

Winners relish that 'real buzz'

Several months after being named as the inaugural winners of the Dairy Business of the Year Competition, Graeme and Sharon Martin are still smiling.

"The win gave us a real buzz and we had lots of nice feedback from friends and farming colleagues as well," Graeme (Grimmy) said.

As well as winning the supreme award, the Morrinsville couple took out the low input farming and the northern North Island sections as well.

They attribute their success in achieving good farm profits to keeping costs down while feeding their cows well – resulting in good production figures.

At the beginning of August,



Winners of the Dairy Business of the Year, Graeme and Sharon Martin.

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“We just do normal dairy farming tasks as well as we can. We utilise the grass well, get the cows in good condition before calving and keep our costs down...”

they were in the middle of calving with about 120 calves in the dairy already. Sharon, who takes on the calf-rearing, said they expected to finish the season with around 240 calves.

Not much had happened since they won the award. But there have been a few changes, some planned before the competition but only happening now, while others have just happened. In keeping with their policy of taking regular breaks from the farm, they're shortly to take a holiday to Fiji with another off-farm escape planned for later this year.

Another 68ha farm and 270 crossbred cows have been purchased in Roach Rd. Sharon's daughter Rachelle is now managing the unit.

New staff

There are two new staff members on board: Geoff Kingsford on the Martins' Matuku Rd farm of 100ha which carries 300 Frie-

sians and Tony Blomendal at their 91ha Woodlands Rd farm where 280 Friesians graze.

Grimmy now shares his time during the busy months between the three properties. He's also been overseeing the building of a new house on the home farm on Matuku Rd, as part of their policy of treating good staff well.

"Winning the Dairy Business of the Year gave us a bit of a spur on," said Sharon.

"We had been a bit anxious about buying the third farm, but winning just reinforced our decision.

"We only had one house here and felt we needed a second one. Part of being in the farming business is to attract good staff and a good house is part of that. To enjoy our business we need to have good staff, to be able to trust and respect them and to get good people you need good facilities."

The new house is at the framing stage and Grimmy and Sharon are in the process of choosing colours



Grimmy and Sharon at the retreat following their win in the Dairy Business of the Year competition.

and interior designs. They will give up their substantial family home closer to the dairy for the farm manager.

Red Sky bonus

Looking back on the competition and reasons for entering, Sharon is quick to say they entered because they would receive a Red Sky farm analysis report. That had been invaluable.

"Even if that was all we got it was worthwhile," she said.

"It's superb. It's a full report on farm efficiencies and performance and showed areas we were doing well in and other parts where we could improve.

"We entered to get the Red Sky report - winning was a bonus. We didn't think we would win and were pretty amazed when we did."

The analysis of their farm performance in the 2005/06 season showed an operating profit of \$3066/ha for last year, well ahead of the Waikato average of \$780/ha and eclipsing

the top 10 percent's \$2121/ha. Their operating profit was a shade under \$1000/cow, four times the Waikato average.

Another part of the winning package was an Icehouse agribusiness course of three, four-day courses worth \$13,000. The programme is run in Brisbane, Melbourne and Auckland later in the year. The Martins intend to pay the extra fee so both can attend the course later this year and get the best out of it.

Teamwork important

Teamwork has played a large part in their farming life together. Sharon is responsible for the bookwork and calf-rearing of the three farms while Grimmy shares his time between the properties and makes all the silage needed. He has a down-to-earth approach to farm maintenance and takes great pride in repairs and maintenance on the three properties.

"I don't know how a farmer can operate without knowing how to weld," he said.

"I've got the experience, gained over the years. It's good to be able to fix things as it saves us money and also saves us time."

Grimmy said farming well is not "rocket science".

"We just do normal dairy farming tasks as well as we can," Sharon said. "We utilise the grass well, get the cows in good condition before calving and keep our costs down."

He is a strong advocate of good cow condition and uses his Dexcel consultant to benchmark his herd.

"He sees many more cows than I do, so asking him how our cows are doing is a good backup," he said.

"Cow condition is so important."

The Martins believe there are plenty of good farmers doing just

as well but who didn't enter the competition.

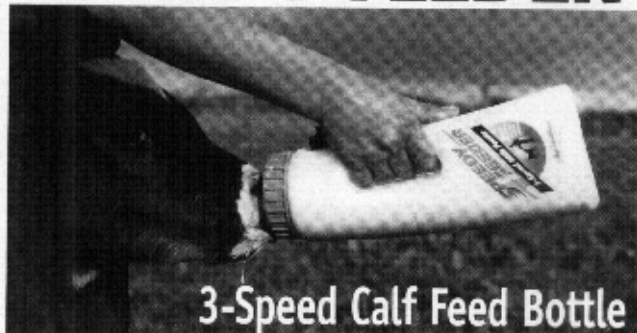
"We would recommend they give this Dairy Business of the Year Competition a go," Sharon said.

"It's a fantastic contest and at the very least you get a wonderful Red Sky report."

• So that other farmers can view their winning way, the Martins will host a field day on their Matuku Road farm on September 27 starting at 10.30am and going through to 1.30pm. The field day will be followed by lunch which will be available for a small cost, or attendees can bring their own. Everyone is welcome to attend particularly farmers from areas other than the Waikato who may be attending the Fonterra annual general meeting at Mystery Creek on the previous day, September 26.

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