

our people our talent



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By farmers. For farmers.

Welcome to the second edition of Our People, Our Talent—

Beef + Lamb New Zealand's newsletter that celebrates the growth of the people in the sheep and beef sector from primary school children to farm owners. Included in this issue is a range of interesting and inspiring stories from the many programmes Beef + Lamb New Zealand supports.



Doug Macredie
Manager
Sector Capability

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Women vital link in primary industry change

Striking a balance between food production, the environment and people came a step closer in November when 14 women graduated from the Agri-Women's Development Trust Escalator programme.

Now in its seventh year, the programme has so far produced 98 graduates.

AWDT founder and executive director, Lindy Nelson, said New Zealand's primary sector was going through a period of exponential change not seen before.

"Women are vital in creating the change needed to achieve a balance between production, profit and the planet. They represent 50 percent of our sector's talent; their diversity is sorely needed and that fits with global thinking about women's empowerment."

Mrs Nelson said the Escalator graduates leave the programme understanding the intersection between their skills, where they can be applied and the energy that drives them.

The 2017 graduates come from Northland to Otago, and work in dairy, sheep and beef farming, science, marketing, animal health, health and safety, Māori agribusiness, and central and local government.

The Escalator programme includes five Wellington-based modules over 10 months, distance learning, coaching and mentoring.

Mrs Nelson said graduates were taking on significant leadership roles with major economic, environmental and social impacts. They were also leading within industry organisations, corporates and sitting at the decision-making table in governance.

Since its establishment in 2010, AWDT has, in partnership with ANZ, Beef + Lamb New Zealand, DairyNZ, FMG, Agmardt, Ravensdown, Red Meat Profit Partnership, CRS Software, NZX Agri and KPMG, delivered leadership, governance and business development and support to more than 2,200 people.

Body condition scoring made easy



Body condition scoring large mobs of sheep can be an onerous task but can technology make the job quicker and easier?

This question was put to 16 tech-savvy Dunedin teenagers recently as part of the Growing New Zealand Challenge.

The initiative of Young Enterprise New Zealand, the challenge brings together Year nine to 11 students studying business, technology and science and gets them to apply their skills to find solutions to real-life problems (pulled out of a hat)—all within a few hours.

The Primary Sector was represented at the day by Beef + Lamb New Zealand (B+L NZ), DairyNZ and the Ministry for Primary Industries.

Armed with a replica sheep named Roger, B+L NZ extension manager Olivia Ross gave four groups of four students the challenge of finding a quick and easy way to body condition score large numbers of sheep.

The students, who were vying for cash prizes, were given just 40 minutes to think of a solution (helped by a list of enablers), another 40 to put a prototype together and a short time to deliver their solution to the wider group.

Amongst the solutions the groups came up with were using blue-tooth chips embedded in the sheep to measure inter-rib fat cover and using an x-ray machine and a conveyor belt to scan sheep. The x-ray information is then automatically sent to the EID tag.

Olivia says only four of the 16 students she worked with had any connection to agriculture, so for the majority it was an introduction to farm management, animal welfare and the role of technology in farming.

She is hopeful the day will have made science, business and technology students aware of the vast array of career possibilities within the primary sector.



Farm management courses growing essential skills

There is nothing like a cold spring to highlight the value of feed budgeting and that's exactly what North Otago farmer Craig Kingan found this year.

He credits a level three Primary ITO Pasture Management course for giving him the necessary skills to objectively measure and manage feed supplies at what was a critical time of the year.

"It was especially important with big numbers of stock coming out of winter."

Having an understanding of feed availability and animal requirements is a fundamental farm management skill and while Craig had grown up learning to assess feed availability by eye, it was Gareth and Sarah Ibister, his employers on the 450ha dairy support and beef finishing operation where he works, who encouraged him to sign up for the Pasture Management course.

The drystock farm, which carries a total of 1300 cattle, employs the same disciplines around pasture management that are commonly used on dairy farms. This means that Craig measures pasture covers every 10 days. The gathered data is, with the help of Farm IQ management software, used to create a feed wedge which underpins grazing rotation and management decisions.

