

People key to couple's success

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PEOPLE have been the key to success for this year's Dairy Business of the Year national supreme winners Martin and Linsey Furrer.

The Mid Canterbury dairy farmers and Canterbury regional winners took the supreme award at the national awards function in Hamilton on June 26.

The judging structure was weighted 70% on profit, 15% on people management, and 15% on environmental management.

Neither Martin, who hails from Switzerland, nor Linsey grew up farming.

But meeting his wife-to-be brought Martin to New Zealand and the couple began their dairying careers in Whakatane.

They moved south 10 years ago, spending one year in North Canterbury before moving to their 295ha property, milking 1250 cows, at Hinds, just south of Ashburton.

The couple said their partners in the Longland Dairies business, Martin and Rikie Rupert, of Peel Forest, South Canterbury, and John and Colleen Campbell, of Whakatane, as well as their staff, were the key to their business success.

"For us the key has been the people involved with us in our business – our partners and our staff. We are running an intensive system and without loyal and committed people around us this success would not be possible," Martin said.

"We have a very loyal team of young people working for us – two who have been with us the whole nine years on this property and two others who have each been with us five years now. Our partners are committed and such a huge support."

Milk production on Longland Dairies runs at 2124 kilograms of milksolids a hectare on the irrigated farm.

Operating profit is \$5025/ha, equating to a 35.7% operating profit margin.

Cost of production is \$3.86/kg MS, with core per-cow cost at \$634.

The Furrers were encouraged by their accountant to enter the competition and last year won the medium-input award, based only on the financials of their business.

This year's Canterbury best overall farm business regional award, topped by the national supreme title, had been quite a journey but a great experience, they said.



QUITE A JOURNEY: Martin and Linsey Furrer won this year's Canterbury best overall farm business regional award, topped by the national supreme title.

Photo: Annette Scott

The Red Sky report, an analysis of the business provided through the judging process, left no stone unturned, they said.

While it was great to have the honour of winning the competition, there was also value in participation and the Furrers urged all dairy farmers to get involved.

All participants receive a financial analysis of their business, a human resources and environmental scorecard that benchmarks the operation, with other farmers identifying its strengths, as well as opportunities for improvement.

That became a useful business tool, particularly when used year on year to monitor the performance of the business, they said.

"It has been a great benchmarking opportunity. The in-depth report leaves nothing to hide.

"We can see our strengths and weaknesses, the risks are

identified, and we know where to improve."

The judges told the Furrers they were selected not just for their excellent overall results in the key criteria of financial, environmental and people management, but because of their strong performance in all aspects of their business.

That included generating a high pasture harvest from their region and outstanding milk production, with the highest per-cow production, all achieved with effective cost control, resulting in an outstanding profit margin.

"For us now it will be about maintaining this success and ensuring in all respects, for the people on the farm, environmental and financially, that the business remains sustainable long term," they said.

"We really enjoy what we do. Farming is long term. You take the

good years and you take the other years and we are still here. Life is pretty good right now."

Runners-up overall and winners of the best low-input system were Kieran and Leonie Guiney, of Shamrock Fern Dairies, in Fairlie.

The competition organisers said being profitable while keeping the environmental footprint down and managing the people on farms to produce their best were critical factors in stepping into the future.

"Getting a grip on this now will keep you ahead of the game, and benchmarking is the only way of objectively assessing where you are and where improvements can be made," they said.

"Overall we aim to help you streamline your business and protect your major assets, your land and your people, allowing you to maximise profit and enjoy doing it."

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Martin Furrer
Dairy Business of the Year winner

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