

# A2 'milk bar' a hit with farmgate customers

Organic dairy farmers are among the prime movers of farmgate milk sales. Now a different type of milk is being sold in a sophisticated way near Feilding.

STEPHEN AND MARY Barr run 850 cows in two herds on their farm Arran, named after Isle of Arran off the west coast of Scotland where Stephen's folks came from.

The Barrs are known as technology-savvy farmers and their decision to set up a 'milk shop' at the entrance to their property near the Feilding airfield didn't surprise many people.

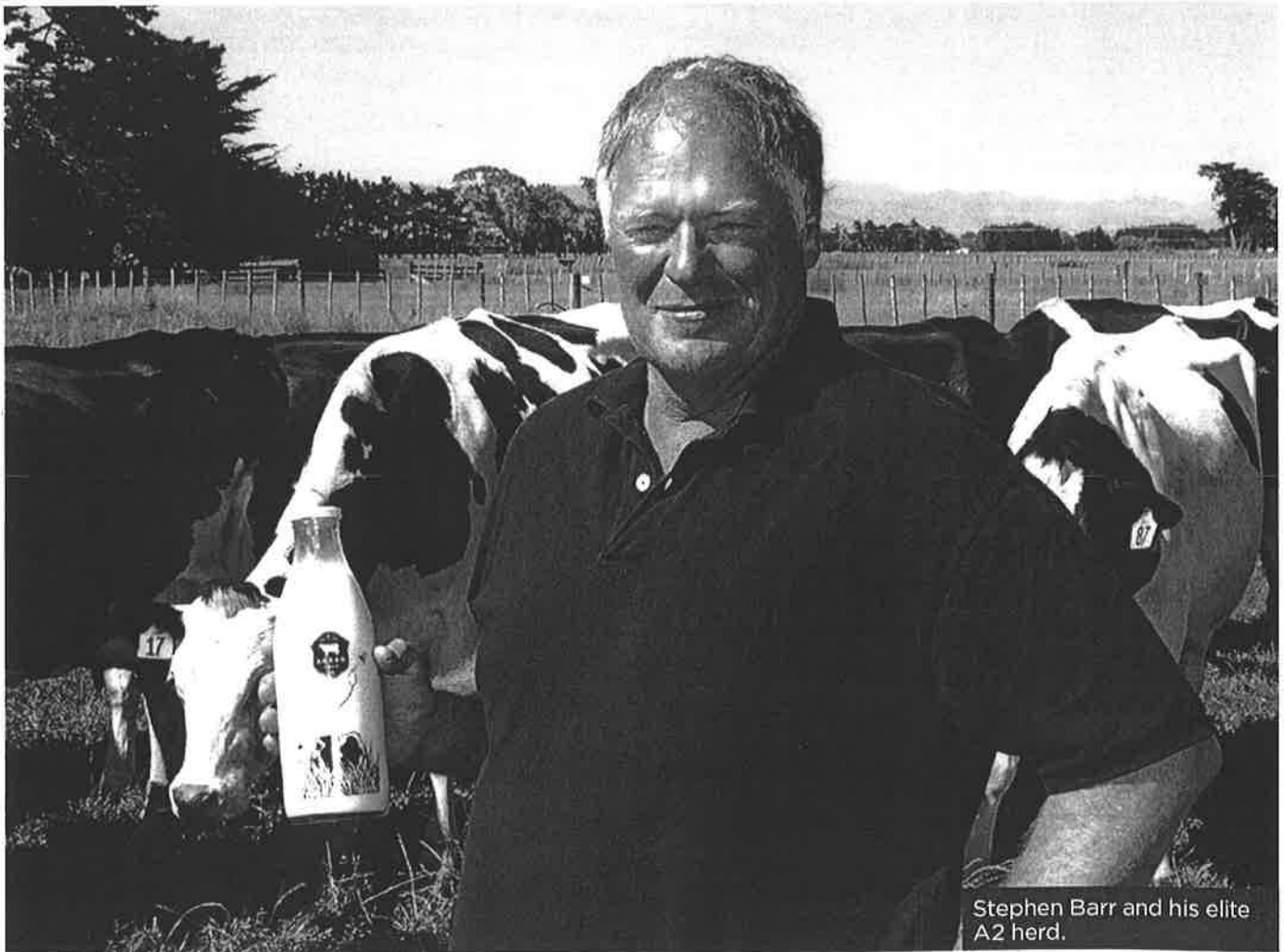
Stephen is a supporter of A2 cows and has been breeding them for 14 years. He advo-

cates the health benefits of A2. "People can have intolerances to the normal A1 milk, but with the A2 we have people reporting their asthma is improving and people who haven't been able to drink milk because they have reactions to it are now drinking A2 milk," he says.