Feed availability and pasture growth rates, coupled with an understanding of the feed requirements of the different livestock classes, ensures the business is making the most efficient use of feed resources while maximising livestock growth rates.

For Craig who has spent all of his career working on sheep, beef and deer farms, the Pasture Management course proved to be a springboard to formalise his training in all aspects of farm management. He is now halfway through a Primary ITO level 4 Farm Management course—which encompasses every aspect of farm management from genetics through to environmental and financial management—and is seriously considering continuing his study once level 4 is complete.

The 33-year-old sets aside one evening a fortnight to do his course work and as he is required to submit a monthly farm management report, he is continually documenting his daily activities.

While he admits he was initially a bit reticent about undertaking formal training—saying it felt a bit like going back to school—Craig has thoroughly enjoyed the courses.

Being able to apply what he has learnt on a daily basis makes the study both meaningful and valuable.

Craig will be utilising his knowledge and skills as he continues his career with the ultimate goal being land ownership.



Danielle Scott

Doing budgets is not everyone's favourite pastime but for agribusiness graduate Danielle Scott they are an essential part of her day job.

Danielle is on a 12-month agribusiness graduate position at BNZ, which means she spends time with the rural bank managers getting exposure to different enterprises and production systems.

She says she loves doing budgets and talking to farmers about their business and business growth opportunities—and Danielle knows what she is talking about.

While she has a degree in Agricultural Science from Massey University, she also has several years of practical farming experience under her belt—along with a Level 4 Certificate in Agriculture (sheep and beef).

At just 23, Danielle has packed a lot into the five years since leaving school. Although she studied an eclectic mix of subjects at Dargaville High School—arts, art history, shearing and fencing, with an eye to maybe studying architecture—her love of farming and the outdoors won out in the end.

After a year studying at Taratahi—where she won awards for best sheep and beef student and best fencer, she took a shepherding position at a 1600ha station in the Wairarapa.

It was while working on the station that Danielle realised the importance of business and analytical skills in running a successful farm business.

This spurred her on to extend her academic education by enrolling in an agricultural degree course at Massey University.

While she believes a grounding in statistics, economics and science would have been helpful in her degree course, she also believes her practical farm experience stood her in good stead.

"It helps you tie everything together when you go to university. It allowed me to easily find casual work whereas some students with little experience struggled to find work and often had to work unpaid."

Danielle was awarded a Beef + Lamb New Zealand scholarship in her final year of study at Massey University.

She says the scholarship—along with savings—was immensely helpful in allowing her to get through university without the burden of a student loan.

International Beef Alliance Young Ambassadors

Earlier this year B+LNZ selected two young ambassadors—Dani Darke and Mark Murphy—to represent New Zealand at this year's International Beef Alliance (IBA) conference in Paraguay.

Dani Darke

Dani understands the importance of needing to have well-performing and profitable sheep and beef farms to underpin strong rural communities.

Last year the King Country farmer completed an Agri-Women's Development Trust Escalator programme where she had the opportunity to define and articulate her values—at the heart of which were a desire to see rural communities thrive.

Dani points out that her values align with those of B+LNZ and it was these shared values that encouraged the 34-year-old to apply for a position as an International Beef Alliance Young Ambassador.

Having a background in rural banking and meat processing, Dani has a sound understanding of this country's sheep and beef industry and is looking forward to getting a global perspective on the opportunities and challenges facing the international beef industry.

Dani and her husband Anthony farm 412 ha of mixed terrain at Aria, running 1500 ewes and 480 finishing cattle—predominately Friesian bulls—and 65 beef-cross breeding cows.



Mark Murphy

Growing great beef is what Mark does and intends doing for many years to come.

The 25-year-old has worked on beef farms—mainly finishing operations—since leaving school and is now building up his own Hereford stud, encouraged by a former employee who gave him his first registered heifer.

