

# Facilitator aims to make farm more rewarding

By Blair Ensor - The Marlborough Express



Deep discussion: New Marlborough monitor-farm facilitator Richard Hunter with monitor farmer Greg Harris chat about a new crop called sorghum at Mt Adde in the Awatere Valley.

Marlborough's monitor farm programme has had a shake-up ahead of next week's Monitor Farm Day at Mt Adde. The programme's facilitator, Geoff Dunham, has been replaced by Marlborough Research Centre consultant Richard Hunter.

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Marlborough monitor farmer Greg Harris said the change was made because Mr Dunham had failed to fulfil his contract.

Meat and Wool New Zealand extension uptake manager Gary Walton said Mr Hunter's role would include running and facilitating the monitor farm day and conducting trials at Mt Adde. Tempello's Jo Grigg had also been employed to compile newsletters for the programme. Mr Walton said the new appointments would hopefully make the monitor farm more rewarding for the local farming community.

Mr Hunter said he was excited about his new role and hoped to motivate Marlborough farmers to take more responsibility for the programme. Information generated by the monitor farm often failed to filter through to the community, he said, but he hoped to rectify that. Mr Hunter, who is a specialist in soil science, plant growth and managing systems, said he also wanted to focus on new plant species that could benefit local farms.

Traditional plant species were not always the best option and Marlborough farmers needed to think outside the square when planting crops because of the region's dry climate, he said. Sorghum, a new species, planted at Mt Adde last December, would be profiled at next week's monitor farm day.

Mr Harris had planted 3.5 hectares of the crop after pasja, a rape-turnip cross, had failed because of cold soil temperatures last October. Sorghum had been used widely in the North Island for the last decade, but it was a relatively new crop to Marlborough, because it wasn't suited to dry conditions. However, with irrigation, the crop had produced "phenomenal" results at Mt Adde, Mr Hunter said. Dry-matter tests showed that in its first 60 days of irrigation the sorghum had produced 5386 kilograms of dry matter per hectare. Mr Harris said the quality of the feed was as "good as you can get" and he encouraged farmers in Marlborough to consider using it.

Winter-feed crops and ewe mating management will also be discussed at the **Monitor Farm Day at Mt Adde, 306 Awatere Valley Rd, on Tuesday. The day will run from 11am to 4pm.**