are two separate pits on each side.

The Kehelys have installed a perforated downpipe in each pit that allows the urine to drain out and this is pumped to the dairy shed ponds and irrigated to the farm. At present about 2000L are separated daily; if cows are brought in wet their body hair retains up to 10L per cow.

When the pits are cleaned the effluent will be spread on paddocks furthest from the shed where there has been fertility transfer over the years. The balance will

in tractor usage leading to fuel savings reckoned about \$2000 monthly, the races are clean with no tractor usage, cow traffic has halved and there are no muddy paddocks.

Shaun says farmers need to work out what's the best option for their farm; the cheapest option is not always the best.

"A lot of people would have ripped out that cowshed and put in a bigger shed costing \$1m, but they would have got no advantages. We have left the shed as it is and have invested the same amount of money and got an extra 120,000kgMS out of it.

"The milking probably



Shaun Kehely says the HerdHomes ticked all the boxes.

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