Mark works on two farms in the Nelson Lakes region and has his eye firmly fixed on future farm ownership—and an upsized Hereford stud.

This is the second year Mark has represented his country at the International Beef Alliance. He was a Young Leader when New Zealand hosted the conference in Taupo last year and has stepped up to a senior role this year.

He sees the urban rural divide and the growth of synthetic meats as two of the biggest challenges facing the beef industry and he is looking forward to discussing the latter at the Paraguay conference.

IBA is a private entity formed by the national organisations representing the beef cattle producers in Australia, Brazil, Canada, México, New Zealand, Paraguay and the United States. Collectively the group represents half of global beef production and 63 per cent of global beef exports.

Successful start to Future Sheep Programme

There is nothing like hands-on experience to generate an interest in agriculture and this is what the Future Sheep programme gave over 60 secondary school students this year.

Based roughly on the Future Beef NZ initiative, Future Sheep was instigated by Taratahi tutor David Price. He saw the potential of running a programme using easier-to-handle sheep that would teach year 10-13 students some basic stock handling and animal husbandry skills.

A programme, which was run by Taratahi and supported by Young Farmers, Beef + Lamb New Zealand and Allflex was rolled out to six Hawke's Bay secondary schools.

Run over terms two and three, the students, who were from urban and rural backgrounds, came together for one afternoon every fortnight and went through learning modules with a focus on practical handling and husbandry skills.

The programme culminated in a competition where students, who wished to participate, could put all their acquired skills into practice in a competitive and fun environment.

Held at the Hawke's Bay showgrounds on the first Saturday of the third term holidays, the first half of the day had the 27 competing students judging stock and wool and completing modules including health and safety, tagging, drenching, genetics, wool handling and hand piece set up.

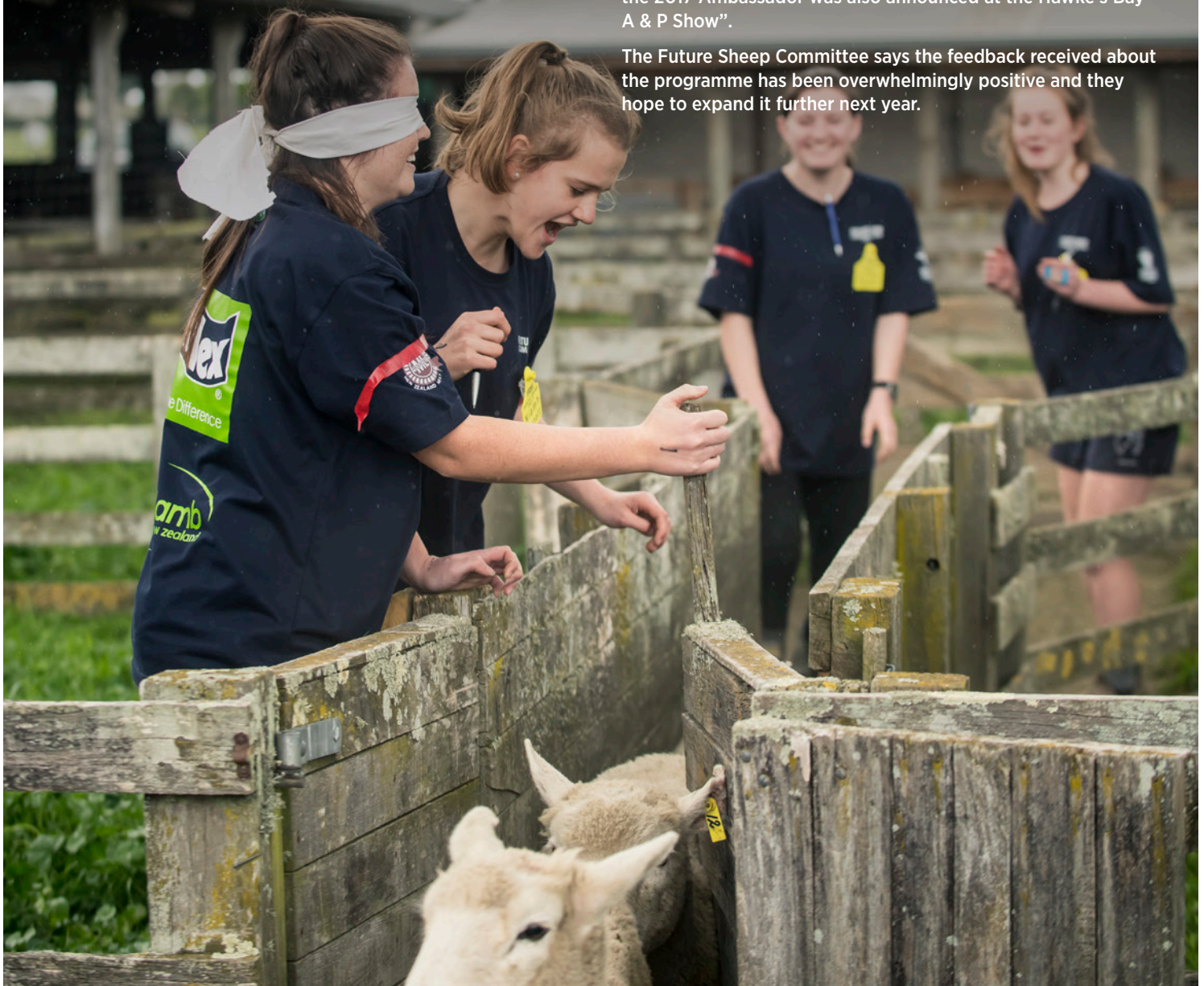
Running alongside the skills day was a Hoof and Hook competition. Each group of students were given four sheep and they had to decide which would be best judged on the hoof and which would be the best on the hook.

