

Building resilient rural communities

Bayleys' engagement with its valued rural clients runs deep, with a number of partnerships in initiatives that are playing a big part in helping sustain and grow resilient rural communities.

Spanning areas as diverse as mental health, shearing, the environment and surfing, all of these initiatives play a critical part in helping farmers, their families, and communities deal with an increasingly challenging farming environment.

Environment awards highlight farmers' good work

Run by the New Zealand Farm Environment Trust, the Ballance Farm Environment Awards are proving to New Zealanders that farmers can be good environmental stewards and businesses at the same time, providing inspiration for an existing and emerging generation of farmers.

Bayleys is proud to sponsor the "People in the Primary Sector" award category and has been able to help raise awareness of the value a good team plays in leading environmental stewardship on a farm.

Farm Environment Trust general manager Sarah Harris says the environmental awards have evolved over its 20-plus years, meeting changes in expectations, methods and the environment.

"I think they did a good job in the early days setting out to be the awards to showcase good environmental practice, and in many respects were well ahead of their time.

"Today, having a light footprint on the land is more mainstream practice. No farmer wants to leave their land in a worse state for the next generation than what they found it in."

The awards are also an invaluable means of telling good stories about environmentally-conscious farming practices to the wider public.

Iwi-owned Whiritoa Orchards were last year's supreme winner for Bay of Plenty. Led by manager Helen Scott, the company also received the People's award with judges impressed with the team approach Helen fostered and efforts to create long-term career pathways.

"People are at the heart of this operation, with a holistic approach to sustainability that means profitability is not compromised," says Helen.



Catching a wave for mental health

Getting farmers off their farms and into the waves through the Surfing for Farmers initiative was the brainchild of Gisborne-based Bayleys rural salesperson Stephen Thomson back in 2018.

Stephen saw support for the initiative as a way to encourage farmers to get off their farms and into the water, learning a new sport but more importantly having a chance to relax and socialise away from

the stresses of day-to-day farming.

Today, Bayleys supports the initiative nationwide, with surfing groups in 28 districts from north to south, from Ahipara in Northland to Colac Bay in the deep south.

Katikati farmer Rick Burke has been astounded at the level of interest from farmers in the group at his local break at Waihi Beach.

"I know Stephen Thomson who started it in Gisborne and take my hat off to him.

He managed to get some good sponsors including Bayleys and Beef + Lamb NZ on board.

"It is great to see farmers able to get off the farm, doing something physical and social and have a bit of a reset before going back home."

Rick says it is also rewarding seeing such a cross-section of farmer types and ages, with young farmer groups now regularly coming along.

"I think given the year we have had this sort of initiative is even more important for farmers' mental health."

Bayleys rural salesperson Steve Low from Tauranga says the involvement in Surfing for Farmers has been nothing short of a privilege, with groups regularly exceeding 50 at the Waihi Beach group he oversees.

"We have farmers coming from within Waikato regularly, sometimes they will also be attending the Raglan one on the west coast as well, they enjoy it so much.

"We are seeing farmers progress from their soft tops to shorter boards. But we are also getting people out off their orchards and farms, feeling like they can enjoy themselves and maybe talk about some of the challenges they have had this season."



Feeding communities in need

Just as the Farm Environment Awards provide an opportunity for farmers to showcase their care of the land to all New Zealanders, the Meat the Need campaign highlights their engagement and care for the communities they are part of.

The campaign has been running for three years as a charity founded by farmers for communities in need, making charity a "paddock to plate" affair.

Today the charity has established channels for farmers to donate not only meat, but also milk through Fonterra and Miraka. The charity has had its profile boosted thanks to the Big Feed telethon it ran before Christmas which generated enough meat for 1.2 million meals in only 24 hours. This came on top of the one million mince meals the charity has already provided, along with 300,000 milk meals.

A "milk meal" is the equivalent of 250ml of milk, while a "mince meal" is 125 grams of mince.

Meat the Need partnership manager Sandra Afield says with the cooperation of Miraka and Fonterra, it is also a simple online click for dairy farmers to allocate a donation of their daily milk supply that is turned into the equivalent as bottled milk for food banks and city missions.

"We have appreciated the support Bayleys has provided as a sponsor, the team understand how pivotal our work is within New Zealand communities and has enabled us to reach some significant milestones including The Big Feed," says Sandra.

She says the programme proves how the sector can utilise its network to make some positive social changes in New Zealand.

"It is a great opportunity to focus on the positive contribution farmers and growers can make to the communities they are so much a part of," she says.



Rural Support Trust gives hand up

The link between mental health and surfing is made all the stronger by both Bayleys and Rural Support Trust being partners in the Surfing for Farmers initiative. Bayleys also works closely with Rural Support Trust to help meet an ever-increasing demand for its mental health and support services.

Taranaki Rural Support Trust chair Mike Green says partnering with the likes of Bayleys and Fonterra has a significant impact on the Trust's capacity to help out farmers as demands grow on them and their businesses from both the environment and regulations.

"This includes things like our Time out Tour. We have partnered with Matt Chisholm to help rural communities start that conversation around mental health.

"It is all about trying to make rural communities more aware of the importance of mental health, of being able to recognise the signs among their members when there are problems and know what to do, rather than the Trust becoming like an ambulance at the bottom of the cliff."

Getting people with the empathy and ability to relate to their farming peers to offer advice is one key challenge for the Trust. Green says having solid partners

on board including Bayleys gives them the resources to seek out and train the best.

"Farming is getting more and more isolating, with things like the pub or the school shutting down in communities, and there is a tendency there for people to become more isolated when they are stressed."

The Trust recently provided a \$30,000 grant to the Mangamingi community in Taranaki to restore their dog trial facilities after they were devastated by a major rainstorm late last year.

"Being able to do something like that is valued by a community that only has the hall and the dog trial centre as its hub, and we can only do this with good partners."



Golden Shears makes a welcome return

After two years of absence due to COVID-19 restrictions, the country's shearing community welcomed the return of the national Golden Shears event which was held in early March.

The world's premier wool handling and shearing event has proven as popular as it ever was prior to the pandemic.

"We had as many entries this year as we got prior to COVID-19 which has been very encouraging. It has done much to reassure us the interest in this premier event is definitely undiminished," says Golden Shears Society judge and president Sam Saunders.

He says he has been particularly encouraged by Bayleys' continued support for the event, engendered by the support of Bayleys Wairarapa rural salesperson Andrew Smith.

"It has been great to have such a strong local interest and support from Andrew, with a respected national brand behind him to help keep the competition's profile out there," says Sam.

Andrew says it has been a tough couple of years for the competition but he looks forward to seeing something that is so central to the dry stock community back up and running on the centre stage.

Bayleys national director rural Nick Hawken says it is an honour to be able to engage with such wide-ranging, valuable groups playing an integral role in all aspects of physical, mental and community health, particularly at a time when both urban and rural New Zealand are facing challenges.

"On the land, we have seen the impact very recently of events on farmers' mental health and resilience, while plenty of people in towns have felt these impacts too, and continue to feel the effects of rising costs of living.

"These groups are proving urban and rural are not so far apart in New Zealand, and bridging the gap in understanding and strengthening between the two is just part of what we can achieve here."

