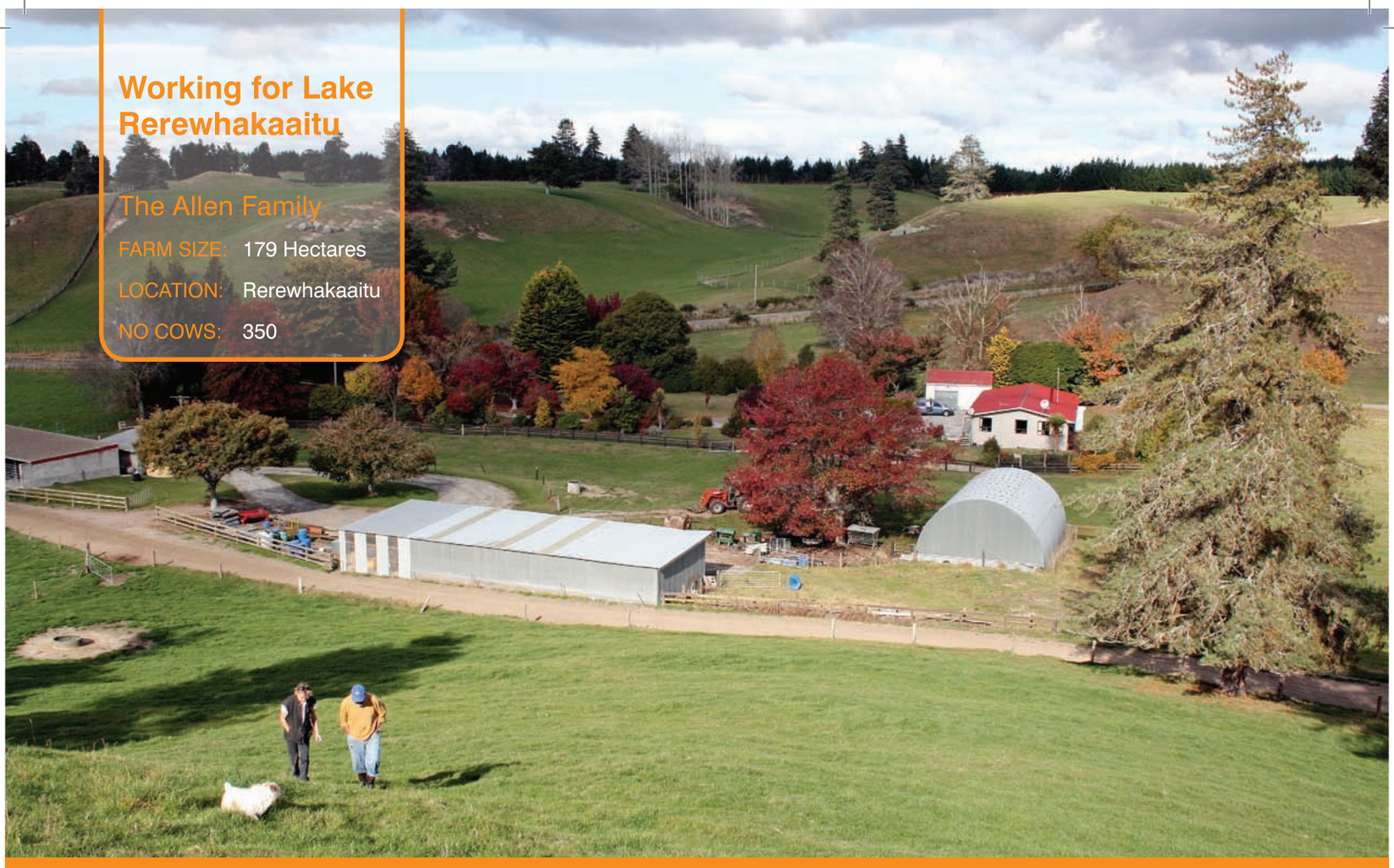


Working for Lake Rerewhakaaitu

The Allen Family

FARM SIZE: 179 Hectares

LOCATION: Rerewhakaaitu

NO COWS: 350

Farming by the lake for 32 years

The beauty of Lake Rerewhakaaitu and the splendid views over water and mountains were part of the X-factor that compelled young dairy farmers Barbara and Peter Allen to settle in Rerewhakaaitu in the late 1970s.

To cap it off, the price of the 56-hectare farm was within their means and before long they had bought a further 52 hectares. Today they have grown their dairy holding to two farms totalling 179 hectares, with 350 cows and a stocking rate of 2.6 cows per hectare.

In the 32 years they have farmed in the Lake catchment Barbara and Peter have consistently applied sustainable methods of farming specifically aimed at protecting the value of the wetlands, waterways and Lake Rerewhakaaitu.

