

ROUND THE FARM TABLE

Chef and good keen man Al Brown chats to BFEA entrants from around the country and finds they're committed to sustainable farming – and growing delicious food.

For Adrian and Pauline Ball, Dennley Farm in Tirau is more than a livelihood. It's where Adrian grew up and where he and childhood sweetheart Pauline, (they even went to the same primary school, although Pauline reckons she didn't think much of him back then!) have raised their two daughters Katie (19) and Amber (21).

Adrian was just 16 when his father passed away and he had to step up and run what was then a 122 ha beef finishing farm. Today, a fair bit has changed. Some 270 Holstein Friesian cows make up the bulk of the herd on their now 196 ha dairy and dairy beef farm, which, under their careful and considered stewardship, is thriving.

Adrian says he reached a point in his life where he felt the need to reduce stress, and re-evaluate. In doing so they have simplified and streamlined the operation while still creating as much value out of their products as possible.

It's this way of thinking that has seen the Balls named as the latest Ballance Farm Environment Awards National Ambassadors, providing them fantastic opportunities to continue their journey of constant improvement.

With excellent production, high stock growth rates, and a smaller footprint as ongoing goals, Pauline and Adrian are making a real, sustainable difference – and they're happy to help others who are keen to do the same. Al Brown chats to the pair to find out more.

Al: Dennley Farm – what a beautiful place to live and work! You obviously put a lot of work into looking after the environment here as well as running a successful business.

Adrian: Yeah we do. We've got a plan we're working through, and it's ongoing, but our dry stock farm is now completely off-grid and uses solar power for electric fencing and a deep well for water supply. We've fenced off waterways, retired areas of the farm, and planted 8000 natives. It's been amazing to see the birdlife return to these areas.

Al: A lot of work, but no doubt rewarding! You're also very deserving winners of the latest Ballance Farm Environment Awards – an awesome achievement. How did you find the awards experience?

Pauline: We loved connecting with like-minded farmers and judges, and especially sharing and learning from each other's stories. It was a great reminder that we're all in this together and that our industries are pretty special and will continually adapt and evolve.

Adrian: The awards have provided incredible opportunities to keep learning as well. We were lucky enough to be able to travel through Ireland and Holland to understand innovation in genetics and animal welfare technologies which is all great learning to bring back home.

Al: That sounds like an incredible opportunity. There's so much to be gained out of sharing those experiences isn't there?

Pauline: Absolutely, and even though farming can be quite a solitary job, you don't have to know everything or do it all yourself. Adrian has a weekly catch up with the M.M.C guys (Matamata Multisport Club) with 15 local farmers. We play sport, have a drink and talk things out. We share our successes and help each other solve problems.

Al: Did you find there were any unexpected benefits to come out of entering the awards?

Pauline: Not so much unexpected, but we loved that we got to have our daughters join us at the awards evening and that they were able to feel proud about what we, and the whole industry is achieving. They're both studying in Auckland and while they might not pursue a role on the farm, the lessons learned about striving for success can be applied to any industry they choose.

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Adrian and Pauline Ball, Dairy and Dairy Beef farmers, Dennley Farm, Tirau, Waikato

WITH *Al Brown*

Al: There are definitely a lot of cool things happening in the industry. Over the next 20 years, what do you think NZ agriculture can be famous for globally?

Adrian: The potential of dairy beef is exciting, I think. If we think of ourselves as food producers rather than simply farmers, we can really put NZ on the map by creating a culinary experience around our produce – where it comes from, how it's farmed and of course how good it tastes. Our primary focus will be to produce the best quality products we can backed up with credible independent assurances.

Al: Well I can vouch for how delicious it is! So of all the food that is produced on your farm, would you say it's the beef you're most proud of?

Adrian: Yep, the beef is awesome, especially a whole sirloin, cooked on the BBQ with mates over – who all think they are meat cooking experts of course!!

Al: So, if you could have anyone over for dinner to enjoy that awesome beef with, who would it be?

Pauline: Our daughters, and our friends – Irish Bill, Brownie, Daws and the M.M.C lads. If we didn't invite them, they'd still turn up. Mostly to tell Adrian he's overdoing the sirloin!



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