

## Harmen Heesen



**T**HIS is a new column which I have been given the opportunity to write for *The Dairyman* and its readers. It's a privilege to contribute to such a esteemed publication and the New Zealand dairy industry in general.

It's always good for readers to know who is the face behind the words - I will keep it brief.

I am Harmen Heesen, chief executive of the TechniPharm Group of companies, Cowhouse Ltd Consulting.

I am a National Fieldays Society board member (voluntary function). I came to New Zealand as a 19-year-old in the early 1980s after having completed my Dutch education in dairy management and economics. I started work on a dairy farm in Taranaki and started a trading company (now the TechniPharm Group of companies) in the late '80s when interest rates were 24 per cent and the payout \$2/kg milksolids (can you imagine that today?).

I had to make some changes, so I took a break from farming, went overseas for a while then moved to Rotorua and started to focus on the company and got involved

# Where is the industry headed?

with the local Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Over the years I have had the opportunity to visit and get to understand not only a lot of "industrial and retail" businesses, but also a big number of dairy beef and sheep farms. There are few places in New Zealand I have not been.

Time moves and now at age 51, I can say I have experience. Funny that all those hard times are paying back. If you survived those 24 per cent interest rates, you can probably survive anything. That said, never take anything for granted (not even taxes or death). We now live in a world of "all possibilities" - just add money. This is one of my catch phrases. It works in resolving most issues - try it.

Now to the topic I will address over the next few columns. Where is the New Zealand dairy industry heading? For starters, I believe we have only just started. We have huge production gains to be made. Does that mean the whole country should be covered with dairy farms? No, not necessarily. There are within existing dairy land uses huge gains possible.

For starters, let's look at grass. Are we actually using every bit of grass we grow? From the feasibility studies on conversions and animal housing I have done, I am convinced we have 30 per cent of grass or more

which never sees a cow's mouth. That is a lot of grass. We also think that grass is the cheapest source of feed. Is that so? It may be so, if you do not count the capital cost of growing grass.

But the fact is that when you take all costs into consideration, grass costs 30c to 33c/kg DM, and if we waste 30 per cent of it, the cost actually is much higher than that. What is the cost of KPE again? The most of maize?

Then we have huge resources of fertiliser produced on every farm. As a matter of fact, every dairy cow produces 27-30 tonnes of organic fertiliser per year. Yet we seem to be importing fertiliser like it's going out of fashion. Now I am not saying do not use any other form of fertiliser, but let's look at how we can use the fertiliser we have on-farm first.

The dairy cow is a fantastic animal - producing milk, organic fertiliser, meat, leather, and human pleasure in having and seeing cows.

The dairy cow provides so much to so many - it truly provides life.

Are we giving her enough in return? Can we do better?

To be continued ...

• Comment? Free to email me at [harmenheesen@me.com](mailto:harmenheesen@me.com)