POSITIVE OUTLOOK: In his opening address at this year's SIDE Steve Booker said farmers needed to focus on the things they could control rather than worry about things they couldn't.

Keeping positive despite the odds

THIS year's South Island Dairy Event saw about 500 attend the three-day conference at Lincoln University.

Run by farmers for farmers the content aimed to be relevant and useful and provide a forum for those involved in the South Island dairy industry to evaluate and apply knowledge, skills and technology to their business as well the chance to meet like-minded farmers. Upside – Raising the bar was the theme for this year.

In his opening address dairy farmer and organising committee chairman of SIDE 2015 Steve Booker touched on the challenges the dairy industry was facing and gave some insight into how he was meeting these challenges on his own farm.

He said farmers' attitude towards the current pay cut was determined by their outlook.

"We must remain positive as history has shown us that commodities are cyclical, and are influenced by all sorts of supply and demand factors. We just happened to be experiencing a particularly harsh cycle."

As a result Booker's focus was on the things he could control, rather than on the things he couldn't.

"The two biggest impacts on my budget are payout and climate. I can't control either of them and they will be what they will be. We just have to work around them and try to minimise the impact of both. So I see no point in wasting time and energy stressing about them."

Booker said one area of focus was looking at all costs, especially the big ticket items, and while there were definite areas where savings could be made, he also stressed the need to be honest about what could be eliminated.

"The farm still has to be run efficiently and be sustainable so we need to still keep in mind the next 3-5 years.

"If it grows, moves or moos, measure it. You cannot manage what you don't measure."

Steve Booker
SIDE 2015

"We will all have some costs that are non-negotiable. On our farm we will not compromise on staffing levels, animal welfare or environmental compliance. But we will look very hard at repairs and maintenance, feed and Capex."

Booker said farmers also needed to be up to speed with their pasture management.

He said if farmers did not know how many kilograms of drymatter they grew each year or were unable to rank paddocks in terms of pasture production they would not know what their stocking rate should be or which paddock really should be regrassed.

"If it grows, moves or moos, measure it. You cannot manage what you don't measure."

He said alongside keeping an eye on costs, it was also important to look after the most important resource onfarm – the people involved.

"Through these tough times it is going to be important to look after ourselves, our staff, our neighbours and farmer friends."

Booker said it was important those in the industry pulled together and for older farmers to keep an eye on those just starting out.

"We all need to pull together as an industry and help each other out. There is plenty of professional support available for farmers who are struggling to cope, but again those of us who have been around a while can also be a source of support especially for those young farmers who may have just moved into sharemilking or contract milking."

To survive, he said, farmers needed to be prepared to change and plan ahead.

"Those who can change adapt and innovate will achieve a higher level of business success in volatile times."