The animals deemed ready for slaughter were processed at Progressive Meats and the results of this competition was announced at the Hawke's Bay A&P show.

All students registered for the Future Sheep programme had the opportunity to put themselves forward for an ambassadorial role. This Future Sheep ambassador will represent students on the Future Sheep committee and help shape the programme's future.

Eight students applied for the role. They were judged on their skills and knowledge and went through an interview process. The top three finalists from the competition were selected and the 2017 Ambassador was also announced at the Hawke's Bay A & P Show".

The Future Sheep Committee says the feedback received about the programme has been overwhelmingly positive and they hope to expand it further next year.





Ahuwhenua Young Maori Farmer winner is farming advocate

If the Ahuwhenua Young Maori Farmer Award was judged on personality alone Jordan Biddles would be a sure winner.

But Jordan won this year's award for his skills, work ethic and drive to climb the career ladder within the sheep and beef industry.

Having left school at 15 with no real direction, he initially worked with his father as a fencer. He took on casual farm work and built up a team of dogs before being offered a permanent shepherding job on Waitaha Station. He has not looked back.

When he won the award in May, Jordan was working on the Ngati Pahauwera-owned Pihanui Station but has since moved on to develop a bull-beef unit within the Iwi's farm business.

He jokes that he moves on every two years, but this is a reflection of his desire to broaden his skill base and experience. He is now the sole operator of an 800ha (500ha effective) steep rolling hill country unit in Northern Hawkes Bay and is undertaking a significant development programme which includes fertiliser, re-grassing, growing feed crops and fencing.

"It's a bit different from what I have been doing but it's a good learning curve," he says.

Last year the unit finished 250 bulls, but this number will increase significantly as the development programme kicks in.

The bull calves are reared on another Ngati Pahauwera farm and delivered to Jordan after weaning.

Jordan, who has two children aged five and two, has just completed his level 3, Primary ITO agricultural qualification and is about to start level 4.

He tries to put time aside every week to carry out the academic study—which he admits does not come naturally.

The fact that he had work experience under his belt before started the Primary ITO programme helped as he could see how the theory could be applied in the field.

Jordan will be staying in his current role until all the development work is complete and the farm is up and running before moving on to the next phase in his career.

