



## Judges' Report

CATEGORY:

Farming

### Meadowbank

<b>INTERVIEWED</b>	Nikki and Duncan Grigg
<b>DATE</b>	21 November 2024
<b>JUDGES</b>	Pete Anderson, Cath Baker and Wendy Sullivan

#### INTRODUCTION

Meadowbank Station is a 2,635ha sheep and beef farm located on the outskirts of Blenheim. It is owned by Duncan and Nikki Grigg. Alongside sheep and beef farming, the property includes 40 hectares of vineyard and 6 hectares of eucalyptus plantation. Additionally, the station contains 460 hectares of regenerating native vegetation, with 75 hectares enrolled in the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS).

The primary challenges faced by the Griggs are water management and erosion. To address these issues, they have undertaken several conservation projects and sustainable land management practices.



## GENERAL INFORMATION

Meadowbank Station is situated within the Taylor River Catchment and contains numerous streams and wetlands. The largest stream on the property is a tributary of Doctors Creek. A significant conservation effort was initiated in a large wet gully, which was fenced and partially planted by the landowners and later financially supported by Marlborough District Council's Taylor River Improvement Fund. The restored area now spans 1.34 hectares. Maintaining the plantings has been a persistent challenge, addressed with the help of volunteers ("Woofers") and a new collaboration with Marlborough Boys' College, which provides students with work experience opportunities.

Amenity specimen trees have recently been planted near a farm pond close to the Taylor Dam, and there are plans to plant native species in the riparian zone.

The hillslopes on the farm are particularly fragile, with unstable subsoil prone to tunnel gully erosion, or "under-runners." These erosions caused sedimentation in streams and wetlands. After unsuccessful attempts to stabilize slopes with poplar poles, the Griggs planted over 5,400 ground-durable eucalyptus trees on one of the most erosion-prone areas. Two species were planted to accommodate frost-prone areas on the lower slopes. These plantings not only stabilize the land but also provide future timber resources and eligibility for the ETS.

Water management is another focus on the property. Although the farm uses a water reticulation system, it was prone to leaks, wasting water, fuel, and time for repairs. To address this, the Griggs installed a Knode Water Monitoring System to detect leaks and manage capacity more efficiently.

The Griggs collaborate with the community to control pests and weeds. They work with the South Marlborough Landscape Restoration Group to manage wilding pines and use family and contractors to control ungulates and possums on the property. Weeds such as nassella tussock and barberry are systematically removed.

Sustainable land management practices are central to the Griggs' approach. These include light grazing, rotational grazing to avoid overgrazing and maintain vegetation cover, and the use of natural fertilizers, which has shown to improve soil health and animal health. The Griggs also plant diverse pasture species, with an emphasis on clover, to support soil fertility and improve animal productivity. Direct drilling is utilised to conserve soil carbon and reduce topsoil erosion on slopes.

Drenches are used sparingly after performing Faecal Egg Count tests to minimize resistance. Additionally, all farm and household waste materials are recycled.



### THE JUDGES WERE IMPRESSED BY

- Level of community involvement and initiatives such as supporting farm tours, engaging volunteers, and supporting students struggling with conventional schooling.
- Transforming an unproductive wet area into a functional wetland that provides habitat, aesthetic value, and sediment reduction for streams.
- Implementing innovative practices, such as the Knode Water Monitoring System, to save water, time, and fuel.
- Employing practices like maintaining vegetation cover, rotational grazing, resting paddocks, and seeking expert advice from organisations such as Soil Matters.
- Actively participating in the eradication of invasive plant and animal species.
- Demonstrating a commitment to the well-being and development of their workforce.

### PROBLEMS AND HOW THEY HAVE BEEN TACKLED

- Soil erosion has been tackled through the eucalyptus planting program, sustainable grazing practices, and maintaining vegetation cover.
- Water management was addressed with the Knode system, reducing wastage and conserving resources while improving operational efficiency.
- Biodiversity enhancement has been time consuming and expensive, however has been accelerated with council and community support.





## SUMMARY

The Griggs have demonstrated a commendable commitment to maintaining and enhancing their landscape at Meadowbank Station. Their efforts reflect a holistic approach to farming, combining productivity with environmental stewardship. By integrating sustainable land management practices, biodiversity enhancement, and innovative technology, they have successfully addressed key challenges such as drought, erosion, and water management.

The Griggs' collaborative spirit has also been a standout feature. Their work with community groups, volunteers, and local students showcases how farming can build connections and foster a shared commitment to sustainability.

## SUGGESTIONS

- Develop a restoration plan to determine direction and key actions, including, where practical, waterways which can be fenced and planted. Breaking the actions into manageable timeframes will assist planning and budgeting.
- Within the restoration plan, identify and enhance ecological corridors between high-value or potential conservation sites to facilitate wildlife movement and resource utilisation, such as waterways linking farm dams.
- Conduct herbage and soil tests to gain a better understanding of land management units. Include Molybdenum (Mo) testing in clover only herbage tests in spring to determine if Mo is at optimum levels. This information could be used to determine if Mo can be added to maintenance fertiliser applications to enhance legume content and nitrogen fixation in pastures. Especially useful in land management units where pH is low, and application of Ag Lime is cost prohibitive.
- Farm tours run by Meadowbank Stock Manager Simon and his wife Natasha are proving an excellent way to educate a global audience about productive farming systems. Engaging Blenheim residents could also help educate the local population and reduce urban-rural misunderstandings.

