



Farming with a higher purpose

Hawke's Bay assisted living facility Hohepa runs a small dairy farm which not only produces artisan goods but provides life experiences and work opportunities to people with intellectual disabilities. Jackie Harrigan visited the farm to find out more. Photos Brad Hanson.

A farm with a higher purpose, Hohepa is a small dairy unit in the heart of the Hawke's Bay region offering living and working opportunities to people with intellectual disabilities to interact with nature through dairy farming and market gardening.

The opportunity to have meaningful work and experiences relates to the ethos of Hohepa as 'every life fully lived'.

A small dairy farm, cheesery, farm shop, vegetable growing patches, and fruit trees exist on the outskirts of Clive on Hawke's Bay's dry coastal strip and a further block

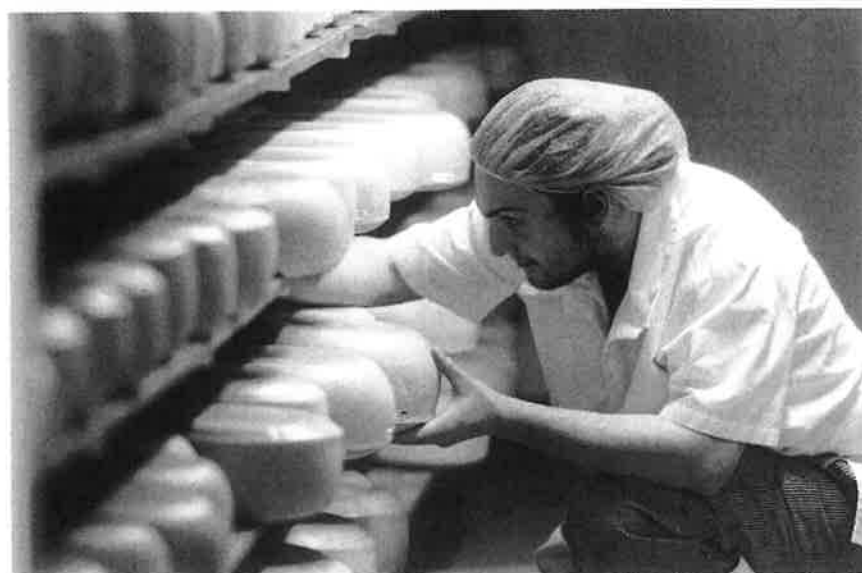
at Poraiti on the hill make up 60 hectares in total, housing and providing dairy products and vegetables for up to 180 residents.

In this magical place, the Rudolph Steiner philosophy and the creativity and compassion of a dedicated group of people make Hohepa a living community enterprise where cultural, social, environmental and financial practices are the key elements that make Hohepa and its people succeed and grow through time.

The farm is Demeter and Organic certified and runs according to biodynamic principles. The milk is sold fresh and

pasteurised and made into artisan-style cheeses. Selling the dairy products at the farm shop, along with other Hohepa-made products alongside locally produced organic vegetables and fruit, sweets, meat, breads and dry goods, provides a small income for the farm, and an opportunity to interact with the public. The shop also acts as an ordering point to keep all of the Hohepa homes and the Hohepa school in fresh produce, dry goods and dairy products - including cheeses and fresh milk delivered in stainless steel milk billies. The refrigerated Hohepa truck is a regular at the Saturday Napier Farmers

Left: Hohepa farm manager Carl Storey says the interaction with so many people makes the milking Shorthorn herd very quiet. **Below:** Interest is growing in the Hohepa organic bottled milk, with glass bottles that are returned, washed and refilled. **Right:** Oliver works in the Hohepa farm shop, serving costumes and restocking shelves and helps with the deliveries to the Hohepa homes around Napier. **Below, right:** Award winning artisan cheese is produced at Hohepa.



market and the huge Sunday Farmers Market at Hastings Showgrounds.

Alongside the 40ha at Clive, the original Hohepa block is a 12ha support block on the hill at Poraiti with an expansive view out over Napier where children and young adults live in supported homes and attend the Hohepa Special School.

Biodynamic gardens and tunnel houses produce vegetables for the homes and young stock and dry stock from the dairy farm graze the paddocks that also grow grass for supplements in the form of hay and balage.

A further arm of the Hohepa organisation maintains a creative space in Napier, with a candle making enterprise for dipping, dyeing and forming a range of beeswax candles that are packed and distributed to 120 retail shops around New Zealand. At the creative space there is also a weavery producing handwoven fabrics and garments, and a small shop sells these products and wooden toys and garden furniture, crafted at the wood-working shop at the Hohepa, Clive campus.

