

Falkner

Wayne & Diane

THE TOTARAS, 1200ACRES – MANGAMAHU



Mangamahu Road could be any one of the hundreds of typical roads heading inland in the central North Island. But for a non-resident, it doesn't take long to see this particular one shows the battle scars of a district that revolves around unstable climate conditions – a twisting, turning track that runs precariously close to delicate cliff slips, with a river that slowly erodes away the access after each new flood. A road that leads directly into an area full of uncompromising farming country.

Despite this underlying threat, since 1991, Mangamahu has been the home to Wayne and Diane Falkner who have managed to run a successful farming operation at *The Totaras* based on simple proven practices and solid old-school principles.

"When we first bought the farm it was run down, covered in scrub and with no fertiliser history," remembers Wayne. "The shady country was covered in moss and carpet fern and the stock would only eat the sunny faces, leaving the shady areas full of bulk rank feed.

We started looking for a fertiliser that would improve pasture quality and also knock the acidity in the soil to help clear the scrub. We found the economic cost of the dicalcic was a big factor in choosing it because we needed to do things gradually as the budget allowed us. We didn't want to put on a dollop of lime and get the associated imbalances either. Admittedly, for the first 4 years we alternated between dicalcic and sulphur-super each year based on a King Country farmer's advice – grow the grass one year and then sweeten it the next. But we eventually decided to stop using the super and just carry on with the dicalcic instead.

Since then, the pasture quality has improved 110% over the whole farm. Within a couple of years the moss had completely disappeared and the carpet fern, which covered the whole shady country, was cleaned up by the stock. Ratstail was also a big problem when we arrived, but the stock cleared it up easily after the first application of dicalcic.



The scrub problem has now become manageable as well. In fact, the dicalcic makes our pastures so palatable that now both sunny and shady faces are grazed evenly all over.

Clover is grown easily on our northerly faces. The local vet even commented on how much clover was over the whole farm. We only have 8 acres of flat land that we play around with, so we put on Cropmaster and DAP to boost the grass growth – it has P levels three times more than the rest of the farm, yet it doesn't grow three times the more grass. One major advantage in using dicalcic is we don't end up with peaks and troughs in feed. There's a constant even growth over the farm. At times, during the harder seasons, we don't seem to have an abundance of feed, but there's definitely quality there. Production has crept up and up since using the dicalcic. We sell all male lambs at weaning at an average 29-30kg with the idea of putting as much weight back into the ewes as possible. We lambed an average of 137% over the last three years (peaking at 142%). These figures are well up on the district's average. Even though we run 10 stock units to the hectare, their condition seems to hang on, even when we think there's not much growth during the hard times; like during the drought we've just experienced.

You can't say you'll grow more grass with the dicalcic but you sure can't argue with the improved stock health

and increased production. To us, animal health is the biggest thing and our stock have no major health problems. There's only a minimal amount of dagging required as well."

The Falkner's farm has a very unique layout. It is predominantly a long, steep sided valley with an access track that runs the circumference of it – no matter where they stop, they're always looking in on the farm. Another characteristic is the three different soil types: the front is papa country, middle is sandstone and the third is light yellow sand. "It's a very diversified farm with equal amounts of shady areas and water catchments, yet the response from the dicalcic has been the same right through."

Since winning the Central Districts Farmers of the Year competition in 2001, Wayne and Diane have taken a more philosophical approach to dicalcic. Although they originally began using it based on its economic cost, the results they have obtained over a short amount of time have proven to them the true importance of using a soil friendly form of phosphate. "We've found over recent years there's been a swing in the train of thought of farmers towards dicalcic. The product suits us because we farm well-bred stock that sell well, along with a low stress animal regime and the dicalcic is perfect for this system," Wayne concludes.

