

Making more from less Bonavaree Farm; an overview



Owners; Doug, Wendy, and their son, Fraser Avery (operations manager).

Property area; 1100ha, 1000ha of effective grazing.

Property description; predominantly hill country. Also includes 200ha of fertile flats.

Climate; 576mm rainfall, ranging from 285-857mm (Grassmere weather station). Average rainfall is lowest from September through to December and highest in May. For 11 years, annual rainfall has been below average. While 1998 was close to the mean, 1997 and 2000, 2002 and 2003 were very dry.

Soils; Mainly Flaxbourne Hills, Dashwood and Hurunui.

Stock; 2450 ewes, 650 hoggets, 150 breeding cows, 30 heifers and 30 steers.

This season's pasture and crops; 20ha of annual grass. 50ha of Omaka 300ha of lucerne (with plans to plant more), 70ha in summer fallow.

Conservation; Two blocks are protected under the Marlborough District Council's Landowner Assistance Programme; 4ha of wetland and a 10ha bushed gully.



Bonavaree hoggets move across a new stand of 'super-sonic' (winter active) lucerne.

Rotation includes summer fallow

Bonavaree follows an annual cropping rotation, from grass to barley to fallow to lucerne.

The key to establishing barley crops is a summer fallow, borrowing some of the spring moisture and taking it through to the autumn.

The area to be sown is sprayed out with glyphosate in late spring, when soil moisture levels are quite high. Barley is direct drilled around February 15, and even in the hottest summer sufficient moisture is retained in the soil for the grain to germinate. Initial growth is always quite poor, but once autumn rains fall and the nights become cooler the barley comes away.

A simple project is being planned to investigate how much soil moisture is conserved under the fallow system at Bonavaree, compared with a traditional system of pasture cover over summer, then autumn cultivation and sowing.

Lucerne

Since the Avery family settled at Bonavaree in 1919, about 50ha lucerne has been grown for hay and seed. In the last 10 years, the lucerne area has been increased to 300ha with management radically changed, and plans to plant more.

Lamb growth rates on lucerne are around 390g/day, compared with the New Zealand average of about 175g. This makes it possible to get 90% of lambs finished and away before the summer dry. Eighteen-month cattle are finished on lucerne before summer. Omaka barley, peas and some hay are used to fill any feed gaps.



Sheep

Ewes are fed on peas and baleage (most bought off-farm) from mid February. They are mated on March 1, and hoggets on April 1. Lambing starts on July 25.

Last season ewes scanned 152% and weaned 134%. Hoggets scanned 121% and weaned 88%.

Most lambs are weaned from October 14 through until December 4, then sold straight to the works. They gain 390 grams/day on their mothers, reducing to 290g/day after weaning.

The flock originally comprised Corriedale and Corriedale-Polled Dorset ewes, but recently Rissington Highlander rams (a Romney Finn Texel cross) were introduced, to increase fertility.

Fertiliser

Recent soil tests showed that fertility on the flats is at dairy-type levels, due to dry conditions minimising loss of nutrients to leaching and pasture production. Lack of available water limits productivity.

Historically, fertiliser has been applied across the entire farm in most years. Recently, this has depended on the availability of moisture and income.

A "first step" in the journey to lucerne is applying large volumes of lime to all paddocks where lucerne is being grown. Also, Cropmaster 15 goes down the spout with lucerne at drilling and Cropmaster 20 with grass and barley.

Cattle

Breeding cows calve on August 1 and are weaned on March 20. Normally all except the best 25 heifer calves are retained with all other heifer and steer calves sold. With plenty of feed after good autumn rains, this year all calves will be retained and finished. Dairy cows will be grazed through winter.

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Bonavaree Farm trend table

	2007	2006	2005	2004
Farm Income				
Livestock Sales	352846	290708	303491	243344
Wool Sales	46498	48872	38539	51267
Lucerne Seed	79871	67339	76342	70849
Sundry Income	54030	42547	50576	31582
Total Farm Sales	533245	449466	468948	397042
Farm Expenses				
Fertiliser	11653	59384	59861	30250
Direct Labour	86114	72389	60723	60176
Contracting	20577	24994	15489	760
Repairs and Maintenance	38220	20321	19552	7267
Animal Health	19680	15133	18016	22292
Vehicle Expenses	14570	13122	14522	11603
Freight and Cartage	8611	3507	3442	2840
Weed and Pest Control	8681	19077	9653	10479
Other working expenses	53895	19362	34597	29997
Debit Servicing	67698	62170	62131	84788
Standing Charges	22977	20594	18633	15656
Admin Expenses	9510	10421	10394	10969
Livestock Purchases	7100	45360	8547	34523
Total Expenses	369286	385834	335560	321600
Net cash profit (loss)	163959	63632	133388	75442
Net movement in livestock on hand	5397	-37031	12005	-6594
Depreciation Expense	31119	32905	36995	26243
Net profit (loss) before salaries and directors fees	127443	67758	84388	55793

*Figures are taken from Bonavaree financial accounts.
2008 has a similar result to 2007 and 2009 looks better.*