**Level 3: Future Proofing Strategies**

**Masters of diversification**

**Teachers Note:**

Leefield Station is a large farm in Marlborough, New Zealand, that shows how smart farming and creative thinking can work together. Instead of relying on just one type of farming, the Marris family has mixed wine, wool, lamb, beef, and even pigs to create a successful and sustainable business. This article explores how they’ve used diversification ,doing lots of different things that support each other to protect their business for the future. It's a great example of how farms can be both environmentally friendly and financially strong by working with nature and telling a real, honest story about where food and wine come from.

Read the article” **Masters of diversification”** and answer the questions

**Discussion Questions: Diversification at Leefield Station**

1. Why was diversification important for Leefield Station’s success?
2. How does the integration of livestock and viticulture benefit both operations?
3. How does Leefield Station use storytelling and authenticity to support its diversified model?
4. In what ways has sustainability been linked to diversification at Leefield Station?
5. What challenges come with managing multiple enterprises on the same property, and how are they managed at Leefield?
6. What role does intergenerational involvement play in sustaining diversification efforts at Leefield Station?
7. Discuss the tips for diversification and explain why these are important.
8. What other strategies could Leefield station consider helping future proof the business and discuss how one of these strategies could support the long-term viability of the business.?

**Answers**

1. Why was diversification important for Leefield Station’s success?

Diversification was crucial to Leefield Station’s success because it reduced reliance on any single product or market. Rather than depending solely on wine or livestock, Leefield layered complementary enterprises such as wool, lamb, pork, and premium wine brands. This created multiple revenue streams and increased resilience against market fluctuations, climate variability, and commodity price changes. Brent Marris emphasized “controlling their own destiny” by owning and integrating every part of the value chain from production to marketing which enabled the business to remain agile, profitable, and future-focused.

1. How does the integration of livestock and viticulture benefit both operations?

Integration of livestock and viticulture creates natural synergies that reduce costs and improve sustainability:

* Sheep graze among the vines in winter, acting as natural mowers and reducing the need for machinery or herbicides.
* Animal waste enriches vineyard soils, improving soil health and fertility.
* Livestock like lambs finished under the vines benefit from lush, irrigated pastures, resulting in high-quality meat.
* This integration optimises land use across seasons and enhances overall farm efficiency. A “win–win” for soil health, vineyard maintenance, and animal welfare.

1. How does Leefield Station use storytelling and authenticity to support its diversified model?

Storytelling and authenticity are central to Leefield Station’s brand strategy. Brent Marris understands that modern consumers want more than just a product, they want a connection to where it comes from. By:

* Sharing the history of the land, dating back to 1840,
* Demonstrating ethical and sustainable practices, and
* Offering full traceability from paddock to product,

Leefield builds trust and loyalty. Visitors can see the livestock, vineyards, and farm operations firsthand, turning them into “ambassadors” of the brand. This authenticity enhances the appeal of their premium wines and value-added products in both domestic and international markets.

1. In what ways has sustainability been linked to diversification at Leefield Station?

Sustainability is woven into every aspect of Leefield’s diversification strategy:

* Solar-powered water systems reduce environmental impact while supporting hill-country development.
* Sheep grazing in vineyards cuts down on fossil fuel use and machinery emissions.
* Food waste from restaurants is fed to pigs, closing nutrient loops.
* Wool dags are used as nutrients under vines, reducing the need for synthetic fertilizers.
* Recycling winery water and repurposing plastic vineyard posts further emphasize circular practices.

By aligning diversification with sustainability, Leefield enhances environmental stewardship while adding commercial value and long-term viability.

1. What challenges come with managing multiple enterprises on the same property, and how are they managed at Leefield?

Managing multiple enterprises on a single large property introduces logistical, operational, and cultural challenges, such as:

* Coordination across teams e.g., 150 vineyard workers and 3,500 sheep to avoid operational clashes.
* Avoiding siloed thinking, where different teams focus only on their specific areas.
* Infrastructure management, like ensuring separate water systems for vineyards and livestock to avoid contamination.

At Leefield, these challenges are addressed through:

* Strong leadership from farm manager Greg Crombie and Brent Marris.
* Clear planning and shared vision, ensuring all enterprises support one another.
* Dual-purpose infrastructure, such as wide laneways for both vineyard and livestock needs.
* A culture of communication and integration that keeps everyone working toward common goals.

1. What role does intergenerational involvement play in sustaining diversification efforts at Leefield Station?

Intergenerational involvement ensures continuity, long-term vision, and preservation of values. Brent and Rosemary Marris have involved their four daughters in different aspects of the business, from winemaking to legal and marketing roles. This includes:

* Emma Marris, who studied winemaking and now runs her own premium label under the family umbrella.
* A shared family passion for the land and business, not forced but nurtured organically.
* Future-proofing the enterprise, as the younger generation brings new ideas, energy, and relevance to changing markets.

This approach fosters long-term stewardship, innovation, and the passing on of expertise, making the business more resilient and adaptable across generations.

1. Discuss the tips for diversification and explain why these are important.

*Sample answers include:*

* Start with a clear vision: This avoids random or conflicting ventures; ensures all enterprises align with the brand and land capability.
* Layer complementary enterprises: This enhances efficiency and adds value e.g., sheep as natural vineyard mowers also improving vineyard soil health.
* Choose breeds and crops based on climate and market fit: this ensures productivity, quality, and differentiation in the market e.g, fine-wool Romneys suited to Marlborough’s dry hill country, rare Hampshire sheep for superior meat.
* Tell a traceable, authentic story: This builds brand loyalty and consumer trust in premium markets e.g., Leefield’s paddock-to-product transparency with wool and lamb products.
* Invest in infrastructure that supports multiple uses: This reduces duplication, enhances collaboration across enterprises e.g., dual-use laneways and solar-powered water systems for hill-country development.
* Plan for long-term succession: This keeps the vision alive through generations e.g., Marris daughters are gradually taking on key roles, from winemaking to business.
* Close nutrient and resource loops: this reduces waste and enhances sustainability.

1. What other strategies could Leefield station consider helping future proof the business and discuss how one of these strategies could support the long-term viability of the business.?

*Sample answers include:*

1. Agri-tourism & on-site experiences

* Wine tours, farm stays, or vineyard-to-table dining could deepen brand connection and diversify income.
* This would strengthens the direct-to-consumer model and builds brand ambassadors.

1. Digital storytelling and e-commerce

* Create immersive digital content around farm life, production processes, and sustainability.
* Launch an online shop for meat, wool products, and wine.
* This could allow better access to wider markets and strengthen global branding.

1. Agri-technology adoption

* Use precision farming, soil sensors, or drone technology to optimise vineyard and livestock performance.
* This would help increases productivity, reduces waste, and provides valuable data for future decisions.

1. Diversified plantings or native reforestation

* Consider planting native species for carbon credits or biodiversity offsetting.
* This would add environmental and potentially financial value.