

# Nothing magical in healthy happy cows

**SUDESH KISSUN**  
sudeshk@ruralnews.co.nz

## WAIKATO FARMER

Rex Butterworth follows a simple philosophy: keeping his cows happy and healthy.

“They pay you back ten-fold, it’s really a no-brainer,” says Butterworth.

A top-performing dairy farm, Butterworth’s figures speak for themselves. In the 2014-

15 season, Rex and his wife Sharon milked 480 cows at peak, versus Waikato’s average of 459 and its top-10% average of 479.

Milksolids per cow on the Butterworth farm were 492kgMS, versus Waikato’s average of 394 and Waikato’s top-10% average of 444. Milksolids per milking hectare were 2237kgMS, versus only 1317 for Waikato and 1645 for the region’s top 10% of farmers.

Total revenue for the

Butterworths was just over \$1 million versus \$831,000 for Waikato and \$977,000 average for the top 10%.

It’s not surprising Butterworth scooped the Waikato title in the Dairy Business of the Year competition; he also finished runner-up in the national competition.

Hosting about 120 farmers and stakeholders at a field day on his farm in Winton, Butterworth says he doesn’t do anything



Waikato farmer Rex Butterworth.

special on his 113ha property (106ha eff).

“All we do is feed cows and grow grass; please don’t go away from here thinking anything special happens on this farm.”

But Butterworth refers to one major decision that was a turning point for his farm: in 2012 he erected two Herd Homes, each holding 250 cows. He made this decision after

realising he was not always succeeding in his quest to farm healthy, happy cows; but the Herd Homes changed that.

It’s ventilation system and shade sails lower

the temperature during summer, reducing cows’ heat stress, resulting in the cows consuming at least an extra 8kgDM/cow daily, raising profits and improving cow condition.

Butterworth also noted that their water consumption rose by nearly 50% during the hottest time of the day.

He says the warm, dry environment in winter led to mastitis at calving time halving from 10% of newly calved cows to 5%.

“We put this down to the cows being stood off in a less stressful, cleaner,

dry environment.

“The clear roof allows sunlight through, killing light sensitive bacteria and drying the floor. Maintaining a dry floor plays a big part in Herd Home management.”

Butterworth says the Herd Homes mean lactation length is not as heavily influenced by cow condition, pasture cover

or weather.

Animal welfare remains a high priority for the Butterworth.

“With the Herd Homes we focus on prevention, not cure and maintenance and not repair.”

He is intent on the basics – pasture management, making high ME supplements, fully grown young stock,



Farm manager Vernon Madeley talks about pasture management to visitors at the field day.

cow condition and the transition of cows from pre- to post-calving.

“Get those things right and the rest is easy.”

Cows are fed pasture, maize silage, grass silage and PKE; all supplements are fed in the Herd Homes. All house effluent is exported off-farm to the maize ground and silage paddocks at the run-off farm.

“Growing a high yielding, high ME maize

crop is essential to our system. The difference in cost between a 22tDM and 26tDM crop is minimal

**“All we do is feed cows and grow grass; please don’t go away from here thinking anything special happens on this farm.”**

but the economic gain/loss is huge.”

Environment is also a key point but Butterworth admits he has not always

been as environmentally aware as he is now. Like many he once saw effluent as a problem and costly

The Herd Homes help make the farm more environmentally sustainable.

“The farm has a far lower environmental footprint than most conventionally run dairy farms and is well below the industry average; this proves more profit need not mean more pollution.”

a major polluter, he had to demonstrate that he could operate responsibly.

The Herd Homes help make the farm more environmentally sustainable.

“The farm has a far lower environmental footprint than most conventionally run dairy farms and is well below the industry average; this proves more profit need not mean more pollution.”



The investment in Herd Homes in 2012 has paid off for the Butterworths.

## PEOPLE POWER

BUTTERWORTHS ONLY employ people they respect and like.

They want employees to share their vision and successes.

Farm managers Vernon Madeley and Barbara Fell are long-time employees.

“Their contribution has been outstanding and we couldn’t be happier with their efforts,” says Butterworth.

“They should be – and have every right to be – proud of what they have helped us achieve.”