

CLIENT CASE STUDY

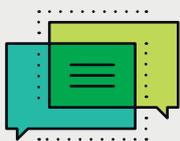
The Cram Family's Farm

Being an essential service, the dairy sector hasn't been stopped in its tracks by COVID-19. It has been one of the few sectors helping hold the New Zealand economy together since March 2020. Despite this, farmers are coming to terms with a reduction in milk prices and with peak milk production coming up in October; it is an unnerving time for the dairy sector.

Baker Tilly Staples Rodway clients, Donna and Philip Cram, own and run their 117ha dairy farm at Awatuna, on the southern boundary of Egmont National Park between Stratford and Opunake. They have around 250 cows, grazed outside year-round so a drought last summer, along with slow processing at the meat works due to COVID-19, has affected their profitability.

Donna explained: "The price of our cows went down at the end of last season and now our milk pay-out range is considerably different for the 20-21 season compared to the 19/20 season."

However, one hugely positive thing that has developed as a result of COVID-19 is the appreciation of the dairy sector, and farms in general. Consumers are now very much aware of the origin of their food.



Now, for tomorrow

Donna remains optimistic, she says, "The story of how our food is grown has now been highlighted. This has put a spotlight on New Zealand as a top dairy producer. Telling our story is of real importance now more than ever. In New Zealand our cows spend all year outside, eating grass made from some of the best soils in the world. We have to get better at telling our story."

As a result of COVID-19, Donna feels that now more than ever we must be communicating with New Zealanders and those overseas to get the message across that what we have to offer is the gold standard in our milk quality. She says,

"We have been committed to environmentally sustainable practices for many years but it takes time to see the positive effects of your hard work and the work is continuing. What COVID-19 has done for our industry is to give much needed confidence to the farmers for their hard work. The feeling of appreciation from consumers is amazing. Now we have been given confidence that providing quality milk and beef in NZ and overseas is a crucial part of a thriving economy."

Donna has had national and regional roles in Dairy NZ's Dairy Environment Leaders. She has a passion for sustainable farming practices, improving the environment and water quality, and contributing to a predator-free district.

In 2016, they were acknowledged for their commitment to their land and were awarded by the regional council for environmental stewardship, sustainable dairy farming and riparian management. Donna explains their achievement:

“It shows what can be done when you have the knowledge and the drive to see a thriving industry. Sustainable practices come hand in hand with better productivity so it’s always been a win-win situation for us.”



A good example of this was a year ago when Philip identified an area receiving a large amount of water in a catchment area. With help from Taranaki Regional Council and NIWA, a former stream bed was re-engineered into a wetland to reduce nutrients, bacteria and sediment leaching into the waterways.

The wetland is now a stunning place to come and enjoy views of Mt Taranaki whilst capturing data on water quality and biodiversity. It is a place that Enviroschools, an environmental action-based programme for schools, has shown recent interest in bringing children to learn about bird, plant, fresh water ecology and sustainable farming practices. Donna and Philip are excited to share the land for education. Donna says:

“Telling our story to consumers is one thing, but more importantly, we want to tell our story to children. They are our future farmers and we need them to be stewards of the land if we want to continue to see a thriving sector, not just for our livelihoods but for the country and economy as a whole.”

Donna has an enlightened sense of hope for the future.

“I am incredibly grateful for the support we have received from Fonterra, Dairy NZ, Federated Farmers, Beef + Lamb New Zealand and Silver Fern Farms. Being able to continue farming during COVID-19 was a huge relief and we received a lot of support. The paddock to plate movement has been highlighted and more consumers are now asking where their food comes from. I am hopeful that there is light at the end of the tunnel, and we will see a booming industry in New Zealand once the pandemic is over.

The Cram Family are clients of Alison Turner, Director and Leigh Buchanan, Associate from the Baker Tilly Staples Rodway Stratford office. Alison and Leigh support the Cram family business with advisory work, and business information systems Xero and Figured.

About Baker Tilly Staples Rodway.

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