Ultimately, he would like to manage a sheep and beef farm, but is open to any opportunities.

For a boy who left school without much idea of what he wanted to do, Jordan is now a great advocate for farming as a career.

"I always thought it was a just a job that paid the bills, but when I started doing my levels it opened up big-time. I would definitely recommend it."

He admits the hardest part was getting a foot in the door and getting that first job—but once in, the opportunities to build a career are there.

Jordan's advice to anyone looking for a career in farming—"stick at it and keep pushing hard."

Fresh thinking at B+LNZ's Farmer Council Conference

Youth and experience came together at this year's National Farmer Council conference when 27 Beef + Lamb New Zealand scholars joined in on the discussions and presentations.

Coming from Lincoln, Massey, Canterbury and Waikato Universities and Telford polytechnic, the scholars proved to be enthusiastic participants in brain-storming sessions, where they worked alongside Farmer Council members giving their perspective on industry issues.

B+LNZ's People and Capability manager Doug Macredie says the scholars were scattered amongst the 65 farmer council members over the two days and while the scholars benefited from the council members wisdom and experience, the councils enjoyed interacting with the students.

After the conference the scholars spent a day working on personal development.

Doug says the feedback he received about the initiative was overwhelmingly positive, and the scholars particularly enjoyed the sessions on red meat market development and the opportunity to offer feedback on the Red Meat Profit Partnership's proposed Action Network.



Kurt Portas is positive about the potential for growth in the US lamb market.

Eating only 0.4kg per person per year, lamb consumption the US pales in comparison to that of New Zealanders who consume an average of 9kg per person per year.

But the tide is turning in the US and lamb is the fastest growing protein category, driven largely by its popularity amongst ethnic communities.

Kurt, who manages the 1300ha Palliser Ridge station in the Wairarapa, gained insight into the opportunities and challenges for lamb in the US market when, representing this country, he visited five sheep producing states as part of the Tri-Lamb Group.

Young leader sees potential in US lamb market

The group is a collaborative initiative between lamb producer organisations, (including Beef + Lamb New Zealand) from the US, Australia and NZ. It aims to encourage young leaders from the three countries to share ideas, network and to broaden understanding of sheep production across the three countries.

Portas says there is a real lack of awareness about lamb and wool amongst many urban dwellers in the US. Sheep meat still suffers from a tarnished reputation from the WWII era when mutton was canned and unsurprisingly delivered a very poor eating experience.

He believes education is critical to rebuilding lamb's reputation and while ethnic communities are talking the lead, Portas would like to see marketing targeted at a younger generation—particularly university students.

“Universities would be a great start. One university is like a town, so educating youth about the taste attributes of lamb would be very beneficial.

“Get lamb on the menus in those towns or sell lamb at football games.”

With the aim of building overall lamb consumption, the US lamb industry is keen to work alongside NZ to educate consumers and increase lamb sales in their market.

While the human population in the US is reticent about consuming lamb, the same cannot be said about predators such as coyotes, wolves and Mountain lions.

These animals, along with changing regulations around the use of government land for grazing, are threatening the future of extensive sheep farming systems in States such as Utah and Colorado. Other challenges sheep ranchers face includes a lack of animal health services and products and distance from processing plants.

“Meat plants are miles away from most of the ranches so logistically, they have to rely on feedlots close to abattoirs.”

He says US lamb producers are seeking price consistency and transparency along the supply chain from paddock to plate.

Portas believes there is great opportunity for NZ lamb to be differentiated in the US market as a clean, green, grass-fed, antibiotic and GMO-free product.

“100% grass-fed is our only advantage and we need to keep it that way.”

He also suggests lamb produced on dryland—as opposed to irrigated—pastures might also be a future selling point.

The group visited Superior Farms—a processing and lamb marketing company in California and Portas says they don't view NZ lamb as competition, rather it complements their supply profile.

“Lamb has to be available all year round otherwise customers will find other proteins. Working with, rather than against companies such as Superior could help lift consumption and demand for lamb.”