Peter and Barbara were among the second generation of dairy farmers in the Lake Rerewhakaaitu catchment.

The first were the returned servicemen from World War II who were balloted 50-acre blocks complete with house, milking shed and a small dairy herd.

The Allens raised their two sons on the land and as a young family took part in the close-knit community life that revolved around the Lake, the school and the many sports clubs to which all families belonged.

Saving the land saves lake

As the original smaller blocks came up for grabs, the Lands and Survey Department offered them to the local farmers who had been leasing them for grazing.

The Allens added to their title – mainly because the price was good but also to retain the land in pasture rather than see it sold off for subdivision and ribbon-housing around the Lake.

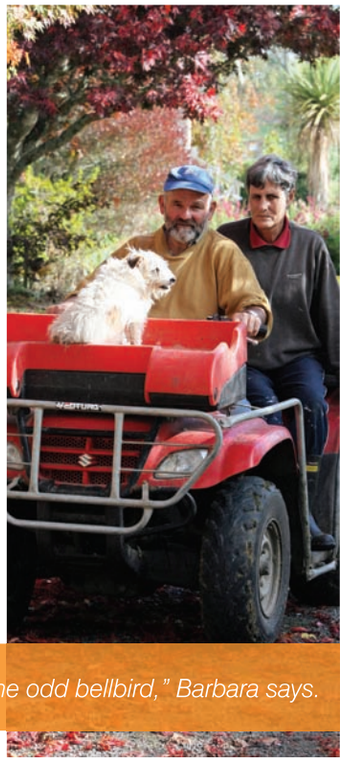
This foresight of the Allens and many other local dairy farmers who amalgamated original blocks into larger farms has been the saving grace for the Lake.

By keeping the land in dairying and farming it sustainably with an understanding of the needs of the lake, the local farmers have protected the water from the threat of lifestyle housing development and related pollution.

"We are very conscious of what is happening on our land and in the Lake because we work with the environment every day and have everything to gain by protecting our future," Peter says.

Retiring wetland areas and vulnerable underground springs on their land has been the main mitigation measure undertaken by the Allens during the past 20 years.

They have retired more than 11 hectares, replacing pasture with a variety of trees such as Tasmanian Blackwoods, Swamp Cypress, Redwoods and many New Zealand natives. This has slowed erosion and protected the quality of spring water, with the added bonus of returning native bird life to the area.



"Native birds are returning and we have more tui and even the odd bellbird," Barbara says.

"We have a passion for trees. When we first came here the bird life was non-existent so we have planted literally thousands of trees. We are now seeing the results of that retirement, plus the aesthetic effect of the native trees. Native birds are returning and we have more tui and even the odd bellbird," Barbara says.

The work has been done with the help of fencing and planting subsidies from Bay of Plenty Regional Council, but all the hard yards have been done by Peter and Barbara.

"The Lake means as much to us as to everyone else – so we want to retain the water quality," Peter says.

Project gives farmers control

Having practised sustainable farming for 32 years, it was an easy decision for the Allens to be part of Project Rerewhakaaitu. They would far rather be masters of their own destiny and that of the Lake than be pressured by regulations.

The knowledge they are gaining through the project is making them more judicious about the nutrient levels they apply, and this is leading to greater cost efficiencies in fertiliser.

"We are looking at the nutrient budgets and finding out as much as we can about phosphate applications and how we can lower our phosphate levels," explains Peter.

"On-farm we are more aware of controlling sediment run-off from our raceways and we will continue to retire vulnerable areas to protect the wetter areas and waterways."

"Project Rerewhakaaitu has also served as a catalyst to bring local farmers together as a group," Barbara says.

"We all have a common interest and we are all on the same wavelength. We all want to keep our lake and our lifestyles and keep our farming businesses profitable."

"So we have to work with the Regional Council and work together as farmers to put scientific policies in place so that we all have control over our destiny."

Ongoing mitigation measures

- The Allens operate an effluent sump and travelling irrigator and hope to double the size of the area to decrease fertiliser inputs on their larger farm nearer the Lake. The pond system is emptied once a year on their smaller farm.
- The reason for doubling the effluent area on the larger farm is due to high potassium levels showing up in these paddocks.
- In the past three years nitrogen application has dropped from 200 units of nitrogen to 170 units and their Olsen P level has dropped from 58 to 47 (this level averaged out over the two farms). This autumn they have applied less potash to parts of their larger farm after receiving results of the latest soil tests and they will continue to decrease levels of potash on these high areas.
- They do not winter off-farm but two-thirds of the cows are moved from the farm nearest the Lake to the farm furthest from the Lake.

Bay of Plenty Regional Council
Sustainable Farming Fund
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
Te Manatū Ahuwhenua, Ngāherehere
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