



## Farmer to farmer: Doing more with less takes a targeted approach

Getting the most out of a constrained fertiliser investment is top of mind for many. Ballance is here to help with strategic advice on ways to manage your reduced spend. Rather than taking a blanket approach, our advice is to rationalise phosphate and potassium spend wisely, with a customised approach to boost pasture and crop productivity. Now is also the time to lean on existing information and experience - including trend data, your own learnings over time, and the science-based advice of your nutrient specialist.

Ballance Nutrient Specialist **Katie Wilkinson** chatted to Matamata dairy farmer **Steve Atkinson** about the changes he's made on farm.

**Dairy farmers are looking ahead to a tough season. What are your tips for riding out tight times?**

*"We don't want to be in a situation where cutting spend will cause us problems the following year. For example, if our races were poor and we were getting lame cows, and those cows then become empty or late calvers, that would have a big carry over effect to next season. With regard to fertiliser, where we have Olsen P above target levels (for us this is 40), we are using some of our fertility bank and reducing phosphate inputs this year."*

**What changes have you made to the way that you use fertiliser?**

*"We've been moving away from a blanket approach and using lighter rates more frequently. This has given us more consistent pasture growth, so we don't get the boom and bust of one big hit. A more consistent and early growth curve also gives us more control over pasture quality."*

**How have you seen your pastures develop over time?**

*"One area of our farm had soil fertility levels well below target. We've made two key changes - establishing a good grazing rotation and fixing up the nutrients. These pastures are now thick ryegrass-clover mixes, so there's quite a contrast in pasture quality and yield now to what they were previously."*



Katie Wilkinson

Steve Atkinson

**How do you manage production?**

*"A really important Key Performance Indicator for our pasture-based system is the amount of milk solids per hectare produced between balance date and 31 December, based on home grown pasture. We also understand our soil fertility targets and have a robust testing programme."*

**What keeps you optimistic about the future of dairy farming?**

*"What excites me is that we are producing off grass, so it will always be low cost, and we can produce a real good quality product out of New Zealand. The cows are outside grazing in the sunlight and green pasture, and I think that for the next generation, this has got to be the focus."*

**Contact your local [Ballance Nutrient Specialist](#) to chat about making the most of your nutrient spend.**