

## **The AmeriKiwi Farmer – January 2009**

When I call back to my friends in the U.S. who are on dairies and they tell me about the hard times there, it sounds like we are in the same boat. Right now we are paying the dairy co-op Fonterra to take our milk. With a share cost of \$5.50/kgMS and a payout of \$4.65/kgMS you can do the math. Needless to say we dried off all of our fall calving cows to minimize the milk we had to send away at this negative payout.

Well, I have to tell everyone, after working for a while in New Zealand, things are really starting to click. I used to be overwhelmed with trying to balance grass/supplement intake, but have seen the ways around this problem.

We are stocking cows at a rate of 1.82 cows/acre effective. This high stocking rate helps us manage our spring flush of grass but even after that has happened we have the ability to feed our cows cheaply on a mixture of potato waste and other supplements. One of the things I have found during our flush period, is that it would be advantageous for a farm of the 700 or so size to have a self steering silage pickup wagon behind a tractor. In one day we were quickly able to harvest and pack 200 tons of grass silage. We had a contractor do it at a cost of slightly less than \$0.04/kg DM, not too shabby if I say so myself.

One of the great resources available to us during the summer months is an irrigation dam. Besides being able to spread effluent, we can switch the valves to draw water from the dam. It was not apparent to me the extent that the irrigation was benefiting the farm until I was fishing at the back of the farm and saw a good view of the neighboring block right next to ours. If I took a picture of that farm and sent it home people would think we were in a drought. But if you look at our farm it looks like spring. While I am not completely sure about all of the logistics of putting in an irrigation system in Missouri, I can definitely see there would be some benefits. It would allow the spring to extend and the fall period to come sooner.

Some of the useful summer crops that work really well are chickory and sorghum. We have locked up two paddocks and planted sorghum to be baled into silage. It grows really well in the hot, dry periods. It could easily be strip grazed like turnips as well, we just don't because with the irrigation system we haven't run out of grass yet. The chickory was sewn into a number of paddocks right on top of the grass that was there and makes an excellent addition to the paddocks providing a high sugar feed in the dry periods when the grass gets a little stalky.

Later this month I will be starting a Production Management course through AgITO. AgITO is New Zealand's Agriculture Industry Training Organization. It is funded by the industry and government. It should provide a great learning opportunity and there should be plenty of projects during the course to keep me busy.

I went marlin fishing off the west coast this past weekend and we caught a 113kg marlin! When Ben asked me what I thought about it, I'm sure my answer was not satisfactory, because I just don't know what to say/have words to describe what it's like when the fish takes off and pulls

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out 600 meters of line in about 30 seconds. Not to mention needing three people to pull it onto the boat and a 90hp tractor with forks to get it off the boat! I am addicted to the saltwater fishing now and can't wait to go out again.

