

Clovertone Replaces Urea on Dairy Farm

Peter & Doris Rust have a terrific view from the 137 ha dairy farm they lease from Peter's mother. They farm on Bayley Road, South East of Te Awamutu. Peter & Doris returned to the family farm after 3 years sharemilking west of Huntly. The farm had been conventionally fertilised originally by Peter's father, then by a sharemilker for a further three years. On advice from the sharemilker's advisor, nitrogen was applied because clover was sparse. When the clover disappeared more nitrogen was applied.

Peter & Doris applied urea sparingly in their initial year, unconvinced it was financially viable. The farm yields average production for their area. The key to their operation is focusing on low inputs. Peter & Doris noticed that if the urea was not applied, the grass took on a sickly yellowish colour. They realised they could potentially be caught with a dependency on nitrogen. After their first year they stopped using urea altogether and instead applied Clovertone on a trial block. Previously milk production dropped when this block was grazed. Within 6 months of applying Clovertone, production was consistent with the main farm block. After 12 months, clover levels had significantly increased. This prompted a whole farm application of Clovertone.

Last year, in a break from tradition no conventional fertiliser was used. They harvested more silage, and the cull cows weighed heavier. Since using Clovertone, animal health bills have reduced and cow condition improved. The paddocks are being left much cleaner, with no fertility spots noticeable. Although it has been a difficult winter, calving has been easier, with Peter not having to assist as many of the cows. Production has been consistent over the three years, but somatic cell counts have dropped to a range of 45 - 65,000, levels not seen before on the farm. Their previous nitrogen fed pasture had been lush and deep green, but never produced the milk they expected. At the end of their one hundred day round, the pasture looked good, but it was starting to rot at the base. Now the grass remains healthier for longer, and there has been a noticeable reduction in frost damage.

Recently Peter and Doris have started using Maxamate, an oral animal supplement, also made by Organic Technology Ltd. Previously Peter had to clean his entire drenching system every week, as the magnesium oxide would clog or totally block the pipes when not in use. Since using Maxamate in his drench, he no longer has to unblock his system.

Extra Clovertone will be applied to the silage paddocks this spring.