



PROJECT PROFILE



Wairakau Farms Ltd

This family-run farm is nestled under the impressive Kaimai-Mamaku Ranges south of the small country town of Te Aroha.

It goes under the name of Wairakau Farms Ltd and the partners are Joy and Trevor Wells, their daughter Rachel and husband Kevin White, with another daughter Brenda and son Richard, the latter two living off the farm.

The day-to-day farm activities are managed by Kevin, with Rachel as the 'farm help' which means she probably does all the jobs no-one else wants to do! There is a saying that farmers never retire and this is true of Trevor and Joy, who are the relief milkers.

Joy and Trevor bought the original farm of 106 acres in 1973. In those days it supported a sharemilker. Twenty-two years later after raising a family of six they established Wairakau Farms Ltd and bought a neighbouring farm, increasing their land area by 48 effective-hectares.

While this purchase increased their assets and productivity it meant operating separately two smaller than average dairy farms with consequently higher than average operating costs. In 2006 the opportunity arose to purchase land on each side of the home farm, so the 48ha farm purchased in 1995 was sold to a neighbour, along with approximately 3.4ha across the river.



Farm Stats

Farm Owner: Wairakau Farms Ltd

Size: 115 hectares

Location: Kaimai-Mamaku Ranges, Te Aroha, North Island, New Zealand

Number of Cows: 344

Farming Type: Grazing

System Design referred to in this Profile

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The final result was a single block of 121ha (115ha effective) of flat to slightly sloping terrain with an annual rainfall averaging 1500mm. While the new block had two operational 12-a-side herringbone parlours it soon became obvious that neither shed could be converted to handle the proposed 350-plus herd, so the family put time and effort into researching a parlour that would suit their needs and style of farming.

"We calved 358 cows last season and now in February we are milking 344," says Trevor. "We have found this a comfortable number to manage at present and that could increase in the future once we develop the new block."

The rapid expansion of land area and cow numbers and an extra 100 heifers put a lot of pressure on the family as they were still milking in a 12-a-side herringbone parlour.

"It was taking us five hours for each milking," says Kevin. "And that was with two of us milking."



We only just seemed to finish in the morning and it was time to start the afternoon milking. The cows suffered and production went down as they didn't have long enough in the paddock to eat enough grass for reasonable milk production."

The other problem was that the milk tankers were coming to collect the milk during milking time which meant stopping and attending to this. "The tanker drivers were really helpful and considerate," says Kevin. "And they knew it was only temporary until the new dairy shed was built."

It is a basic 36-a-side herringbone design with low maintenance poly-panel walls which are easy to keep clean with a high pressure hose. The circular concrete yard has two water propelled backing gates, one with a yard washer. One of the main advantages of this dairy shed is the automatic wash system which reduces the time spent in the dairy shed.



Trevor and Kevin put time and effort into researching a parlour that would suit their needs and style of farming and decided on an easy care herringbone design.

The Wells' parlour was started in late July and completed by early September 2006.

"With two operators we get through the cows in an hour and a half," says Kevin. "Which reduces the stress on us and the cows."

It is interesting to note that of the four people who do the milking at different times, three of them are left handed. Does this cause any problems? Apparently not, as this design can be used for left or right handed operators.

A well designed dairy shed needs to be supported by an efficient milking plant. Waikarau Farms decided on a Milfos system. "The special feature for this dairy shed was the swing arms, allowing the cups to be swung out of the way in the pit, so the operator can move up and down the pit without any obstructions, saving time," says key accounts manager Grant Coburn.

Trevor had reservations about the low-line jettors, but after seeing them in action is very keen on the concept.

"The plant has been 'future-proofed' so any add-ons at a later date can be done without altering the plant" says Kevin.

