



## Providing plentiful pasture

**Y**OU may have read in some of my previous articles how over the years we and other farmers have noticed our farms not producing like they used to. We have soil tested, and applied the recommended fertilisers and nitrogen; however, what initially seems to rectify our problem soon seems to fade and we are back at square one.

Certain types of nitrogen applications that are being pushed throughout New Zealand as the best way to go "and I admit we have used in the past" were providing a quick fix and prolific growth. However, through observations on our farm, they also seemed to be providing pasture that the cows found less palatable, and was lacking in nutrition and longevity of growth without subsequent regular applications.

Ourselves and other farmers have likened this type of nitrogen fixation on farms to being as healthy for the pasture as a hit of heroin is to a drug addict, you have to keep using it for it to have any effect, and the more you use, it seems the more you need for regular growth.

Therefore, we changed last season to a more plant-soluble pasture and soil-friendly option of a form of nitrogen that we could spray on the pasture called Nitrostim. This is in no way a push of certain products; there are others available that provide nitrogen also. And I must add that when we use this spray, we don't use

it with gibberellic acid, which is an option. What we are trying to achieve is a less acidic soil, so we have also gone back to applying significant amounts of lime, as our fathers and grandfathers did.

Therefore, of interest for us relevant to our dairy farm, as well as for you, the *Lifestyle Farmer* readers and your pastures, my husband and I recently attended a field day on pasture animal health and production on a dairy farm in the Waikato.

Vaughan Jones is a well-known name among farmers and has a wealth of experience, completing a two-year commercial economics course in 1946, followed by two years at Weston Agricultural College, Natal, South Africa, on its 1000 ha mixed farm, gaining honours (99 per cent) in dairying, to many years of converting peat to highly productive dairy and beef grazing land.

Vaughan has been the main speaker at well over 200 seminars on grazing and profitable farming in around 20 countries, and shown more than 25 groups of farmers from many countries the farming in New Zealand to encourage them to buy New Zealand electric fencing equipment, and to graze instead of stall feed, which increases their profit and reduces milk production, which is of benefit to New Zealand.

He was a member of the Australasian Register of Agricultural Consultants, and points out that their



Vaughan Jones

rules don't allow consultants to get any commission on fertilisers selling for \$400 to \$500 a tonne, whereas in NZ consultants can earn up to \$12 per tonne, so don't recommend lime, which costs only about \$20 per tonne at the mines.

Tania and Brendan Fernyhough, whose farm was the site of the field day that Vaughan ran, had read his *GrazingInfo* eBook, which advised that the pH measurement to decide your lime applications is losing farmers money. Since then, Fernyhoughs have changed to using the calcium figure in pasture mineral analyses, aiming for 0.8 per cent calcium in pure ryegrass.

Subsequently, with reducing cow numbers from 380 to 340, changing from their previous fertiliser program, to spreading three tonnes per hectare of lime and serpentine with trace elements, based on their pasture tissue analyses, and cutting back on