

Stock home helps save pasture, farmer's energy

GARETH GILLATT

A COVERED feedpad from Herd Homes has helped a Hikurangi farmer and sharemilker take care of pastures and keep workload and waste down. Glenn and Kristine Redwood are lower-order sharemilkers milking 230 cows off a 160ha Hikurangi dairy farm owned by Lew Ringrose, 10 minutes north of Whangarei.

The Hikurangi area is known for being wet, and though their farm never floods, Glenn Redwood says it gets its share of water, with pastures being sensitive to pugging from June to late September.

While the farm has had a woodchip standoff pad for two or three seasons before the installation of the Herd Homes shel-

ter, Redwood says it never stood up to the challenge. "We couldn't clean it and it wouldn't last the whole winter... it just lasted 6-7 weeks."

Redwood went shopping for a solution at the Northland Field Days, deciding between solutions that used concrete floors and limestone floors. "We decided to go with a limestone floor because concrete can be quite hard on cows' feet."

Herd Homes spent one month putting up the structure and it took Redwood and Ringrose a bit longer to install the feed troughs and gates. Redwood says the shed was all completed by the middle of June.

"It took them a bit longer because this was the first structure of its kind and they had to

source the right materials."

Now that the structure is up, Redwood says they are already seeing the benefits. "It'll take a few seasons to pay for itself by helping us repair damaged pasture but we're already seeing improving pasture."

One benefit Redwood didn't expect to see are the time savings the standoff shelter brought. In the 2011-12 season he had to stand stock in the cowshed yard as well as the woodchip pad and found that he was having to spend time shifting stock around to make space for essential jobs like milking.

This isn't a problem now and Redwood says that time required for herd management is a fraction of what it used to be. "Before once the cows started calving I had to get

rid of the dry cows before I could start milking but now I can put the dry cows in the shed and leave them there until I finish milking."

Clearing effluent out of the shed also doesn't take too long, according to Redwood. "I just spend 10 minutes a day scraping it out into a pit then don't worry about it until summer." The pit is only 5m² and "a couple of metres deep".

Redwood says it has managed to handle most of the waste generated although they do plan on roofing it and increasing the size for next season.

"It was good that we didn't need to worry about spreading the effluent in the winter. It's one less job to do when we are getting cows and calves in."

The shed, which is 42m



Glenn Redwood

long and 16m wide, provides shelter for the animals but doesn't get hot, according to Redwood.

"We might put shade cloth on the trusses inside of the Herdhome and use it in the height of summer to get them in the shade."

Herd Homes director and founder Tom Pow says when coming up with the concept of the shelters he took a page from nature and made sure air vents were at the top and

bottom of the walls to guarantee airflow.

"If you go under a tree in the height of summer on a still day there's always a breeze so I asked myself why that was."

Air circulation is vital in the sheds says Pow as it prevents ammonia build up. Ammonia inhalation can make stock listless and limit production and is often a problem with other covered areas where stock spend large amounts of time. "When there's no

airflow going through a structure there's nothing to take the ammonia away.

Too many sheds are built from a greenhouse and construction background and its causing problems."

Redwood says while it has been used extensively the floor and walls of their shed hasn't deteriorated in the least. "It all looks like the day when they put it in - no rips, tears or anything." www.herdhomes.co.nz