

We must learn to balance our needs with production

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NATIONALLY, the general public may have a perceived issue with the dairy “footprint” increasing. Reality or not, if that is what they think it’s up to the agricultural community to ensure they change that perception. People need food and need to know what is needed to produce it.

If we look at some other countries and see what they produce and what their land footprint is, we have no option but to conclude that our production in relation to the land we use for that, is very under-utilised. We are a bit like having one milk bottle on the supermarket fridge shelf ... while we pay for all the remaining space as “empty” space and yet the perception is the shelf is full. (For instance, Southland is about the same land mass as the Netherlands, Southland has 500,000 cows, Netherlands 1,500,000 and 18plus million people.

We have cows which genetically can produce at least twice of what the national average is.

We have vast areas of land yet to be developed.

We have plenty of water, just a matter of getting it in a storage facility and use it where we need it rather than trying to increase ocean levels.

We have factories which seem to be built to cater for “peak production” while 80 per cent of the time we have no peak production and 20 per cent of the time we have buggar-all milk.

Same with a cowshed, why have all that money tied up and only use it 280

days of the year?

Increasing production sustainably is about a balance between people, animals, the environment and financials.

It’s not just about the environment only, some people forget that. We are part of the environment too, and have a right to live and live well and farmers have a right to farm!

Those farming or involved in farming need to spend more time telling the general public what farming is all about and change the perception, so we can grow the nation’s wealth and have every one on the same page.

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Abe and Anita de Wolde in Southland.

A great example of sustainability is the farm enterprise of Abe and Anita de Wolde in Southland who just won the Ballance Nutrient awards.

They have a hybrid system which delivers a very high level of production, they farm efficiently, use resources carefully and have invested in infrastructure and people to achieve that.

They have increased production without increasing the footprint, as a matter of fact they have decreased it. There are many more farmers like them who have clicked on that there are ways to be better, do more and use less, work smarter not harder.

To the point – are we at the right track of creating so called sustainability out of 2 per cent of the problem ie, dairyshed effluent (diluted). A 360-cow herd produces at least \$140,000 worth of nutrients in undiluted effluent during lactation.

A very small portion of that is disposed off in the dairyshed while we milk. Yet I see farmers spending huge money on solving a problem which earns them “nothing”.

How does that work in the sustainability context? Are we not better off spending the money to capture up to 98 per cent of the undiluted effluent and make a real difference, environmentally and financially?

From where I am sitting I struggle to see that there is sustainability and environmental improvements let alone much production growth on the near horizon if one keeps spending money at the wrong end of the business.

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