

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 Pania and Eugene King and their four boys, looking after Kiriroa Station, their 483ha sheep and beef farm, doesn't stop at their boundary. The neighbouring rivers, mountains and sea – and the animals, fish and community that live there represent something much bigger in their lives. The Kings are firm believers in the importance of continuous kaitiakitanga (guardianship of the land) and manaakitanga (aroha, hospitality, and mutual respect for all).

Pania (Ngāi Tūhoe, Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Kahununu) and Eugene (Ngāti Awa) are both from farming families that taught them to look after whānau and the land, and to work hard at both. Pania was raised by her grandparents in Te Urewera, while Eugene grew up on a farm in Taranaki.

"Pania and I met at a woolshed in Taupō," says Eugene, "and now our boys are shearing too. It's no wonder we've ended up on a sheep farm!"

This work ethic has stood the Kings in good stead as they continuously strive to look at the bigger picture in all aspects of their life, on and off the farm.

Al Brown chats with them and finds out more.

Al. What brought you to this beautiful spot?

Eugene: We've been here for about 20 years, but we originally moved from shearing to farming with my siblings and their partners. The goal was always for each family to own their own farm. It's the best office in the world! Quarter flat, half rolling and a quarter steep to keep things interesting. It's got taonga like the river and bush and is great farming country. Best of all, Motu is a wonderful community.

Al: And how important is that community to you?

Pania: It's very important to us. We're still involved with Motu Primary School where three of our four boys went. Next to the school, the community has also helped establish a predator-free Kiwi creche and we're also close to opening a tuatara sanctuary.

Eugene: The Kiwi are raised within the reserve's crèche and after being sent to hatch in Rotorua, come back to mature before being returned to their habitat in the Whinray Scenic Reserve. The school kids love it.

Al Brown: So your boys are important to the future of Kiriroa?

Pania: If they want it. I love having my boys here and they love it too. They work hard and they play hard – catching and releasing trout and eel (Kiriroa means 'long-skin' in Māori and is a reference to the eels), riding motorbikes, horse riding, and hunting.

Eugene: The boys love the land and see first-hand the kai we produce from pasture to plate. They know we are doing our utmost to farm in a sustainable way, that's kind to our environment and respectful to our animals.

Al: Why did you get involved in the Ballance Farm Environment Awards?

Eugene: We saw farmers getting rapped over the knuckles by a public that was often misinformed, when the truth is that as farmers, we not only take pride in producing high quality products, but in how we grow it. Animal welfare and the health of the environment, and our communities, is all part of that. We realised we needed to share that pride and passion outside of our peers.

Pania: So we said, let's let people in to see what we do. It's challenged us to be accountable, with the awards acting as a review of what we've done, how we've done it and providing a clear view of how we want to continue on.

Al: Well whatever you're doing must be working, you've won a few! (5?)

Pania: We've been very humbled by our success with the awards, but more importantly they've given us the confidence to lead by example by passing our knowledge onto others.

Al: Tell me a bit about the kinds of things you've done on farm to protect the environment?

Nº4
Pania and Eugene King and whānau.
Sheep and Beef farmers,
Kiriroa Station, Motu,
East Coast.

WITH

Al Brown

Eugene: We've gradually fenced off our waterways, and retired some land to create a weka wetland to enable the birdlife to thrive. We've completed some big erosion plans and planted a lot of young natives.

Pania: That has been our journey so far and it is work that has been done over many years and with a lot of helping hands. But we're not unique – there are so many other farmers doing the same, and more – or concentrating on different things in their own ways that promote good, healthy practice. They should all be celebrated.

Al: Ever take a break?

Pania: We're pretty careful that work doesn't dominate our life. Wellbeing is one of the keys to success.

Eugene: I'm probably happiest escaping to the Mahia Peninsula for some diving and fishing. We only ever take enough for a feed. That's the way I grew up and it is the way my boys have been taught. There are even a few pāua if you know where to look, Al. Tangaroa still provides but we have to look after him!

Al: I'm so jealous! Now this will be a hard one but what's your favourite food off the farm?

Pania: We call it the shearer's breakfast – mutton chops, bubble and squeak, spaghetti and fried eggs! When we're really busy, you can't beat it. The boys and I love it.

Eugene: Roast lamb is unreal, but a Sunday roast hogget with all the trimmings can't be beat.

Al. Ok so who's coming over to share dinner with you?

Pania: Sir David Attenborough to share his knowledge and stories – and I know that another entrant you spoke to said the same thing! Great minds think alike.

Eugene: Eddie Murphy. Laughter is good for the soul. And you Al – to cook dinner for everyone because I'm not much of a cook!

Al: You heat up the oven, I'll start peeling!



TRY MY LAMB BURGERS WITH KEETROOT RELISH AND MINT BASIL MAYONNAISE.



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The Ballance Farm Environment Awards is a pan-sector programme that promotes best practice, sustainable farming and growing. To join the journey or find out more, visit nzfeatrust.org.nz

