

# Close the leaks to efficiency

By HARMEN HEESEN

**L**AST MONTH I concluded with the statement "efficient farming is common sense" but it's easier said than done. Feed wastage is rife everywhere I look, and it's worth noting that 30 per cent of food we produce never reaches human mouths.

So if in producing the food for the animals, to produce food for humans, we lose out twice, it's a double whammy.

It's not hard to see how we can resolve the much-needed increase in food production, just by making small changes, such as Fonterra's new milk bottle.

On a farm, change could be the efficient use of nutrients. In the end your farm buys and sells nutrients, the closer the gap between these the fewer you have to buy in, simple as that.

Pasture farming, particularly in NZ is all about feeding grass regularly, but there's no point feeding it if it is not growing. So store effluent/sludge when there is no benefit to the soil, and put it on when the time is right and grass grows, close the leaks and you will benefit.

Next leak is, grass use, first make sure you measure what you grow - even with all technology available there are still many thousands of farmers who do not know what they grow.

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The fewer Kg of grass (Dm) you need per Kg of product produced the better. There is already plenty of research which confirms that grazing cows in the

early morning is not very efficient, wet grass tramples easily, wet grass in spring also has low Dm/volume ratio, so many more bites are needed to fill up the cows. Afternoon grazing means grass has a higher sugar content and higher Dm content. So you have less trampling and more feed value per bite. Have you ever worked out how many Kg of Dm you grow and then use to create a Kg of Ms?

Research also confirms cows do not like early morning milking. If there is a change to be made in a business model which creates better efficiencies and better profits and better outcomes why are we still milking cows at 4am 5am or 6am and putting them straight on pasture? Just because that is how "we have always done it" - most other businesses die doing that.

Many farmers will be looking to sell the farm one day, so if you keen on selling the farm as a food producing business it needs to make a return on capital, it needs to be efficient. If that is not the case some may call it a hobby farm and buyers will not pay top bucks for the privilege of owning it. For what its worth, very few businesses sell on the premise of *possible* capital gains.

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