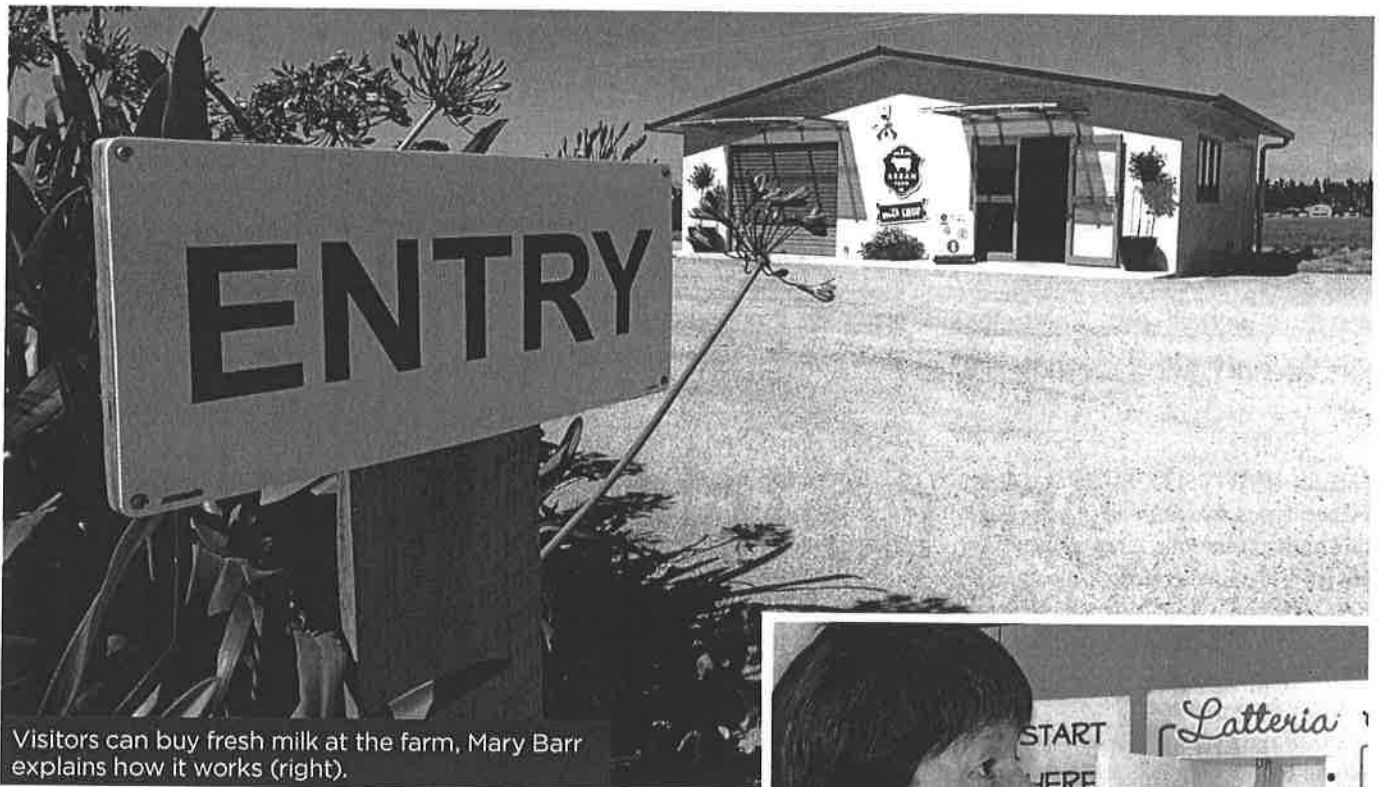
Mary says they'd been looking for some time to find a way to add value to their milk. "We looked at cheese making and it wasn't for us, then we read about people using milk-

ing vending machines in the South Island. So in February last year we went to Golden Bay and Nelson and looked at machines down there and thought 'that's for us, we can do that'."

The result one year later is a smart, well branded 'milk shop' with excellent parking and easy access. The shop itself is well laid out: customers can buy glass bottles and carrybags from one vending machine then buy milk from another. 'Arran Farm' leaflets



Stephen Barr and his elite A2 herd.



Visitors can buy fresh milk at the farm, Mary Barr explains how it works (right).

explain the farm's size, stock numbers, total milk production and individual cow production. A simple narrative tells about the life of a cow to help city folk understand how a dairy farm works.

"There are many people locally who sell organic milk at the gate but our point of difference is that our milk comes from A2 cows and that's becoming more popular for people for health reasons. We wanted to create a site people would like to come to and where they could park and get in out of the rain. It's self-service shopping 7am to 7pm seven days a week.

"We wanted people to trust the milk because it's a food like anything else so we felt the shop was vital to creating the right perception. You wouldn't go into a grungy place to buy food so we wanted to have a clean environment," says Mary.

For customers who struggle to understand the vending machine, a simple system allows a call for help to the Barrs. Mary will often head for the shop for a chat with customers.

One of Barrs' goals is to help bridge the gap between town and country; the milk shop at Arran Farm is doing that.

"There is nothing like coming in and buying your milk and seeing the cows it comes from to make that link. Over time we'll have newsletters about what's happening on the farm and we'll slowly ramp up

the information so people will get a bit more familiar with what's happening here," says Stephen.

Kids like getting the milk out of the dispenser, seeing this as "quite novel". Even before the milk shop opened, Barrs had hosted local schools at their farm -- helping bridge the town-country gap.

The farm's 22 A2 cows get special attention: they get milked first and their milk goes into a special vat for snap chilling to 4 degrees C, then to smaller vats for shifting to the shop. Here its temperature is kept 2-4 degrees C.

"The milk is fresh every day; we don't wait until it runs out. Whatever is left goes and new milk comes in the morning. We lab test our milk twice a week for all the nasties you can think of, so we're confident the milk is safe to drink," says Mary.

The farm's dispensing machine is Italian-made. They looked at many different systems and found this best met their needs, Stephen says.

"We wanted something big enough for this site because we are a little out of town and knew we would have people bottlenecks from time to time. Most systems have single standalone units; we wanted two dispensing



windows to cater for a lot of people arriving at the same time. This machine is set up so that it first uses the milk in one canister then switches to the second one and sends us a text about what's happened so we won't end up with two empty tanks or one full one and one empty one," Stephen explains.

In just two weeks, Barrs' milk shop had been attracting lots of attention. People on their way to work are stopping to buy milk for their coffees. Late afternoons are busy as people buy milk on their way home from work.

Barrs have publicised their venture at the local market, on Facebook and on the internet. All have worked.

Signs around the district are helping and customer numbers are fast building. Even before the shop opened, people visited to see what was going on.

Special about the shop is that the product is 'raw' yet delivered in a sophisticated, user friendly and pristine way.