

Pallesen

Michael & Karen

INGLETON FARMS, 570HA – TIKOKINO
(330 DAIRY / 240 RUN-OFF), 370HA IRRIGATED
WINTER 1080 COWS - MILKED 1020

Smith

Lindsay & Mary



From left: Duncan, Cynthia, Rhys, Andrew, Lindsay, Karen, Michael – Absent: Junior, Anna-Marie



Michael, Karen & Lindsay

Michael and Karen Pallesen love dairy farming. It's obvious from the immaculate appearance of their lush 570ha farm, right down to the small plaque above their kitchen sink, quietly proclaiming, "Home is where the herd is". It's a passion that reflects in their management, philosophies and ultimately their production – it's something they're good at too.

The Pallesens have been farming together for the last twelve years. They originally started in Waikato before making the move down to the fertile soils of Central Hawke's Bay six years ago, becoming 50/50 sharemilkers with the farm's owners, Lindsay and Mary Smith.

During the early times at Tikokino, Michael and Karen started running into common dairying problems with their stock that were not only limiting the potentially high production, but making their enjoyment of farming a difficult one. The main problems that needed urgent attention were: lame cows, a high empty rate and severe bloat.

"The bloat was a real dilemma. It was really, really tough. We used to use 15 litres of bloat oil a day, and from 7am to 1pm we'd stand in the paddock watching the cows and feeding straw and other supplements to give them fibre. We'd quite easily stab 10 -15 cows a day. Basically out of 400 cows, we would have stabbed half over a 6 month period," remembers Michael.

"The empty problem was very depressing too. We used to ask ourselves, why are we farming? It's a waste of good cows and we weren't going to be happy unless the figure fell below 10%. In the worst year we had, the empties peaked at 28%. During this time, there were so many cows empty that we decided to milk through winter to make up for it. But that proved to be a bad mistake and all it achieved was a vicious cycle," recalls Karen.

"We tried to cope with the problems for two years," says Michael. "By the end of the second year we'd had enough, and decided to change our policy to using Hatuma dicalcic phosphate, directly spraying bloat oil onto pasture, feeding maize, reducing the stocking rate, using Milking Cow Minerals and getting tactical advice from a consultant."

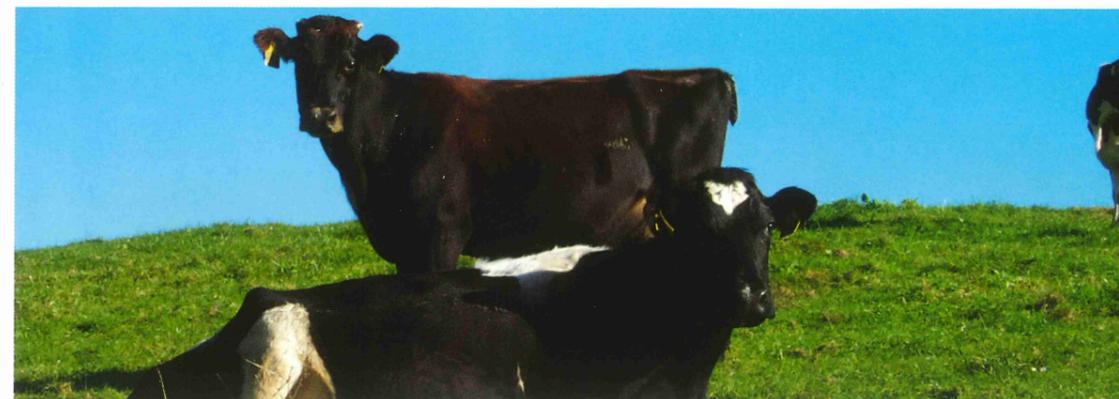
"The changes in policy were decided together with the farm's owners. They were very supportive as they wanted to bring a more natural approach to the system as well," adds Karen.

