

## Achiever returns to farming despite warning

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Marlborough farmer Greg Harris has always loved farming but he initially trained as a builder. The difficult years of the early nineties meant Greg was encouraged to get a career off-farm.

“Dad said it may not be on to come back,” says Greg.

Since returning to the Awatere Valley family farm when he was 23, he has gone from strength to strength. His latest achievement was becoming a finalist in the Freemasons Rural Achiever Awards, run by the Royal Agricultural Society of New Zealand. The event was won by Micheal Dunn, a 30-year old rural bank manager based in Southland.

Greg, pictured above with his champion Corriedale ram, is a great example of young people making the most of agriculture. His stint at the Fieldays Rural Bachelor of the Year competition means he is often recognised by complete strangers (usually female).

“An experience not to be repeated,” he says.

He was a ‘Top of the South’ finalist in the Young Farmers’ competition for several years and has had a stint as Chairman of the local Young Farmers club. He also ‘did time’ on the National Executive. Six months were spent travelling around Britain on a Young Farmers Exchange programme.

But it is his progress on the 683ha farm that he is most proud about. Since returning to Mt Adde in 2000 Greg has set up a Corriedale stud, commercial Angus stud and, together with parents Ron and Helen, a 25ha vineyard. This involved building a 124m<sup>3</sup> dam.

“It is great seeing the farm diversifying and going well after the bad run we had with poor prices and dry seasons.”

Greg estimates he spends about 90% of time on the farm, managing the 1100 ewes, 400 hoggets and 210 in-calf Angus cows. The rest of the time is planning and organising the vineyard work (mainly contract labour).

After establishing a flock of commercial Corriedale ewes, stud ewes were purchased from Bill Bain’s Wattle Bank Stud. Greg aims to sell both stud and commercial rams.

“I am really pleased with our progress and they do well in this environment.”

Mt Adde ewe hoggets have been finalists in the Corriedale section of the national Ewe Hogget competition. Hoggets are mated to composite or Corriedale rams. Finn/Texel, Poll Dorset/Texel and East Friesian/Texel sires are being trialed.

“I’m really interested in the genetics side of things.”

Not one to shirk technology, Greg has all ram hoggets footrot gene tested and the yearling bulls are scanned for eye muscle area and intra muscular fat.

“I’m into technology and will spend money if there is light at the end of the tunnel.”

A few late nights at the desk saw Greg gain a Diploma in Farm Business Management through the Open Polytechnic. He’s a new recruit on the Meat & Wool Monitor Farm committee and is also involved with Federated Farmers and Search and Rescue Marlborough.

After completing a carpentry apprenticeship in 1991 he bought his first house.

“It was better to pay off a mortgage than pay rent.”

He has just bought a second house in Blenheim – a rental property. Down the track he would like to develop the sheep stud and cattle breeding operations. He wants to extend the area under pasture irrigation and vineyard while paying off debt and see his parents settled.