

Davidson

Brian & Charlie

SHEEP & BEEF, 820ha – PORANGAHAU



Brian & Joan Davidson

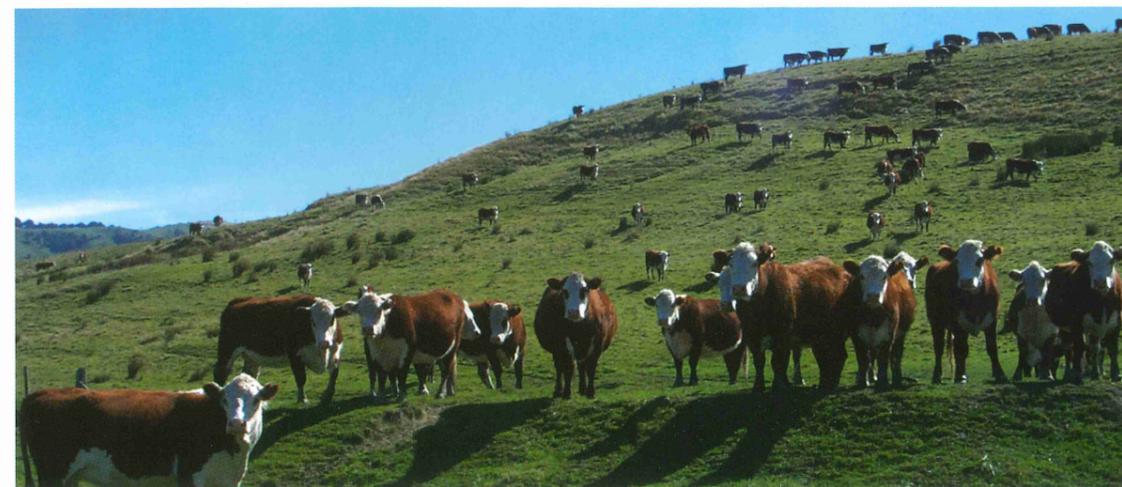
Ngapua has been in the Davidson family ever since J.D. Davidson drew it in a ballot in 1912. By 1957 a partnership had been formed with his two sons, Don and Brian, eventually purchasing the neighbouring farm, *Weldon*, and running them as two separate properties.

They set about clearing heavy scrub, hand-sowing new pasture, and organising fencing. A D2 bulldozer was purchased as well, assisting with development, and allowing a series of access tracks to be built. When it came to top dressing, they always wanted to apply lime with their phosphate but found it to be too costly. By the early '60s though, Hatuma had started manufacturing dicalcic, and after they looked into the concept, it seemed the natural choice of fertiliser; with the first load being applied shortly afterwards - an annual application that would continue for the next 40 years.

Brian continued to farm *Ngapua* by himself before his son, Charlie, returned in 1978 to join him, eventually incorporating *Weldon* into the operation. These days, Charlie and wife Susan are both actively involved in the community - Charlie being the President of the staunchly supported Porangahau Rugby Club, and schoolboy rugby coach, while Susan is Principal at the local Mangoarapa School. From being brought up on the farm, through to working it, Charlie has been able to come to his own conclusions about Hatuma's dicalcic phosphate:

"The first thing you notice about dicalcic is that it feeds the soil," says Charlie. "A few years back we purchased a neighbouring block. While it initially grew more grass than the original farm, we couldn't get the stock to eat it because there'd been too much water-soluble fertilisers applied in the past. Even when we pushed them to clean it up, the stock began having a lot of health problems. After a while, we decided to do some soil tests to help us improve the situation. But when the results came back, they showed that everything was fine and the soil was perfect, which contradicted what we were noticing. In the end, it took three years of dicalcic use for it to come right. This reaffirmed what we were doing was correct. It also showed us that although the other fertilisers can grow grass, they aren't necessarily any good for the stock.

The stock health is a big part of farming for us. We don't feel we need to excessively drench them, and as such, we only drench the ewes once a year. Dagging is very minimal and never a problem - if you have healthy stock and balanced pasture then you don't get them. There have been some rare isolated cases of staggers and facial eczema in the past, but they were easily dealt with. The stock are happy and content, which keep the extra costs to a minimum. Not long ago, the Bank Manager came out to the farm and after looking at everything, proceeded to tell me the cost of the farm's health bill was way below average.



“When spring arrives, the grass responds well. The pasture is palatable to the stock and they graze everything evenly, which is important for any farm. Even if it has got away the cows will easily clean it up - any browntop that appears gets eaten by the stock before winter.”



The lambing percentage has been steadily rising from 115%, to this year's 135%. All the lambs get fattened here, averaging 17.5kg each year. There's also 90-95% calving on average with only 3% dries last year.

We have phenomenal clover growth on the farm and don't have the need to apply artificial fertiliser to fix the nitrogen. When spring arrives, the grass responds well. The pasture is palatable to the stock and they graze everything evenly, which is important for any farm. Even if it has got away the cows will easily clean it up - any browntop that appears gets eaten by the stock before winter. We have one particular area on the farm that doesn't have the dicalcic mix applied to it due to the truck not being able to get there, and as such, we really have to push the cows to clean it up. That's certainly a true indication of how the dicalcic makes the rest of the farm palatable - something soil tests don't test for. We believe in feeding the soil and not the grass, and get great satisfaction in kicking over cowpats and seeing the earthworms working," concludes Charlie.

After Brian left *Ngapua* in 1993, he moved onto 50 acres of finishing country in the Hatuma district. "When we arrived ten years ago, we knew that it hadn't had any fertiliser for a long time. As a result, the pasture was a mess. So one of the first things we did was turn the paddocks up and start applying dicalcic. It took the first three years to get the pasture where we were happy

with it and starting to get results; but it's been great ever since.

The stock come in, get blown up, and then they're sold. 50 - 60 steers a year get finished with another 30 heifers after that. We keep the steers until they do over 400kg (live-weight) and then they're sold. The stock performance is terrific - we fatten over 50 cattle on only 40 acres.

We had one case of bloat in the first year, but nothing since, and we don't use any precautions. The vet has only been out twice since we arrived and they were for unexplained incidences. We don't get health concerns over the stock here.

There is a huge amount of clover that "hangs on" throughout the year, even on our predominant southerly faces, and the stock eat the lot. Both Charlie and I get many comments on how good this block looks and how it stands out.

The light applications are the secret, especially now that Hatuma are producing the Cropfine lime. It has brought it into every farmer's reach and is a lot more beneficial to the soil life and stock well-being.

We've found the dicalcic to do a lot of good. The appearance of the farm looks healthy, both here and back on Charlie's. The stock certainly like the product, and this shows in the production," says Brian.