"We knew that the only way to overcome these stock health issues was to be proactive. We made a decision to use Hatuma dicalcic because we questioned whether the traditional fertiliser being used was perhaps having a detrimental affect on the soil, with a follow-on effect on pasture quality and cow health. From what we had read, dicalcic sounded like what we were looking for. Before we came to try it though, we decided to talk to other local farmers who were already users. We found that not only were they free of the problems that we were experiencing, but their production was increasing each year as well. This convinced us to give it a go ourselves," says Michael. "The farm was also short on lime applications and we didn't agree with the method of applying it in large doses. With the extra lime added into the dicalcic mix, we were putting it on little and often, and that suited us well," explains Lindsay.

The changes came about quickly after the first application of dicalcic – almost instantly the cows started looking healthier. Now, after 3 years of dicalcic use, the Pallesens are currently producing 360kg MS per cow, with an aim of 400kg.

"We are also using less and less bloat oil. We can let the cows into a paddock and not worry about bloat at all, even though there's a mass of clover. The pasture used to be unevenly grazed, but now it's palatable and the cows enjoy eating it."

"The stock's condition is the best we've seen," adds Karen. "Last year we were down to 18% empties. This year we're down even more to 13%, with an aim of being under 10% this season." "We get a kick out of seeing the cows lying down now and being content. The cowpats must be breaking down quicker because there aren't as many going hard and there's definitely more earthworms. We do not use CIDRs and this year we won't be inducing. Metabolic diseases are at a minimum and there has been some improvement in



lameness. The end result has been very pleasing," says Michael.

Ingleton Farms applies a mixture of Hatuma Dairy Blend with added dicalcic and Cropfine, plus 120-150kg of urea per hectare a year. They employed a consultant last season to help with over-all farm management; reducing the stocking rate to 3.3 cows per hectare being one of his recommendations. "He supports our decision to use dicalcic, along with small strategic use of nitrogen during feed shortages in the year. We only use very small amounts of N because sustainability is at the back of our minds. We have to address the effluent areas and lower the fertiliser rate accordingly. With the farm being fully irrigated, the non-water solubility characteristic of the dicalcic is a huge bonus," says Karen.

"I'd like to think we could be nitrogen free after a period of time. Every season is different though. Being sustainable is about being proactive and if regulations on nitrogen applications are imposed in the future, then we want to be comfortable that we can still farm productively without it. The results we've had so far with the dicalcic and small N applications certainly make us think we're on the right track," adds Michael.

The Hawke's Bay Regional Council is also using Ingleton Farms to measure effluent leaching. Preliminary test results are very favourable. "We have peace of mind that we are farming a lot more sustainably. In this industry we have to scrutinize everything and make our own decisions," says Lindsay.

The Pallesens run six staff on the farm; 2 herd managers, Andrew and Rhys, and 4 farm assistants, Duncan, Junior,

Cynthia and Anna-Marie. "The problem years were a very stressful time for staff. The pressures of the lameness and bloat took its toll on the employees, and we had trouble keeping them," says Karen. "But once we eliminated the problems, the stress went as well. The original workers have since come back and they've settled in again. We now have an established team, which certainly helps. They are really happy with farming since the strain has gone – some of them are even taking extra training as well. These days Michael and I are free to concentrate on being better farm managers and employers."

This year, Michael and Karen came second in the Hawke's Bay Sharemilker of the Year. They entered the competition to help improve business, but they also found that the staff got a real sense of enjoyment from it. The team are very proud of the farm and all are keen to stay on. Michael, who has been dairy farming since he left high school, is the new Hawke's Bay Chairman of Dairy Farmers of New Zealand. But he is no stranger to these types of positions – he was the National Chairman of Sharemilkers for 6 years. "We're here for the long haul," concludes Michael, "if you're part of the industry, then you need to find out more than just farming in it."

Since competing in the Sharemilker of the Year competition, their farm will host the Large Herd Conference contingent at the end of March next year. Dairying executives and farmers from all over the country will be shown the Pallesens' and Smiths' successful philosophy of productive and sustainable dairy farming.

