

Dalziel

Alan & Michele, Colin & Louise

ATAHUA FARM – MANAWATU, ANGUS STUD, 630 CATTLE, 5000 SHEEP

HOME-BLOCK: 240HA, HILL-COUNTRY BLOCK: 524HA (240HA LEASED)

Application: ALAN – 400kg/ha No. 9 (once a year) + 400kg/ha Haymix/dairy-blend (on selected paddocks) COLIN – 370kg/ha No. 8s (once a year)

Visual Soil Assessment Score (1/6/04): 25.5/28 (Total)

Approximate earthworm count: 1575 per m²



Brothers Alan and Colin run two separate farms in the Manawatu under the Atahua name. Alan looks after the home-block and its highly successful Angus stud, while Colin, for the last five years, farms hill country twenty minutes away. After a decade of dicalcic experience, they are comfortable knowing it is helping them achieve high production, and meeting their expectation for stock health and performance.

“We started using dicalcic in 1994,” says Alan. “Our father thought we should use it after reading various Hatuma publications, and talking to John Jackson in Pahiatua. Before that, we’d started out using super and lime, then moved to RPR’s, but the place still wasn’t performing as well as we wanted it to be. The stock health improved after the first applications of dicalcic. There used to be rough-looking grass, but within a couple years they’d gone, and the pasture became more evenly grazed. Now we never have a problem maintaining clover.”

“There’s been a definite increase in clover cover on the hill-block compared to when I first took over,” says

Colin. “Every year more of it has showed up and stayed for longer. Even the rushes are starting to disappear.”

We stopped using DAP on the home-block because the stock were getting too many dags. The hill-block was the same; the fertiliser history had been mainly straight superphosphate, and the stock had a lot of dags when we arrived. But they’re much cleaner now. Out of our first draft of 700 lambs, we didn’t need to dag any, which showed us what they’re eating must be better.”

“We might still get a few dags,” says Alan, “but nothing like we used to. We’re not chasing them for fly as well. That helps show the quality of the pasture, which is more important than the quantity.”

“The stock are utilising the grass much more, which is a big benefit,” says Michele.

“Some people may comment that we’re short of grass on the hill block, but they also say the colour looks healthy,” says Colin, “and the ewes always come off it in great condition.”



“The regrowth of pasture here is fine, even now in a paddock shut up for calving it’s still growing,” says Alan. “We grow all our own supplements, which supplies both blocks. Funnily enough though, we’re not using as much as we have in the past. There is a saving with dicalcic too, it’s more cost effective. When we were using lime and super by themselves we didn’t have the stock health we wanted.”

“We get better value for money by using it,” says Michele.

“The dicalcic being non water-soluble is also a benefit,” says Colin. “The cost of putting fertiliser on hill country and not having it wash away is a big advantage. To pile lime on hill country isn’t economically viable, but the No.8S mix is and you’re covering both phosphate and liming in the one application.

All my ewes lamb in the first five weeks. We scanned 900 two-tooth’s this season and only 26 were dries. The ewe health is exceptionally high, so we only drench them once a year. The block also had a bad bearing history, but we’re not getting as many now. The cost of stock health has definitely reduced. I would have very little health concerns with the stock on the hill country.”

“3500 home-bred lambs per year are finished,” says Alan. “The lambs off this block are gone before Christmas, averaging 18.6kg, while the second lot average 19kg. We find we’re able to finish more lambs here now, including Colin’s.”

“We don’t need to use nitrogen,” says Colin. “Last year the hill-block was looking short for lambing and I thought seriously about it, but decided not to. The clover stays longer and comes away quicker – that’s our nitrogen source; we don’t have to pay to put it on if that’s there. We’ve never oversowed the block, yet the clover is coming back by itself. In the end, the lambs came through fine.

The long-term effects of nitrogen are unsustainable; my ewes have complete control of the pasture and it’s easy to manage without it. The ewes trim the growth but it’s consistently growing. The dicalcic has now allowed me to run more stock on the lease side of the farm.”

“I’m also running more ewes than I’ve ever run as well,” says Alan, “including an extra 300 we’ve kept on. Our cattle numbers have risen too.”

“The VSA was very interesting,” says Michele. “Looking at the earthworm population – it was the first time we’d looked at the soil like that. We were surprised to find that many earthworms in such a small place.”

“We’ve always known this block has a good earthworm population,” says Alan, “you only have to look at our harrows – they’ve been sitting in the same place for the last ten years. The cowpats get recycled quickly.

During the last drought, we went for a ride in a helicopter. Our place stood out green compared to the rest of the landscape, even though we thought we were just as bad as everyone else.”

“A pilot was spraying thistles on my block, but I didn’t have to show him where the boundary was as he said he could see it himself,” says Colin.

“We haven’t done a soil test since we’ve been using dicalcic because we haven’t had a need to,” says Alan. “Not having to get the vet out all the time with supplements like copper – it takes the stress out of it.”

“I was tempted to do one when we first moved onto the hill-block, but in hindsight it wouldn’t have mattered,” concludes Colin. “If the stock health started deteriorating then there could be a reason to. But we’ve read about the benefits of dicalcic before and they’re all happening on both blocks. It revolves around health. That’s dicalcic’s main appeal, the healthy stock and less worry.”

