



Graeme Dodd enjoys working amongst the diverse environments that the farm contains.

A MOSAIC OF BUSH AND PRODUCTIVE PADDOCKS CREATES A PARK-LIKE FEEL AT TE WAEWAE BAY

FARM OVERVIEW:

- Enterprise: Sheep & beef & dairy grazing; 6500 stock units. The home block is Certified Organic with Assure Quality since Jan 2009.
- Property Size: 240 ha: 200 ha effective, 20 ha in covenants, 5 ha to be covenanted, 3ha riparian buffer strips, 1 ha created wetland, 3 ha native forest shearing shelter, 8 ha to be improved. Plus 300 ha non organic certified leased grazing land.
- Property location: Near Waiiau River mouth, Tuatapere, Southland.
- Average annual rainfall: 1200 mm
- Altitude: 20 m a.s.l.
- Soil Type: Glenelg & Papatotara silty-loams.
- Ecological values: Five separate biodiversity covenants contain patches of botanically diverse lowland alluvial terrace Podocarp forest that is rich in birdlife. The forest type has been much reduced nationally and would have once been widespread along the Waiiau valley. The Waimoutu and Kowhai Creeks are estuarine tributaries and so have an important influence on local fishery health.

The Dodd's farm has a history of environmentally sympathetic management and many natural assets are present. Indeed, the previous owners negotiated the sale of two native forest blocks to the Department of Conservation via the Nature Heritage Fund. When Dorothy and Graeme Dodd purchased the property nine years ago, they were determined to integrate environmental management with productivity and profitability improvements. Dorothy sums up their basic ethic with the assertion that "you should leave the land better than you found it".

A guiding principle of the Dodd's vision was to find ways to improve the farming system itself whilst enhancing ecological values and reducing costs. Bush areas were fenced to improve mustering efficiency, reduce lamb deaths due to wind exposure and avoid weight losses associated with stock spending too long in the bush. Apart from restoring bush vitality, a key focus has been to increase freshwater ecosystem health. In this context, the decision to become Certified Organic producers seems a natural progression since the Dodd's farming practices were

already aligned with the principle of sustainability that organic production embodies. In fact, minimal work was required to satisfy the international standards and receive premium prices for their products.

Fencing and planting activities were started in their first season on the farm, resulting in the creation of five QEII National Trust bush covenants in 2005. Graeme Dodd explains that for them, the main benefit of opting for covenants is that they “can be sure that something positive will remain into the future for all the hard work put in”. Four years on, the natural regeneration is marked. Meanwhile, the major project of installing generous riparian buffer strips either side of all streams has been completed with some funding assistance from the Waiapu Fisheries and Wildlife Habitat Trust. The NZ Landcare Trust gained two Biodiversity Condition Fund grants on the Dodd’s behalf. This funding has provided plants for extensive riparian plantings, predator traps and poison, as well as paying professionals to control the persistent Darwin’s barberry shrub.

“I GET SO MUCH ENJOYMENT FROM WORKING IN A PLACE WITH CHARACTER”, EXPLAINS GRAEME DODD.

Darwin’s barberry is a particular threat as it is one of the few weeds in New Zealand that can actually establish and persist under a forest canopy. Control of mustelids and rats in the covenant areas was given a further boost by the donation of traps

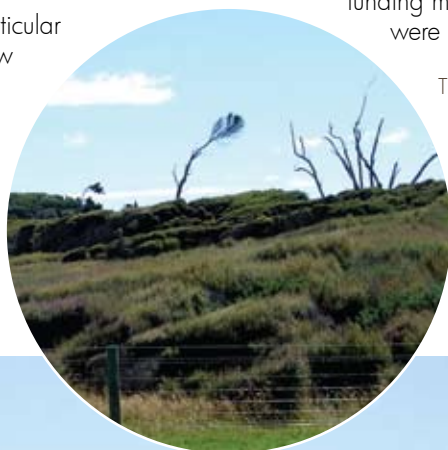
from Environment Southland. Now, after a concerted trapping effort over the last two years, catch numbers of rats, stoats and hedgehogs are well down with the Dodds noticing an increase in bird numbers helping to keep them motivated.

Most capital costs of the environmental initiatives have been covered by grants and donations, enabling much faster progress to be made than would have otherwise been possible. So far, the main cost to the Dodd’s of this work has been their time input. The highest capital cost borne by them was the reticulation of stock water supplies to allow fencing streams off. Excluding stock from streams has brought with it a raft of benefits apart from the obvious water quality improvements. Foremost of these benefits has been the reduction in drainage maintenance costs. Now that riparian plantings shade out aquatic weeds and stabilise banks with their roots, the streams run unimpeded and suffer less damage during floods. One disadvantage to creating the stream buffer zones has been an increased occurrence of weeds such as Ragwort in directly adjacent pasture. Nonetheless, some neighbours have been inspired to fence their creeks off too after a field day was held on the Dodd’s farm during which experiences and information on funding mechanisms were shared.

Widespread recognition of their efforts came in 2006 with the awarding of the Southland Supreme Winners of the Ballance Farm Environment Awards. The opportunity this gave to meet other like-minded farmers from around the country at the national showcase was particularly valuable to Graeme and Dorothy.

The work the Dodd family have put in to protect the biodiversity values on their farm has changed their attitude towards the place, making it feel like home. When they first purchased the property, they had planned to use it as a stepping stone but now they have “no wish to move on anywhere else”; so much so that they continue to put precious time and resources into enhancing biodiversity. Recently, with connectivity in mind, they have created a one hectare wetland that links existing bush with the estuary and provides fishery habitat. Soon, the only patch of Podocarp forest that remains to be protected is to be fenced at the Dodd’s expense. And all this while continuing to improve pasture health and aiming to develop residual rough ground makes for a bright future.

100m long shelter belt sections are being established in the paddocks without natural bush shelter using Flax and the hardy Chatham Island Akeake (*Olearia traversii*).



This highly wind-sculpted patch of regenerating Podocarp forest on the southern end of the farm gives a clue as to just how close the property is to Te Waewae Bay and the prevailing sou’westers.



The layout of the bush patches gives the farm a spacious feel as many paddocks only reveal themselves upon exploration. The mosaic of bush patches, riparian plantings and shelter belts provides stock with protection from all prevailing wind directions.