

A battler against bureaucracy

Henk Smit first got involved in the dairy industry in his native Holland, working on a dairy farm during the school holidays.

After completing an MSc in animal breeding, feeding and agricultural economics he was still keen on the practical side of farming and decided the best opportunities in dairying were in New Zealand, and since then has filled a large number of roles in the industry.

Smit, 49, has interests in two dairy farms, one at Okorioro of 320ha, co-owned with his oldest son and his partner, milking 580 cows and carrying 300-400 head of young stock. They are in their first year of ownership.

The other farm in Matamata is 106ha, milking 480 cows, managed by his second son, and is leased for a year to fill a gap after the Smits sold their Cambridge dairy farm in May.

Over both farms, the target is for 450,000kg milksolids (MS) this season, supplying Open Country Cheese. Both farms milk all year round, which Smit has been doing for the past 12 years. He and his wife Nienke live on a 40ha horse rearing property just outside Cambridge, and have seven children, aged from five to 21. They also have a half share in a drystock farm near Raglan.

As a trained geneticist, he worked for LIC as a research officer when he arrived in 1985 before starting on a farm and working his way up through manager and sharemilker positions. In 1993, Smit went to Southland where he spent 12 years developing a number of dairy conversions. The family returned to the Waikato in 2005.

He is part owner and a director of HSS Genetics, which develops Friesian genetics for New Zealand and international markets. The company has provided embryos for Fonterra's Chinese operation, exports bulls to China, and is involved in sire-proving bulls in Australia.



Henk Smit – answers are out there.

Smit said his interest in genetics had also led to his involvement in racehorse breeding.

Bureaucratic

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"I don't like bureaucracy anyway and, from farmers' point of view, it's bad news for our investment if it becomes ingrained in our industry-good organisation."

The big issue facing the dairy industry is around survival in the face of environmental pressures, Smit said, and we are in danger of trying to reinvent the wheel.

"It is an issue that has been faced in other parts of the world where they have been able to control the negative effects of

farming and, in some cases, even restore environments to how they were 30 or 40 years ago."

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that European experience".

Farmers need to do their bit too, and Smit said that some people are too relaxed about the impact they are having on the environment. "We are on an increasing treadmill of scale and we all need to take responsibility for protecting the environment and for making sure that our consumers understand we are doing the right thing if we are to survive."

He believes present research is too focused on the typical all-grass New Zealand system and,

with more farmers choosing to move to higher input systems, this should be reflected in the work done by DairyNZ. Higher input farmers are levy-payers too and many feel that not enough of the levy is directed towards solving their problems, he said.

Improving genetics

"Progress in efficiency [biological and economic] is coming from improving genetics, improving feeding and improving systems resulting in more production per cow, per kg dry matter (DM), per hectare and per labour unit. This basic rule will not change. Drive in this progress is not coming from DairyNZ, it is coming from individual farmers" he said.

He believes DairyNZ can help transfer this knowledge from one farmer to another, and from systems in other parts in the world to the New Zealand industry. It can help farmers minimise environmental impacts, and will need to lobby consumers to make them aware of farmers' hard work to improve environmental standards.