

# Adding value essential for future

We asked for your opinions on the future of New Zealand farming for our Glass Half Full series. Here, Southland sheep and beef farmer **Dean Rabbidge** says a focus on value over production is key to our success.

**N** MY mind, the future of New Zealand agriculture will be motivated by adding value to our high-quality produce.

As a young sheep, beef and dairy farmer in the deep south, I find it insulting that the product we put so much pride and effort into delivering is shipped off overseas in cardboard packaging (usually of the 40kg variety). It is barely processed for a secondary processor to clip the ticket as they pass the final product on to the consumer.

I know I probably sound like a stuck record talking about the value add, and that exciting and ground-breaking work is already being done, but I think that I speak for the majority of people my age in the industry, when I say that if we want to continue to farm in a manner that is financially viable and environment-enhancing, we need to increase the focus in this area.

**“Great work has already been done to establish niche markets where an increased value is received for our products, but we need to raise the intensity.”**

The way that we currently farm, with the mentality of “must increase production” is flawed.

Environment Southland is introducing its Water and Land 20/20 plan. If implemented, this plan will have massive



implications on a property's ability to produce at current levels.. The only way to remain financially viable under these conditions is to receive more for what we produce, which all comes down to adding as much value as possible to our products before export.

Although we rely on, and to a certain degree trust our processing companies and co-operatives to add value to the products that we produce onfarm, value add starts behind the farmgate. This is where I feel as an industry we need to be taking more responsibility.

It is as simple as ensuring the product we supply is “True to label” and that the lamb and beef we send IS grass-fed and antibiotic-free, the milk we put in the vat is containmate-free and the cows that produce it are ethically treated and cared for. Yes, we already do this but we need to be selling this story with more passion and conviction than we are.

NZ primary producers have a mentality that we “must feed the world”. Simply put, NZ does not have the resources or land area to come close to this.

Great work has already been done to establish niche markets where an increased value is received for our products, but we need to raise the intensity.

But where does this intensity come from? For me it will come



**TALENT:** To add value we need to ensure New Zealand's brightest and most talented engage in our industry, Dean Rabbidge says.

Photo: John Cosgrove



**Glass half full**

from people who are still at school, aspiring to be doctors, lawyers and police officers. Here lies the second challenge we are facing – a huge shortage of skilled and motivated people wanting to immerse themselves in our industry.

Organisations such as Young Farmers are doing a great job visiting schools and hosting “get ahead” days to change the perception that agriculture is suitable only for the bottom 10% of students, to a perception that agriculture is for the top 10%.

My expectation is that in 10 years the industry will be delivering \$150 lambs annually, a farmgate milk price of \$7, every farmer will be farming in a manner that continues to enhance the environment, and everyone in urban areas will have an understanding and appreciation

of the opportunity agriculture provides for our economy, society and way of life.

The only way this will be is achieved is to add value, and to add value we need to ensure NZ's brightest and most talented engage in our industry.

## Your View

Got a view on some aspect of farming you would like to get across? The Pulpit offers readers the chance to have their say. nzfarmersweekly@nzfx.com Phone 06 323 1519