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Historic Whanganui River Property in Ahuwhenua Trophy Finals

An historic 99 year-old property near Ranana, on the Whanganui River is one of three finalists in this year's prestigious Ahuwhenua Trophy – BNZ Maori Excellence in Farming Awards

Morikau Station, which runs around 20,000 sheep and 2,000 cattle on 4799ha, is one of Maoridom's oldest incorporations. However, it is the recent innovative approach by the Morikaunui Incorporation to stock and pasture management, infrastructure, staff development and genetic improvement that have earned it a place in this year's finals.

In 2005 the Board instigated a comprehensive strategic management programme to upgrade what the Chair, Ms Hari Benevides describes as: 'a property in need of attention.'

They recruited a new manager and engaged a farm consultant, and a human resources consultant. A development programme then set about up-skilling core staff. Stock movements were streamlined with the building of a second woolshed; adding covered yards on the home block, building 6kms of laneways and new satellite yards 6kms from the main woolshed.

"All this saved us man hours and led to faster more efficient shearing and improvements in the health of our animals. This is evident in their weights and the returns we've been getting." she says.

In the last three years revenue from Morikau Station has increased by 31per cent while expenditure has decreased by just over 12 per cent.

Sub-division has doubled the number of paddocks to 61. They introduced an intensive rotational grazing system and a pasture renewal programme. This will comprise up to 10 per cent (or 300ha) of the total effective farm area with the capacity to finish all trading stock. Extensive fencing has increased the utilisation of feed, feed quality, and stock grazing management.

A progressive breeding programme to improve genetic purity has been put in place from a breeding base of Romney sheep and Angus cattle. A better balanced 70-30 stock management system - favouring sheep - has seen breeding ewe numbers increasing and breeding cow numbers decreasing.

“We are building up pasture quality and the genetic base of the stock. The genetic improvement will be permanent and cumulative with every generation better than the previous one”, says Ms Benevides.

Morikau Station has a staff of six including: manager, Mike Raumaeva-Tosi. All either come from, or have family links to, the Whanganui River. Staff welfare and skills development are a major part of the farms business plan and workers are encouraged to attend appropriate training courses.

The Morikaunui Incorporation is a strong supporter of the local community. It sponsors the broadband internet connection for the Whanganui Awa School and the Sisters of Compassion property at Hiruharama. Each year a horse trek across the flats and high country of this historic property raises funds for one of the local Marae.

“We encourage staff involvement in the local community and school fund raising, not only does the community benefit, so do they and their families” Ms Benevides says.

Like all farms in the district Morikau was affected by the drought, which, an 84 year-old neighbour and Shareholder describes as the worst he’s ever seen.

Ms Benevides says Morikau didn’t have to sell any capital stock to get through the drought and is now in a great position to take advantage of any upturn in the industry “because it has a strong stock base, better infrastructure and water reticulation, committed staff, management and stakeholders with a commitment to the future of Morikau.”

Morikau was first farmed 100 years ago under the Aotea Maori Land Board. However, it wasn’t until 1955, when the Morikaunui Incorporation was formed, that the owners’ regained direct control of their land.

The public will have the opportunity to visit Morikau Station when a Field Day is held there on April 30.

The supreme award winner and recipient of 2009 Ahuwhenua Trophy – BNZ Maori Excellence in Farming Awards will be announced at a gala dinner in Gisborne on June 19.

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For more information contact: Pamela Fleming 04 905 8198 or 0274 575 677

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