A total of 180 residents, ranging from seven to over seventy are supported by over 500 staff, making Hohepa one of Hawke's Bay's larger employers.

HISTORY

Hohepa was established by the joint venture of Marjorie Allen (later Dame Allen) and Hawke's Bay farmer Lewis Harris (later Sir Lew). Marjorie had been inspired by the work of Rudolf Steiner and wanted to provide a nourishing developmental

community for her nephew with Downs Syndrome, so joined forces with Harris who had a Downs Syndrome daughter and wanted a good education and outdoor experience for her. The Hohepa community was founded on the Poraiti hill close to the Harris home farm in 1957.

The first houses and the school were originally set up for Downs Syndrome children, but the remit over the years has widened to all people with intellectual disabilities, of different levels of need, who come from all over NZ. Some live in houses on the property with live-in carers, meaning they walk to and from school past fruit trees, grazing calves and veggie gardens, surrounded by a community of people who know them and take time to stop and chat and befriend them.

Three eldercare houses have residents up to 70 years of age. Many of the people Hohepa supports live in the wider Napier community in a number of home settings.

Through living, working and taking an active part in community life alongside staff, the people Hohepa support grow to experience satisfying lives with as much independence as possible, according to Hohepa general manager, Santiago de Marco.

The Steiner philosophy is that every child or person has the capacity to become as independent as possible and to be able to impart purpose and direction in their lives, encompassed in the mantra of Hohepa, 'every life fully lived'.

The people Hohepa supports are able to work in the area of their own interest. The aim is to be involved in real life and work processes thus participating and contributing in a meaningful way to their communities, said Farm and enterprises manager Alfred Busch.

Hohepa now has three other centers of residential support in Wellington, Auckland, and Christchurch.



People supported by Hohepa create a range of artisan products sold around the Hawke's Bay and across the country: cheeses, candles, wooden and woven goods.

BIODYNAMIC AND ORGANIC FARM

Milking 52 cows on 22 hectares through a 6-bail walk-through dairy shed is far from the norm in the dairy industry, but Hohepa farm manager Carl Storey says it means people can be supported and work in a meaningful way.

Balancing year-round milk supply with seasonal grass growth and maintaining genetic growth in a small herd are challenges Carl grapples with, while the pleasure and growth opportunities afforded to the people at Hohepa by working and interacting with the farm, cows and products definitely makes it a great experience.

The Hohepa farm herd is mainly Milking Shorthorn and Ayrshire cows, now transitioning to straight Ayrshire as the

Milking Shorthorn semen is no longer sold by LIC.

The cows are split into an autumn herd, with 20 cows calving on 20 March and a spring herd of 35 cows, with a couple of carryovers. Up to 50 cows are milked from spring through till after Christmas when the autumn calvers are dried off for 12 weeks.

Carl prefers a longer dry-off period to give the cows a good rest and to help manage somatic cell counts, which are not able to be treated with antibiotics under the biodynamic and organic farming guidelines.

"It's a totally different philosophy, we always go to homeopathic products first, and also second - and we use True Health products for intra-mammary treatments with their garlic, herbs and echinacea."

If really necessary for animal care they work with the veterinarian to use the most appropriate mainstream medication, then that cow leaves the property.

Having said that, Carl said he hasn't had a case of clinical mastitis for 12 months and only two sub-clinical cases during that time. The milk is tested each week and all of the milk is pasteurised as 700-800 litres each week is bottled and sold through the shop or markets or delivered to the Hohepa houses and school in stainless steel billies.

