

CASE STUDY:

Roz Mackenzie

Roz Mackenzie grew up on a dryland Mid Canterbury arable farm. She has well learned the value of water in farming. Annette Scott talked to Roz who was keen to share her positive experiences.

Roz Mackenzie farms in the Mid Canterbury District with her husband Craige. Their 200ha intensive irrigated arable operation, Greenvale Pastures, this year won the couple the National Ballance Farm Environment Awards 2013 title.

The farming partnership began in 1984 when the couple married and started farming with Craige's parents on the Methven property. Roz grew up on her McKendry family farm on the dry, arid soils further across the district at Lyndhurst.

"We had no (irrigation) water on the family farm so that showed us what it was like to farm without water. The crops can look fantastic and then come Christmas and the nor'westers and just like that the crop fails before your eyes."

Roz loved her days as a youngster growing up on the family farm. She went into the banking industry as a career until "Craige came along". She was equally happy to become a farmer's wife and her banking experience has proved useful in the financial management of the farming business.

Initially there was some irrigation on Greenvale. "It was border dyke irrigation and one of my jobs in those early days was the irrigation. It was okay on a nice day you could go in shorts and jump in."

That was the days before water trading. Greenvale was part of the Ashburton Lyndhurst irrigation scheme but there was no opportunity to buy more water and so the decision was made to drill for water to extend the irrigation from the 100ha of border dyke. "That was a bit nerve wracking but we knew we had to take the risk if we wanted to progress."

Fortunately it all went to plan. "This totally changed the way we could farm. It showed us what water could do for our farm business. It evened out the peaks and troughs."

Farming operations today are based around small seed production, wheat and ryegrass. The property boasts a 600m pivot irrigator with a 400m pivoting lateral currently going in for the coming season.

Technology has become the new baby at Greenvale that utilises state of the art technology to maximise production in

a sustainable manner. Variable rate irrigation (VRI) has proved highly valuable, increasing productivity and saving up to 50% of water last season.

"Topography-wise we have a huge variation in soils so the whole 200ha has been EM (electro-magnetic) mapped and we use VRI in line with that. We can be hugely efficient with our water doing this."

Adding to the efficiency the Mackenzies are into precision agriculture. "It fits with the philosophy of farming and with the EM mapping and VRI we can efficiently match soil types and needs."

Roz admits both she and Craige are "sticklers for detail" as they strive to set best practice. "Water is crucial to our operation but if we over-apply it costs our business and it's not good for the environment."

Efficiency and satisfaction are key drivers. "The feeling of satisfaction in that we are doing our best whether in economic terms or the whole bigger picture of sustainability is what drives us. We are extremely aware of what water is available and you have got to learn to manage it. If water is short you learn more about it." The learning never stops. "You can never sit back and think, right we have got there. You keep looking ahead and looking for another challenge. It's all about being open to change."

Roz is looking forward to the couple's new role as ambassadors for New Zealand agriculture.

"It is very important to be positively sharing what we do. Farmers need to be profitable in the long-term and that means making sure we all look after the land. It is important to understand the strengths and weaknesses, potential risks and opportunities of our business alongside the physical resources."

Roz enjoys family time, gardening, scrapbooking, travel and her membership with Women in Arable. In the future she wants to enjoy seeing her grandchildren swimming in rivers, going fishing and having access to good potable water.