

Rushbrook Farm's cow barn and effluent pond with milking herd in the foreground. Around 80 per cent of the herd are registered shorthorns.

Farming life keeps Phil on the ball

Richard Loader

Fit, healthy and sharp as a tack – a year off his eightieth birthday, Philip Garrett still puts in a 20-hour week on his Canterbury farm and enjoys the cut and thrust of the bi-monthly board meetings around the dining room table.

Attended also by the bankers and accountants, Philip says they have to deal with him – he really enjoys that part actually.

From a farming family, Phil, as he likes to be called, was the only one to go farming.

“My father was a farmer in Southland but he died when I was two. My mother's parents lived

in Christchurch and wanted to keep an eye on us. Mum said she would come up as long as we had somewhere to milk a cow to help feed us.”

So the family moved to a lifestyle block in Heathcote. The neighbouring property was a dairy farm milking Shorthorn cows.

The day he turned 15, Phil left school and went to work for the neighbour where he developed a love for cows, Shorthorns in particular, and the freedom of being outside.

In his early 20's and in conjunction with a business partner, young Phil leased land, fattened lambs and eventually had enough money to buy the dairy farm along with a few shorthorns from the neigh-

bour. The partnership dissolved around 1981 and Phil farmed solo till 1986 when he sold up to buy a larger farm where the land rates weren't so high – buying 103ha in Leeston; “Right in the depths of farming despair under Rogernomics,” says Phil.

The farm was sheep and crop when Phil bought it, and he was an early converter to dairy in the region.

Since then the farm, which is two kilometres from Lake Ellesmere, has grown in size and now takes in 440ha, including a 93ha drystock block just down the road.

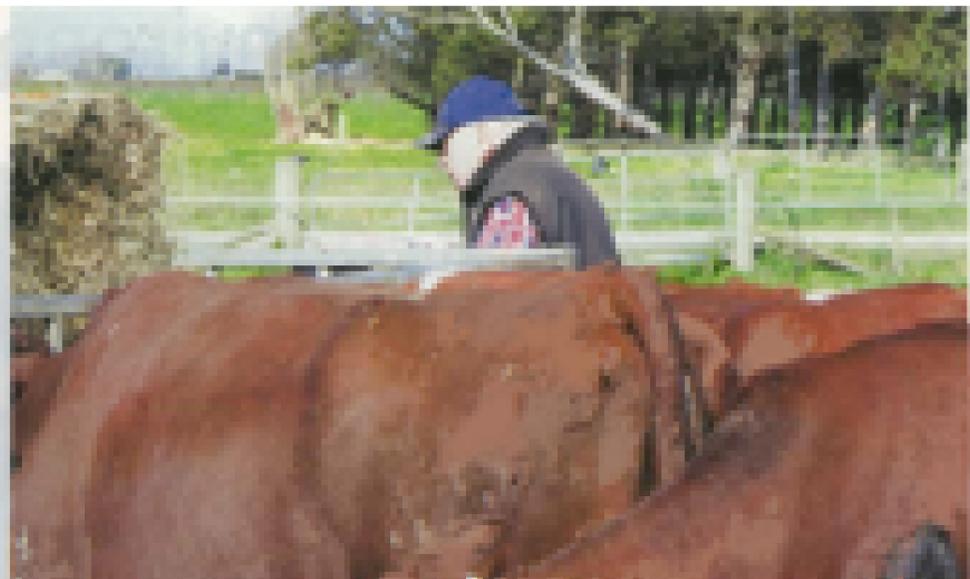
These days Phil has passed general operational management of the farm to his son Andrew. Grand-

son Ethan recently joined the family business as manager on the drystock block.

Contract Milkers, Rob and Fran Foster, are in their third season looking after the milking side of things, employing a team of five farm assistants. A tractor driver employed by the farm adds to the team.

“I still shift the electric fence every day with the cows and calves,” says Phil. “I check the born calves every day to make sure they have the right mothers and record that sort of thing. I have poultry that I look after – so yeah, I'm still active – and that helps keep me pretty fit.”

Andrew takes charge of feeding the cows in the farm's free-stall barn – a piece of infrastructure that



Native plantings line Boggy Creek, which runs through Rushbrook Farm. The property won the Lady Isaac Cup for its environmental work. Farm owner Philip Garrett busy on his Leeston farm with some springers.

has revolutionised farm productivity.

“The farmland is all flat with a Waterton clay loam and has an extremely high water table because of its proximity to the lake. It gets very wet and sticky winters and we were doing a lot of damage to the soils prior to the free stall barn, which we built to save the soils.”

The farm milks all year round, with five calving seasons throughout the year. Only two calvings are from AI, and last for six weeks, producing replacement heifers. The other calvings are from beef bulls

and much shorter durations. “We have about 1100 milking cows and at anyone time we try to have 1000 in milk, occasionally we'll drop below that for a fortnight.

About 80% of the herd are registered shorthorn cows. The rest are a mix of straight friesians and cross breeds and a few straight jerseys and a few crosses of all three.”

Last season's production hit 562,000kgMS and this season Andrew and Phil are budgeting between 580,000 – 600,000kgMS.

“We've a lot more control of our production than some farms because of the free stall barn,” explains Phil. “A few years ago before we had the barn our production was only 260,000kgMS and we were making a mess of the farm.

The milking platform was 260hectares and now the platform is 180ha. We also run the dry cows on that platform so it's growing an enormous amount of grass by only using effluent from the pond.”

Phil says the farm is quite well known for its environmental work and two or three years ago won

the Lady Isaac Cup for the environmental work done on the farm. “We worked quite closely with Ecan for all sorts of things. They loved this farm because of its very low nitrogen losses – we're down to eight on the last full run up to the year.

“The free stall barn and our effluent bin which holds 14 million litres play a large part in that.”

Going forward, Phil is proud that his son and grandson are both actively involved in the farm and that with the new generations the farm may continue in the family.