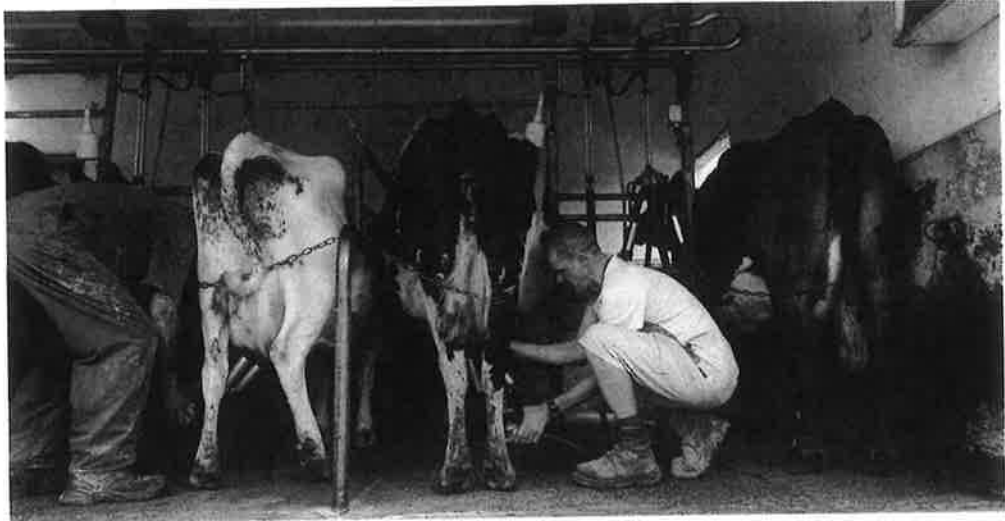
CREAMERY FOR CHEESES

The excess milk is made into cheeses in the cheesery next door to the dairy with each cow producing an average of 3800l/lactation and over 200,000 litres each year.

The cows are all milked twice each



Above: The community also produces biodynamic and organic fruit and veges for sale and for community consumption.



Left: The weavery at the Hohepa creative place. **Right:** The oldest walk-through dairy shed still in use in NZ provides great opportunities for interactions with the cows by the helpers who work on the Hohepa farm.

day, at 4.30am and then at 1.30 in the afternoon when Carl has an 'open shed' for the milking, with a number of residents helping out.

David loves to help get the cows into the yard, Jamie and James are adept at cupping the cows and giving them a good pat and scratch and Katherine often comes to help with hosing down the shed and yard. Others love to help rear the replacement calves - four heifers for the spring herd and four for the autumn herd - before they are weaned and transferred up to the 12ha Poraiti farm.

"The residents are totally animated by the connection with the cows and by helping with them - it's all happy smiles and excitement - it's like animal therapy," Carl added.

The walk-through shed is the only one used for commercial supply left in NZ and although the dairy is being largely rebuilt this year, the walk-through setup is being retained and renovated.

"This style of shed gives us really good cow contact. Hohepa is all about the residents - it's great for them to be able to help out and give the cows a pat and a scratch," said Carl.

As a result, the cows are super quiet and Carl said they love the interactions with the milkers. There are up to 22 people daily, enjoying coming to the farm for some meaningful work all year round.

FARMING IN ABUNDANT SUNSHINE

Supplying customers and residents with organic dairy products is a 12-month

business, but anyone who has visited the sunny Hawkes Bay knows it's difficult to grow pastures in the long hot summers.

Carl says it's always a challenge - he runs three small irrigators on manual shifts and spends lots of time walking the farm to measure how much pasture is in front of the cows.

The small farm up the hill grows supplement, usually 80 bales are transferred down to Clive to feed the herd and Carl says they are lucky to be able to access and buy hay and baleage from a local biodynamic farm.

A small crop of winter oats is resown into new grass - and Carl says the 5% of non-organic inputs allowed under the Demeter certification system usually ends up being grass and crop seed.

"We also grow sugarbeet through the summer and Japanese millet, fed off during the winter as green feed but generally having enough feed is always a struggle."

Hohepa farm has different opportunities and challenges than a commercial farm which makes it so interesting to be involved in, Carl said.

"It's a different pressure to commercial farming - but we need to keep the factory going and our customers around the country supplied."

SAY CHEESE

Recently Hohepa invested in a certified milk bottling plant and set up and now supplies pasteurised milk in reusable glass bottles through local shops, in their Clive shop and at the weekly Hastings and Napier farmers markets. The empty bottles

are returned and reused in a twice-weekly bottling.

There is a growing demand for glass-bottled milk and Hohepa Farm is exploring sales to further regional outlets, shops, supermarkets, cafes and restaurants.

One of the residents works in the bottle washing station and another works the filling machine recently installed to automate the process.

There is no home delivery service to customers at the moment, but it is something the staff are contemplating for the future.

Residents who are able to work are paid for their time and enjoy having an income to spend on themselves. Others have secured work in the community and many of the residents enjoy community activities like Riding for the Disabled, special Olympics, swimming, bowling and football.

Three residents work in the make room at the cheesery, where the milk is split into curds and whey and the different cheeses formed. Most of the Hohepa range are European-style cheeses, made by three passionate professional cheesemakers. Their Danbo, vintage and tasty cheeses have over many years won NZ Champions of Cheese awards along with cumin, fenugreek and biodynamic blue cheeses. They also produce a range of soft cheeses like mozzarella, halloumi, cream cheese and herb-flavoured quark. The maturing rooms hold 6kg rounds of the Danbo and European cheeses that are matured for up to 18 months before being sliced, packaged and sold.