

# Paradigm shift needed for future

**N**EW ZEALANDERS need to “get over” the idea that pasture-based farming is the ultimate green picture, says a farming industry businessman.

Technipharm director Harmen Heesen says in reality, the scientific evidence points to quite the opposite.

“We have created this perception that grass-based farming is the best and the only way to farm. However, seeing cows on the pasture 24/7 looks nice but the benefits end there,” he said.

“Our relatively sensitive and shallow top soils and numerous rivers means there is certainly a high loading of nutrients.

“The problem is exacerbated in autumn when

the grass is so dry that there is no absorption of N. The higher rainfall comes and the nitrogen leaches into the subsoil. It is an issue we simply can’t ignore.”

Heesen said New Zealanders’ resistance to moving towards the more European style of housing cattle was strong, with the false belief that cows would be confined 24/7.

“The housing paradigm shift is all about efficiency and tuning into the micro management of your dairy herd. Introducing a hybrid, controlled grazing system whereby cows spend portions of the day inside will create better efficiencies and have a huge positive impact on the environment,” he said.

“We are moving towards



Technipharm director Harmen Heesen says partially housing dairy herds is the best way forward.

animal housing for different reasons than the Europeans. Our current, preferred methods of capturing effluent in the dairy shed is only dealing with 2 per cent of the problem; most of the nitrogen leaching comes from cows on the pasture.”

Heesen said if cows were housed overnight, their morning urination would be captured inside before first milking. Ideally, they would then be moved to the

paddock for four to five hours of grazing, before spending the night inside. This would improve production and animal well-being, and reduce the inefficiencies of waste that comes with pasture-based herds.

“We haven’t changed the way we do things for many years. The ‘slash and burn’ method of expansion and conversion is not realistic for the future of farming,” Heesen said. Anne Boswell