



**DAIRY TRUST**  
**SEEKING SOLUTIONS**  
**USING WORLD-CLASS SCIENCE**



In the face of climate change and a call for increased sustainability, a Taranaki farming organisation is using cutting edge science and research to find solutions.

**D**AIRY TRUST TARANAKI, FORMED ABOUT a year ago, has put together its first science direction for the province and is working on trials at its four research farms.

Trust chairman Brendan Attrill says to find out what the sector wanted from research in the region, farmer-focused workshops were held. The ideas gathered were then prioritised into groups.

The resulting research is all about sustainability; not just from an environmental point of view, but also from a farmer's economic viability stance. "A number of our traditional dairy-based businesses in Taranaki have come under significant pressure due to climatic shock," Attrill says.

As a result, research into an autumn calving programme has become a clear focus for the Trust. "We want to take a proactive look at what's going on in that autumn calving space and also listen to a number of leaders in our province, who have already changed to autumn calving and use them as companion farmers," Attrill says.

A few farmers on the coast have been autumn calving for 10 to 15 years, whereas most will calve in late winter/spring. "But with the severe climatic challenges we have seen over the last five years, we have seen an acceleration of people looking at changing to autumn calving."

The Trust's research is shared over four properties — the Stratford Demonstration Farm (51 hectares), Waimate West Demonstration Farm (34ha), the Gibson farm (110ha) at Whareroa near Hawera and the coastal Kavanagh Farm (210ha). Coming under one umbrella made sense, because the farms were competing for slim research funding and now the Trust can utilise the joint skills available from each farm, Attrill says.

Trust operations manager Debbie McCallum says the research tackles the issues around the winter wet and the summer dry, which is becoming more accentuated. While Taranaki-focused, she says research from this region will be applicable to other parts of New Zealand. "We have the high altitude and the wet, and we also have the coast, with low rainfall and a dry summer, which does cover a lot of the climatic variables you have throughout the countryside," she says.

At the Stratford Demonstration Farm, researchers are looking at covered feed pads.

One herd is grazed continuously on pasture, which is the traditional way, and the other herd is moved on to a covered feed pad when soils get saturated in winter and early spring. On the covered pad, cows are given feed supplements and can rest in an area deep with litter bark.

"It's looking at the cost-benefit analysis of that and environmental impacts," McCallum says.

Researchers are also looking at a lower stocking rate and all-grass system, versus a farm where cows are supplemented with palm kernel when feed is short. Or a system where cows are fed supplements "grown on your back doorstep", namely kibbled maize or barley.

"We're aware of the pitfalls of palm kernels going forward as far as it being an imported feed," McCallum says. "We are trying to find a system that's going to be sustainable in the future. We would like to use more environmental measurements, but they are expensive, and they need more funding."

While the Trust is new, the research isn't — the demonstration farms have been around for decades so have a large pool of studies behind them. Going forward, Attrill says the Trust has big plans. "We want to perform world-class science. We want to be the leaders of regional research within the New Zealand dairy space. We want to be a top-class, highly regarded research entity."

Along with doing relevant research, the Trust wants, through farm income, to be profitable every year, so it can continue with self-funded science.

It also wants to be an excellent partner for people to be involved with. Already the Trust leases significant amounts of land off Fonterra, the South Taranaki District Council and the Stratford Demonstration Farm. "We want to be seen as pretty cool people to hitch your wagon to."

Staples Rodway Taranaki is one of the professional bodies supporting the Trust's research goals. "Staples Rodway play an important part of that. Marise James and Jordan Hartley-Smith are pretty pivotal to all our day-to-day operations."

Acting as the Trust's full financial back office, Staples Rodway Taranaki help with payroll, bookkeeping, monthly reporting and attending board meetings, as well as providing the full range of HR support and advisory services.

"We also support them with their IT requirements, facilitating the full set up of wireless internet connections to all of their farms and ongoing technical support," Hartley-Smith says.

"The key to our relationship with the Trust has been the ability for us to provide remote offerings that enable them to sign off invoices, etc., from anywhere and receive technical support in rural areas, so no waiting around for help."

Attrill says working with others is extremely important to the Trust. "We want to be leaders around the way we manage people, around the way we develop people and we want to develop our governors around the table," he says, mentioning succession planning.

"We want to see them come through the industry as young leaders and develop further by taking senior roles as the Dairy Trust develops."