



Cows on a feed pad at Matthew Collis's Kairanga farm.

Keeping it simple

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Simplifying his 600-cow intensive winter-milking Kairanga farm was top of Matthew Collis' wish list when he undertook a Whole-Farm Assessment (WFA) with AgFirst consultant James Allen, as part of his Dairy Farm Systems Certification.

The pair had met while Collis was risk-proofing his business during the pilot Professional Primary Producers Business management programme, to be rolled out through Primary ITO.

"While I was there looking at the implications of adverse events – like earthquake, power outage, staff risk or flood events on our low-lying Kairanga property, I realised there was other stuff to look at within the family business."

"We have been winter milking 220 of the 600 cows for the past 18 years, but the operation had become very complicated and expensive to run so we were keen to simplify the whole system," Matthew says.

While the system has jumped around, the herd was producing 300,000kg milksolids (MS) each season from the split-calving operation and Matthew had recently considered returning to spring calving and seasonal production, to better match the pasture growth curve."

He cited staffing issues, winter wet soils, the huge amount of feed needed and just the drain on time and energy to keep the system going as reasons to look for a system change, and felt the whole-farm assessment programme was the best tool to look at the issues.

While supplementary feed was not brought in, huge amounts of maize and grass silage and summer crop was needed to bring on to the dairy platform and keep

the cows producing year-round.

Working through the assessment has been helpful to have outside eyes on the business, he says.

"A lot of the time you do stuff because it's what you want to do – I had been thinking of making this change, but it was good to have someone to challenge my assumptions – and to look at all aspects of a change.

"I got to thinking about the whole farm business and wondered if we were doing the best we could – and how we could change it to make systems more repeatable and more balanced.

"I had been thinking about changing back to spring calving for a while, I didn't want to wake up one day and say I wish I'd done it five years ago," he says.

"But I did appreciate an oversight across the whole business in making a large system change – the process looked at the implications from every angle – financial, environmental, systems, production, feed, staff requirements and work balance."



Matthew Collis.

The farm assessment included an action plan and SWOT analysis and the financial ramifications were outlined with similar income being generated.

Out of the huge report generated, Matthew says a list of points to review or adjust was brought forward and they are now embarking on the change. This season will be their last winter milking and with a whole new staff team on the dairy platform the absence of winter mating will make life much easier, he says.

"It's a managed process to get out of winter milking, but now we have made the decision and there are good reasons behind it, we can start moving towards it.

"The big thing is that the operation is going to be much easier to manage from a staffing point of view." □



Mucking out: Daniel Jago, the farm's newest team member with Matthew Collis.

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