

Ian Douglas

CRESTA STUD, 60 ACRES

Ian Douglas farms 30 minutes out of Masterton along the main road to Castlepoint. His father began farming 440 acres back in 1900s, when it was part of the original Langdale Block, which at the time was over 9,000 acres and incorporated a small community.

These days, Ian's family is the only original family left in Langdale. Over the years more land was acquired and Ian built the farm up to 700 acres, but now it has been reduced to the current 60 acres, leaving him with a much easier block to run.

Early in the New Year we were sitting on his veranda, admiring the rather large, but perfectly manicured front lawn and the number of tall trees that towered a long way above it. Straight away, we realised that Ian was someone who takes great pride in looking after what he has, and who doesn't take it all for granted.

"I first became interested in using dicalcic phosphate after reading previous 'Hatuma Updates' and learning what other farmers were achieving naturally from the use of it. So back in '95, I decided that I'd start using it - putting it on at 5cwt per acre, followed by another 5cwt of potassic dicalcic with each cutting of baleage.

When I began using the dicalcic, the neighbours used to hassle me about using it - they would try to tell me that it was an expensive way of applying lime and super, but I used to think, how could that be? Not only are you putting it all on in one go, but it's not even lime and super any more - it's become a new product in the dicalcic phosphate form."

We decided to leave the sunny veranda and have a look around his property. Heading out through his back yard, we arrive at his very impressive vegetable garden and fruit trees. As we stand there briefly, admiring basically every type of edible plant that there is, Ian comments, "I even use dicalcic on the vegetable garden and its helped turn my garden into something legendary around these parts."

He carries on leading the way, and we very quickly find ourselves walking through paddocks that look more like they belong on a dairy farm, with a great abundance of rich green clover and white flowering clover seeds. "We have no bloat problems here. The lambs and ewes never get dags and very seldom do we see scouring on the bulls. I do very little drenching as well - as long as you practice good stock-husbandry, the drenching can be as minimal as you like.

Everything does very well here now. I'm getting very good weight gains on the bulls with all of them around the 500kg mark (late November), and the lambs are all fattened on this property. At times I bring in some of the neighbours lambs, and they're amazed at the great condition I can get them into. Also, they don't seem to hang on to their mothers as long, as they're onto the grass a lot quicker within a week or two. I'm convinced it's got to do with the palatable grass that the farm has now got. Certainly one of the big advantages to dicalcic is that the stock graze onto the paddocks and don't leave it looking patchy any more.

The regrowth is very quick as well. One particular paddock was grazed right out and then topped, but within 6 weeks, the grass was back up to the bottom of my shorts. We got at least 130 bales of wrapped baleage off 16 acres. The clover content in the pasture is the big difference from when I was applying lime and super separately. The clover just keeps rejuvenating itself, even though the last time I sowed most of the pasture was a good 40 years ago! The farm seems to stay greener, even when it's getting drier during the drought times."

An interesting feature that adds to the uniqueness of Ian's farm is that it is situated on top of a gas fault line, and a series of "blowholes" on the flats are constantly letting out gas. Ian and his farm have had a lot of interest over the years both locally and internationally because of them - for example, a group of French geologists visited the week before we were there. Although he isn't the only farmer with these natural occurrences on their farm, to find them on flat land, instead of a hillside, makes them a rarity.

Ian brings us to a short, yet rather wide gully that leads back up towards his house. It is full of trees, and looks slightly out of place compared to the rest of the farm. As I pause to take a photo, Ian turns around to me and grins as though he's reading my thoughts. "Yes, this is a very beautiful scene. I often admire it myself as I'm walking past." He scales the barb wired fence with the agility of a teenager and starts heading up towards the trees that actually dwarf his tall frame. And before we know it, we're climbing the fence as well and following him into the trees' shadows.

"I've planted many different trees in this area, after I began having an interest in all types of vegetation through joining in Farm Forestry. In the end, I wanted to have the type of trees that I was only reading about in books and to have the ability to experience them for myself. I've become very fond of this area, as it's got a really serene feel to it."

"The clover just keeps rejuvenating itself, even though the last time I sowed most of the pasture was a good 40 years ago!"



As he's pointing out the different species and the natives, including Kauri, Matai, Maire, Rimu, plus a rare Metasequoia from China, he stops and bends down to pick up a feather. "Look at this, looks like we have ourselves a pigeon." He turns it in the light a few times, "aren't those colours amazing?" he points out the metallic blend of colours at the tip. Before this moment, I would have walked right past that feather sitting on the ground and not even given it a second thought. Yet, Ian's natural ability to see everything has me staring spellbound at the end of it, as he continues on walking, holding onto the feather for the rest of the journey.

Despite farming for over 50 years, Ian shows no sign of letting modern farming get on top of him. Always keeping both eyes on the farm and one ear to the ground enables him to keep making the right decisions and doing the best for his livestock.

"I'm satisfied with what I'm doing with dicalcic and I would never change back to the old practice of applying lime and super separately. I'm meant to be slowly easing out of farming, yet the dicalcic is giving me such pleasure in this farm that I feel farming is so effortless.

People often ask me, "When are you going to retire and move into town?" He laughs, shakes his head and hold his hands out to either side, "I always reply,

"Why? Where in town can you do this?"

