



DAIRY FARMER SAYS TECHNOLOGY CAN EASE PRESSURE ON NZ AGRICULTURE

SUSTAINABILITY AND SCIENTIFIC INNOVATION SHOULD BE HIGH ON THE AGENDA OF NEW ZEALAND FARMERS.

This is the view of Waikato dairy farmer Grant Coombes, who says it is time for farmers to embrace new technology to tackle issues such as environmental sustainability.

Grant runs a 750 ha dairy farm at Taupiri, North Waikato with 2000 milking cows, plus dairy support and dry stock cattle. Like many younger farmers, he is open to trying out new things on the farm.

He is in the process of phasing out his fleet of quad bikes for new electric motorbikes.

"I've got seven Ubc0 2x2 electric bikes, and they are great," Grant says. "They are quiet and easy to operate. I am passionate about sustainable farming and reducing emissions, so this is one way we can do that in our farm business."

Grant first heard about the Ubc0 bikes at

National Fielddays two years ago. "I've always been interested in innovation, so these caught my eye."

Grant says farmers he knows are committed to reducing their environmental footprint and to mitigating nitrogen leaching through riparian planting and fencing waterways and wetlands.

"Farmers across the country have invested a lot of time, effort and money to improve sustainability and protect the environment. They often get a hard time from their city cousins, but I think we should congratulate farmers for their efforts there."

However, with regulatory and political pressures bearing down on farmers, Grant believes that new science and technology will be vital.

"Farmers are working hard on sustainability and improving the health of waterways, and there are still new things that can be done," he says.

"These days we are 'farming in a fish bowl', and that means that the wider community in

New Zealand is looking at farming, and so too is the international community and our export markets. So it is about continuing to look at new ways to improve sustainability on the farm."

"New scientific developments and technology hold the key, and farmers can take heart in some of the innovative, ground-breaking discoveries happening in New Zealand."

He says one example is CRV Ambreed's LowN Sires, a genetic discovery that could reduce nitrogen leaching on New Zealand farms by 20 per cent within 20 years. CRV Ambreed selected bulls genetically superior for a new trait related to the amount of urea nitrogen in milk.

Cows bred from these bulls should excrete less nitrogen in their urine which will, in turn, reduce the amount of nitrogen leached from grazed pasture. This could potentially save New Zealand 10 million kilograms in nitrogen leaching a year, based on the national herd number of 6.5 million dairy cattle.

Another innovation he is interested in is Ecotain plantain from Agricom. He says Ecotain is designed to reduce nitrogen leaching from urine patches by up to 50 per cent, and is another tool for dairy farmers.

Grant says agricultural leaders need to step up and engage proactively in conversations in science and technology, and how it can help every farmer.

"It is really important for leaders of our industry to communicate the latest scientific developments, products and technology to grassroots farmers," Grant says. "I would like to see agricultural leaders collaborate more and communicate better in regards to science and technology. We need to make that a part of the story of dairying."

Grant says many farmers are already embracing science and technology and he would like to see that continue. Mobile apps help farmers better manage their farms, says Grant.

"We are so busy, so any apps or agri-tech products that can help farmers save time have got to be a good thing. I'd love to see more farmers embracing systems that make life easier." **RC**

GRANT COOMBES WITH ONE OF HIS UBCO ELECTRIC FARM BIKES.



◀ PwC predicts that AI will boost the global economy by US\$15.7 trillion by 2030. The New Zealand IoT Alliance estimates the economic benefit of IoT in NZ dairy farming is worth \$448 million and another \$72 million in horticulture.

While we are generating more data than ever before, we are only scraping the surface on how we use them to make smarter busi-

ness decisions at the right time.

MobileTech programme manager Ken Wilson says new digital technologies and their practical applications will be the big talking points at MobileTech 2018.

"We are currently developing the programme for MobileTech 2018. We have already received a huge amount of interest from industry, researchers, tech developers

and some of the early adopters of new technology.

"It is always exciting to bring together the country's industry and technology leaders to discuss innovations that are driving the future of the primary sector."

MobileTech 2018 runs 27-28 March in Rotorua. For further details visit the website www.mobiletech.events. **RC**