



Judges' Report

CATEGORY:

Farming

Glentoi Farm (Millton Farm Ltd)

INTERVIEWED

Willie and Millie Millton

DATE

3 December 2024

JUDGES

Pete Anderson, Cath Baker and Wendy Sullivan

INTRODUCTION

Glentoi is a 1685ha sheep and beef breeding and finishing property in Ward, owned by Willie and Millie Millton. The Milltons purchased the property in 2014 and expanded it in 2020. The property runs 3700 halfbred sheep and 400 Angus cattle.

The property features extensive native vegetation, including 32ha protected under a Significant Natural Area (SNA) designation.

A total of 146 hectares are registered in the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS), with 106 hectares under Indigenous ETS and 40 hectares of Pinus Radiata (including 32 ha pine plantation) also registered.

This initiative not only diversifies farm income but also provides wildlife habitat, stock shelter, and reduces the farm's carbon footprint.

The Millton's have recently achieved New Zealand Farm Assurance Programme Plus (NZFAP - Plus Gold Certified) a voluntary, independently audited, nationwide farm assurance programme.



GENERAL INFORMATION

Glentoi Farm is situated in the Flaxbourne district and operates as a terminal sheep system, adapting trading strategies to match summer conditions. Cattle are primarily used for maintaining pasture quality but are also traded.

The property comprises rolling terrain with numerous gullies and streams. Many of these gullies retain native shrublands, which are ecologically significant given that over 80% of the surrounding native vegetation has been converted to pasture.

The Milltons, having owned the property for only ten years, have had to adapt their farming practices to suit the region's climate, land capabilities, and terrain. Key challenges include managing erodible soils, low summer rainfall, and agricultural weeds. To better understand their potential impacts on waterways and prioritize actions, they utilised Marlborough District Council's (MDC) Catchment Condition Survey. Access to funding has enabled faster progress in enhancing habitats.



The Milltons employ a range of innovative practices to improve soil health, manage waste, and minimise environmental impact:

- Conducting soil tests and implementing a fertiliser program with paddock rotation to maximise benefits while reducing costs and nutrient runoff.
- Using their own sprayer and direct drill to apply treatments at optimal times based on conditions.
- Converting a diesel water pump to solar power and using natural springs to keep stock out of waterways.
- Direct-drilling catch crops to absorb surplus soil nutrients.
- Recycling farm plastics through AgRecovery and Plasbac, repurposing containers and baleage wrap.
- Implementing control programs for invasive species such as goats, possums, and pigs, and plant pests such as Nasella.

THE JUDGES WERE IMPRESSED BY

- Extensive fencing, in only 10 years they have extensively fenced 34 blocks to a total of 74 blocks and protection of native vegetation.
- Use of recycled vineyard posts (Re-Post).
- A comprehensive wilding pine eradication program.
- Establishing a poplar nursery to address poor survivability of commercial stock. Using a pilot hole with an auger and ramming around poplar poles after planting has also improved poplar pole survival as has selecting species they determined best survived in their environment.
- Propagating their own native plants for replanting.
- Thoughtful siting of pine plantations to minimise wilding spread, using existing road access to avoid additional tracking.
- Using matagouri as a resource for lambing shelter instead of indiscriminate spraying.
- Registering native vegetation in the ETS to generate income while providing ecosystem services, such as sediment control and habitat creation, along with a long-term vision of being carbon-neutral.



PROBLEMS AND HOW THEY HAVE BEEN TACKLED

- Continuously learning and refining systems as their understanding of land management units and climate grows.
- Using tools like the Resolution App and conducting weekly planning meetings to manage tasks, coordinate staff, and improve work-life balance.
- Rotating stock, implementing strip grazing, and back fencing to prevent pugging, encourage re-growth, and reduce pressure on fragile soils.
- Utilising the ETS has allowed an income from native vegetation while providing habitat, and other ecosystem services such as sediment control. Working with MDC's SNA program has contributed to fencing, and using repurposed vineyard posts has reduced costs.
- Engaging consultants and experts to identify weaknesses and implement solutions

SUMMARY

The Milltons have shown a strong commitment to sustainable and innovative farming practices at Glentoi. They effectively balance agricultural productivity with environmental stewardship by incorporating native vegetation protection, participating in the Emissions Trading Scheme, and implementing practices like solar water pumps and direct-drilled catch crops.

Their conservation efforts, such as fencing native areas, eradicating wilding pines, propagating their own plants, and collaborating with experts, reflect a proactive and thoughtful approach to environmental management. Overall, the Milltons exemplify how the farming community can embrace ecological kaitiakitanga (guardianship), seamlessly integrating farming practices with ecological values.

SUGGESTIONS

- Explore diverse permanent pasture options, including plantain, chicory, legume mixes, and increasing lucerne, to extend pasture longevity beyond 2–3 years.
- Implement selective spraying for barley grass and resow pastures strategically to disrupt its growth cycle.
- Organise a long-term plan with a breeder for replacing stock to ensure a steady and sustainable supply
- Evaluate whether to focus on breeding or finishing units, as balancing both can be challenging. Identify your strengths and streamline operations accordingly.
- Research other catchment groups and think about how you can help build momentum for Flaxbourne-Waima initiatives. Potential activities could include:
- Hosting field days on relevant topics and involving a range of stakeholders.
- Sharing insights and experiences on improving poplar survival, as many landowners face challenges with successful establishment.
- Collaborating with local school to involve students in the native nursery project.
- Propagate canopy trees such as totara, black beach, mahoe and matai, which are rare in the catchment, to diversify forest remnants.

