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For Tony and Zoe Kuriger, the Dairy Industry Awards are a great way to gain insight into your farming business while showcasing dairying in a positive way.

They carried on a family legacy in winning the Hawke's Bay/Wairarapa Sharemilker/Equity Farmer of the Year title. Tony's parents, Louis and Barbara Kuriger, won the 1987 Taranaki Sharemilker of the Year competition, while his sister, Rachel Short, formed a winning combination with husband Kenneth in that region's competition last year.

Tony and Zoe are in their third year of a 21% variable-order sharemilking contract on a 284ha property just out of Woodville in Tararua District. Milking 740 cows through a 60-bail rotary dairy, the couple also have a 25% equity holding in the farm business.

Not your typical dairy farmers, Tony has a Bachelor of Science with Honours majoring in chemistry while Zoe has a Bachelor of Science with a postgraduate diploma in genetics.

Both qualifications are put to good use in the farming operation. The knowledge of chemistry has come in handy in helping to mitigate the farm's environmental impact. The farm bounds the Manawatu River and is easily observed from State Highway 2 – responsibilities the Kurigers and the other farm owners take seriously.

They have managed to develop a

farming system which nutrient budgeting software Overseer models as leaching just 17kg N/ha, including support land. Instrumental in achieving this are the two HerdHomes on the farm.

The pasture-based diet is topped up with maize silage. Minimal nitrogen fertiliser is used. The nutrient budget is based on an annual figure of 135kg N/ha but the past two years have averaged less than half of that.

Each cow is individually allocated a bull depending on that cow's specific traits. They are aiming for a mid-weight cow – smaller Friesian or larger-framed Jersey – with a sound udder and high level of natural fertility.

The Kurigers also had a good run in the merit awards for the competition, collecting five in total.

Their determination to mitigate the farm's environmental impact was recognised with the Meridian Energy Farm Environment Award.

As well as reducing the farm's Overseer nitrogen leaching value, they have put up several kilometres of fencing to exclude waterways, continued a riparian planting strategy, retired some areas of the platform completely, and rejuvenated wetlands.

Tony believes their simple philosophy of trying to match feed supply with feed demand led to them winning the Ravensdown Pasture Performance Award.

"It's a case of understanding the feed system and what is actually driving your productivity.

"We try to shift our supply and demand around to match everything up in the cheapest way possible so you are not getting into that reactive hole."

They also collected the Triplejump Risk Management Award, the Westpac Business Performance Award, and the Honda Farm Safety and Health Award.

The couple aim to own the farm they are sharemilking on outright within eight years. To help them achieve that, the farming company in which they are equity partners is taking on an additional

700-cow 50:50 sharemilking position next season, which Tony and Zoe will operate as 25% sharemilkers on behalf of the larger farming company.

Dannevirke sharemilkers Blair and Naomi Castles were second and also took out the LIC Recording and Productivity Award.

Third place went to Pirinoa-based sharemilkers Glen and Trish Rankin, who also won the DairyNZ Human Resources Award and the Ecolab Farm Dairy Hygiene Award. The Federated Farmers Leadership Award went to Bernie and April Cox of Carterton.

Physical farm data

Milking platform	284ha
Cows	740
Production	833kg MS/ha; 385kg MS/cow
Pasture eaten	12.8 tonne DM/ha/ year
Milking supplement	460kg DM/cow maize silage
Nitrogen	135kg N/ha budg- eted; 60kg N/ha actual average
Cows/labour unit	165
Roster	12 days on, two days off plus two sleep-ins/ week
Farm dairy	Modern 60-bail rotary
Dairy automation	Auto cup-removers, MilkHub auto-drafting and weighing
Six-week in-calf rate	67%
Empty rate	12%
Weeks of mating	10.5 including six AI
Wintering	All mixed age cows wintered on the milking platform; two Herd Homes enable on-off grazing practices to protect soils and cows supplemented with maize silage.
Runoff owned	84ha; youngstock and maize silage.

Financial facts

Sharemilking %	21% (plus 25% equity share in farming business including land, plant, cows and shares)
Operating expenses (sharemilker)	\$0.75/kg MS
Operating profit (sharemilker)	\$658/ha
Farm working expenses (farm)	\$2.91/kg MS