

Treating animals well is always rewarding

YVONNE O'HARA
yvonne.ohara@alliedpress.co.nz

Geoffrey Wilson is a dairy man through and through.

He is a firm believer in treating his animals well and with respect "every single day", particularly as his cows work hard to provide an income for him.

As part-owner of 120ha West Mains Farm at Maungatua, in partnership with his parents Philip and Heather Wilson, he also runs the Telesis Holstein-Friesian stud.

He is also the property's 50-50 sharemilker, milking 300 cows.

"The herd has a BW of 190 and a PW of 252," Mr Wilson said.

They also have a 65ha run-off, which is used for cropping and young stock.

The milk solid target for the past season was 176,000kgMS and until a few years ago he winter-milked.

The Wilson family is constantly looking at ways to improve the efficiency, productivity and appearance of the property and a year ago built two Herd Homes®.

"They are excellent for wintering the cows in and we calve in them as well," Mr Wilson said. "They are also used as a stand-off pad."

There are two silage bunkers.

"It is not quite ad lib feeding and we feed half grass and half barley-whole crop mix.

"The cows also go into the paddock for hay and baleage if it's a nice day."

By using that system, he can prevent most paddock damage and mud.

"We have noticed a huge drop in silage consumption since we started using the Herd Homes® in May last year. The cows are happy and content and they utilise 99.9% of what we feed out."

The Herd Homes® sit on top of 1.5m deep bunkers, which hold the effluent.

"It is amazing how clean and dry the shelters are.

"It has to be better for them when calving and we only lost one calf stillborn last year."

Mr Wilson said he had extensive regrassing, refencing and planting plans for the property.

"I planted 4000 native, gum and poplar trees last year and

planted another 3000 this year. I am a bit of a greenie and I enjoy doing it, especially when you see the results.

Enhancing the property is part of his five-year plan, and is making it a better place to work.

"I want to be more proactive, rather than responsive to issues on the farm to make it more enjoyable for us and ultimately we will end up with more happy, friendly cows.

"It encourages me to get up in the morning when it is raining or snowing and sustains me through the hard times and encourages me to take the next steps."

In addition to farming and managing the stud, Mr Wilson was the 2006 Otago Sharemilker of the Year. He won the national New Zealand Young Rural Achievers' award in 2008, in addition to several breeding awards.

When not working, he enjoys playing drums, the guitar and doing adventure sports, including "skiing in stupid places, like heliskiing".

His partner works in Dunedin and he has a Jack Russell called Jack.



Happy and healthy cows
... Dairy farmer and stud breeder Geoffrey Wilson believes in treating his cows well and with respect.

PHOTO: YVONNE O'HARA