

Tantrum

Jeff & Don

TAIHAPE – 250HA (200HA EFFECTIVE - 50HA PLANTATION)

2400 S/U – INCLUDING 1300 MIXED-AGE EWES / 350 REPLACEMENT EWE HOGGETS

Application: 350kg/ha No. 8 over whole farm in spring + extra 400kg/ha on the cultivated land in autumn



The Tantrum's farm has an appeal that is easily recognisable. It's an eclectic block of medium hill country and flats, plantations of eucalyptus, cypress and pine, hidden by neighbouring high country and the splendour of Mt. Ruapehu a mere gumboot throw away. Son, Jeff, has been back for the last five years, managing it for three before taking over the lease in 2002. And like many returning to the home farm, he had visions of how to improve on convention. Hatuma dicalcic was one of them.

"Straight superphosphate had always been used on this place, with no lime ever," Jeff says. "While I was shearing in Southland, farmers down there got me onto thinking about lime, but the experts always said it was too expensive to put on hill country. However, in 1999 I went on an organised trip to Hatuma and was shown around their manufacturing plant. Afterwards I realised the No.8 mix (80% dicalcic / 20% Cropfine lime) was going to give us the best of both worlds. We didn't know anyone who used dicalcic at the time – but I've since been surprised who actually does and they never criticize it. The only people to do that have been the non-users, although they never seem to know why."

"I was happy for Jeff to use the No.8," recalls Don. "Over the years I hadn't been comfortable applying only superphosphate and felt the stock health could be improved."

"But since using dicalcic there's been a steady improvement," says Jeff. "I wanted to look at improving

the stock health when I took over the lease, but the turnaround over the last five years has been amazing."

"The pasture is more palatable now, and there's definitely more earthworms," says Don. "The biggest difference though has been in the stock. The stock health has turned around so much that the dicalcic has to be the reason. They're healthier, have less dags, and are achieving better killing weights, particularly after last year's drought. That drought was meant to have an effect on the lambing percentage, but it went up."

"We fatten all our lambs," says Jeff. "1550 were fattened this year, plus an extra 200 which were brought in for the first time. I'll tolerate over-fat lambs – it's a good sign they're being well fed. 2003 was a difficult year being very dry, yet the lambs averaged 17kg. There wasn't much grass but it must have suited them. That result was more of a revelation than this year's 143% and 17.9kg. I run a lease block near town that's under a super regime, it lambed 20% less, yet the lambs averaged nearly 1kg lighter at slaughter. Other farms I visit seem to have more grass, and I worry we won't have enough going into winter, yet our stock still seem to perform."

"14kg lambs used to be the target weight not too long ago," says Don, a former Central Districts Farmer of the Year and winner of the North Island Farm Forester award. "This year some lambs were doing 400gms per day, and we're sure it's not just the new grass."

"We put a lot of pressure on the pasture – more than





most," says Jeff. "In the past we've used strategic nitrogen on new grasses only, but now we're questioning whether that's even needed; if you get the clover content right, then I would question the need for nitrogen."

"If you don't look after your pasture the stock suffer," says Don. "We can grow clover on northerly faces easily. In fact there's more white clover over the whole farm now."

"We've done some re-grassing on the farm in recent years," says Jeff. "But we've noticed some paddocks, which are in old pasture, are now growing masses of clover and ryegrass. We've since come to the conclusion that old can still be very productive if your management is good. We also put some urea in a trial-type scenario with a couple of paddocks, just to see what would happen – but we found no difference in weaning weights. According to some experts, the stock off those paddocks should've been heavier."

Last year's drought I couldn't believe how much the pasture held on. I remember thinking at one stage we only had another two weeks before we were in trouble, yet that two weeks came and went, and the sheep didn't seem to suffer. I'd much rather have quality pasture over quantity – the quality of grass is absolute. I don't feel a need for soil testing, I'd rather look at the stock production. I'm not anti them, I'm just confident that our production shows we're doing things right – we don't use any copper in the cattle because they don't look deficient. P levels don't mean anything to me either because they don't tell the full story. Look at the sheep; they're the true story.

This place is an absolute joy to farm. Every time I get the lambs in they exceed all expectations. I'm confident with dicalcic and I don't have to think about it – I just put it on and it makes farming very easy."

