

CASE STUDY



Martin Bennett, Dairy farmer and farm consultant, Putaruru

WINNING COMBINATION FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Putaruru dairy farmer Martin Bennett has been farming for 37 years. The Bennetts' South Waikato farm comprises 128 effective hectares milking 390 cows producing 160,000kgMS per year.

The farm employs a contract milker which is just as well because Bennett is also a farm consultant to seven dairy farmers located throughout the greater Waikato region, from Reporoa to Te Kauwhata.

Bennett started consulting around four years ago when he was able to step back from some of the day-to-day responsibilities of his own farm.

With more than a quarter century of successful farming under his belt, and with national roles such as chair of the annual Building Dairy Environment Leaders Forum in his portfolio, it is no surprise that Bennett's farm management advice is sought by other dairy farmers.

A BETTER FARM MANAGEMENT TOOL

In 2012, Bennett started looking around for an information management tool for his own farm that would continue to sharpen their farming operation.

"I had developed my own feed budget on a spreadsheet many years ago and taught myself to use it. I added costings to it and over the years it just kept getting bigger and bigger and more and more complicated to use. Eventually it was a logical transition to find a complete software package that would integrate more aspects of the farm and was easier use."

FARMAX was the software program that caught Martin's attention.

"FARMAX is a one-stop-shop tool that covers most of the input and output costs of the farming business and summarises it all in one place. It integrates all your information rather than, for example, looking at your

feed budget in isolation. It also gives you the unique ability to model different scenarios across the farming system so that you can assess options for your farm and make decisions with a greater level of confidence than what you'll get from educated guesses or gut feel."

DEVELOPING THE GAME PLAN TOGETHER

Today, Bennett uses FARMAX Dairy Pro which is the most advanced version of the software. It allows him to do more in-depth analysis and model different scenarios for his farmer clients.

To get started he works with the farmer to set up a file in FARMAX which creates a model of the farm based on historical data across a range of areas, and based on that develops a plan for the farm for the coming year.

"Farming has to be viewed as a programme of continuous improvement and that's one of the key advantages of FARMAX because it keeps stretching how far you can push your farm's ability to produce more from the resources you have available."

The farmers use FARMAX FarmTools which is a version of the program specifically for recording information such as feed types, values and purchases, supplementary feed made on farm, stock numbers and movements, fertiliser applications, and paddock activities such as cropping and re-grassing.

They send this information to Bennett on a monthly basis who adds it to their master file.

Then they meet monthly to review and fine tune the plan and make any adjustments, such as shifting feed, buying feed, adding fertiliser or selling stock to ensure the farm is converting as much dry matter into milk solids as possible.

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NO-WHERE TO HIDE FROM ACCOUNTABILITY

Bennett said once you commit to using FARMAX, it quickly tells you whether you are on the game, and there's no-where to hide from the accountability it provides - in a very positive way.

"You'll know whether you or the people in your team are following the plan because you'll either have too much feed or not enough milk production, or vice-versa."

He said it is also a great tool for motivating teams to work together towards common goals, and dovetails nicely into staff management.

"It keeps people very focussed which is beneficial for everybody. Especially for your Gen-Ys who like technology. You can get them on-board and working towards achieving set targets and goals rather than boxing on blindly, so in that respect it is also a tool for engaging your staff in their work."

TAKING CHARGE OF THE PRODUCTIVITY EQUATION

Bennett said farming through volatile times puts an increased focus on controlling costs, and not losing track of where the expenses are and how they are being managed.

He said if you lose control, it is really hard to pull back on the cost per kilo to produce milk solids, and FARMAX tells you in black and white exactly how you are performing in this area.

"FARMAX really keeps the financials tuned because it integrates the cost structure of your farm into its program - so nothing is working in isolation. As long as the data is being kept up to date, you can use FARMAX to successfully maintain cost control and ride the highs and lows of payouts."

Bennett said if a farming operation has clear goals and they want a long-term planning tool, they should consider FARMAX.

"If a farmer wants the ability to plan the use of the resources they have as efficiently as possible and also define future goals for their farming business, there is no better tool than FARMAX that I have come across.

"The more you get into it, the more you can fine tune

MARTIN'S TOP FOUR FARMAX BENEFITS:

- 1. Feed efficiency:** It's a brilliant education tool that helps farmers quantify the resources they have available so they can use them more effectively.
- 2. Integrating cost structure and financials:** It covers most of the input and output costs of the farming business and summarises it all in one place so that you're not looking at different aspects in isolation; instead you can see where one change here affects something over there.
- 3. Power of scenarios:** This is where it really cranks up and you see the benefits of building your model, keeping it up to date and testing different decisions or scenarios to make changes with the utmost confidence in the outcome.
- 4. Prepares the farm for the future:** With farming within limits well on the way, FARMAX will contribute to the farm system being more resource efficient and being able to adapt quickly to remain profitable.

your farming system because you are constantly evaluating your progress, and it fits all scenarios, from an absentee owner to a family farm or corporate ownership."

Bennett said the most important thing to remember is that improving productivity on farm is a combination of managing production, cost control and efficiencies.

"Pasture utilisation is number one, and then you need to forward plan your production and profitability goals. FARMAX has the ability to help you continually look forward and push the boundaries and that's the winner for me."