



CARE FOR THE LAND AND PEOPLE

After two tough years of juggling judging and award timings around lockdowns, the Ballance Farm Environment Awards were again positioned as the country's premier farm awards event, backed by multiple high-quality entries.

Joanne van Polanen, chair of the New Zealand Farm Environment Trust, the group overseeing the awards, said regional committees worked hard with farmers and growers in communities to see the awards programme remained a rewarding programme that could be completed despite the challenges of the past season.

"It is more important than ever that the great initiatives and work being done by farmers and growers is being celebrated and shared with others," she said.

Among the celebrated recipients this year, Wellington Regional Supreme winners Patrizia Vieno and Rod Clutton of Rewa Rewa Station were recognised in late June for their efforts on the station located near Tinui, in the Masterton district.

The couple run 4,300 Romney sheep and 140 Angus cattle, along with alpaca and cashmere goats on the 1000ha property. They emigrated to New Zealand from the United Kingdom and purchased the station in 2011 after Rod, who had farmed in the United Kingdom, decided he wanted to return to the land.

For Rod, the move to an extensive hill country property at the bottom of the world was a big one after running an intensive easy country sheep and beef operation in the United Kingdom.

The couple received not only the Greater Wellington Supreme Award but were also recipients of the Bayleys People in Primary Sector Award, the Norwood Agri-Business Management Award and the QEII National Trust Farm Stewardship Award.

That spread of awards that cover the couple's attention to business, land and people represents a balanced approach to a farm business, one that leverages off their care for the land and interest in community and people around them.

“ At Bayleys we recognise that people are the most important asset in our business and equally recognise how important people are to every farming business in New Zealand. ”

Nick Hawken, Bayleys National Director Rural says the couple exemplify the quiet, often overlooked work going on in many remote parts of the country, and it was fantastic to see them be recognised winning both the Bayleys People in Primary Sector Award and overall Greater Wellington Award.

“At Bayleys we recognise that people are the most important asset in our business and equally recognise how important people are to every farming business in New Zealand. The Ballance Farm Environment Awards celebrate excellence across the whole farming business, and it is really important that all the good that is being achieved in the rural sector is shared with the wider community.”

Patrizia says the Bayleys People Award was particularly welcome and reflects the efforts they have taken to develop good relationships with their staff and visitors to the farm.

“We have worked to ensure they have the best of conditions, including upgrading our station manager’s home from what he had before.”

But the couple have also forged strong links with their wider community, something the judges recognised in the People award. This has come in part through their Airbnb accommodation that offers more than simply just a roof over guests’ heads.

“I make a point of taking them out on the farm, showing them the entire property, and telling them about what we are doing,” Patrizia says.

For Patrizia and Rod, this side of the business is a way to bring farming to the people, help break down urban-rural divides and give all generations an insight to what happens on the land.

They have also run open farm days, participating in the National Open Farm Day programme and bring the dogs on board for a demonstration.

“They will get to see some dogs working the sheep, and love seeing that relationship between dogs and bosses.”

Patrizia’s passion for wool also has her opening up her wool spinning studio, showing school children the wonders of nature’s fibre. The couple have also employed a local student who has since gone on to do a degree in agriculture at Lincoln.

The couple’s environmental efforts include creating a 13ha QEII covenant, with prospects for another along with retiring the back 200ha of the station for pine trees under the ETS carbon scheme.

“ ... for many rural landowners like Patrizia and Rod, it is care for the land and animals that keeps farmers doing what they are doing. ”

Nick Hawken says, “Those that have established a track record of excellent stewardship on farm will present a more attractive property when it is taken to the market and buyers will often put these properties at the top of the list. However, for many rural landowners like Patrizia and Rod, it is care for the land and animals that keeps farmers doing what they are doing.”

Patrizia said the awards have been a welcome surprise over a tough winter.

“But really we have just been doing what we have always done.

“For us it has been about opening up the farm and giving people a good understanding at all ages about what we do. It’s a rewarding part of farming that we are keen to continue.”

The future of the primary sector relies on the entire country understanding how farms operate, and the Ballance Farm Environment Awards plays a very important role to ensure positive stories are shared.

