

24 OPINION

We must front foot urban-rural relations

I'M STILL hot on the topic of the rural sector better engaging with the general population about how important it is to New Zealand's economic future.

Fonterra chairman Henry van der Heyden in June told farmers at a conference that the co-op had lost its connection with urban New Zealanders. But it is not just the dairy giant that has become disconnected from the wider community. Other farming sectors – meat, wool, kiwifruit, cropping, etc – also need to lift their games and get proactive in promoting their industries.

No doubt Fonterra and DairyNZ should get more on the front foot, taking on the role of industry cheerleaders and relaying the good news about dairying to the community. However, they also have to acknowledge issues such as water quality problems and ever increasing milk prices and show how the industry is addressing such problems, especially in the case of the former.

Currently, in the dairy sector, the vacuum of information is being filled by environmentalists piling pressure on the industry and farmers to lift their game on sustainability. At the same time, con-

sumer groups frustrated at increasing milk, butter and cheese prices complain about being ripped off while farmers enjoy a record payout.

Inevitably these situations have seen opportunistic politicians playing the envy card by claiming



COMMENT
DAVID ANDERSON

farmers don't pay enough tax, instigating pointless inquiries into milk prices and coming up with silly policies, such as irrigators in the South Island paying to clean up polluted North Island waterways.

All this does is further drive a wedge between rural and urban New Zealand and lead to more discontent from both sides.

Agriculture Minister David Carter recently said the dairy industry needed to acknowledge there are urban concerns about the effects of the intensification of dairying on the environment. The minister is right. He believes dairy farmers need to acknowledge these issues

and spend more time telling the industry's good-news stories so urban New Zealand can respect the progress dairying is making on environmental issues. Carter is adamant Fonterra and the wider dairy industry must be more proactive rather than reacting to criticism in the news media.

DairyNZ chief executive Tim Mackle also agrees the industry needs to engage with the public and politicians on sustainable dairying. Fonterra's Shareholders Council chairman Simon Couper recently told *Rural News's* sister publication *Dairy News* about the need to have the community behind both farmers and the industry.

Couper nails it on this point.

So it is positive to see the first real steps being made to win over the community. As part of Fonterra's upcoming 10 year celebrations, it is throwing a birthday shout throughout the country on Labour Day (October 24). This will see farmer shareholders manning the barbecues and handing out ice creams at a number of family days up and down the country.

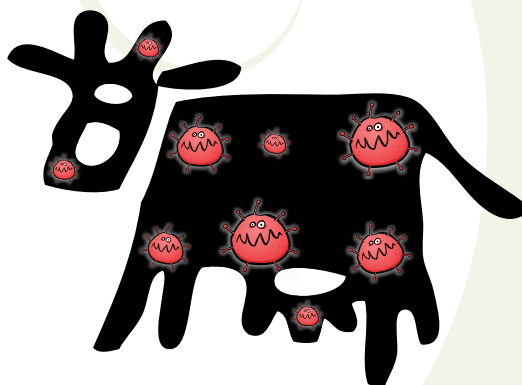
"While it will not change the world, we hope to get those without a

good understanding of the industry to know us a bit better," Couper says.

He's right, it won't change the world. But at least it is a step in the right direction and is exactly the kind of thing that will foster better relations between rural and urban

New Zealand. In fact, it would be great if other agri-sector groups such as Federated Farmers and/or Beef + Lamb took a leaf out of the dairy boys' book and tried a similar thing. The more rural and urban folk can interact the better for us all.

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smcgivornz: Trust me, pig farmers have genuine concerns over a possible devastating disease that may or may not arrive here – and no protectionist agenda. #honestly



waynemcneemaf: So it's not ok for Aussie apple growers to ban imports of NZ apples because of a possible disease risk, but it is ok for NZ pig farmers to ban pork imports because of a supposed disease risk? #hypocrisy



smcgivornz@waynemcneemaf: You're on to it Wayne. We just don't want any rotten apples and/or pigs ruining our cosy little number here in Godzone.



dcarterminofag: Soon to be re-elected (hopefully) agriculture minister trying to keep his head down and not get any grief over potential apple and pig trade disputes! #keeplookingbusy



henryfonterra: Bloody hell, I thought we had this TAF thing all sorted. What is going on? #bugger



fonterrapr@henryfonterra: Mr Chairman, it seems some shareholders are revolting and not accepting the party line that we know what is best for them. #troubleisbrewing



henryfonterra@simoncouper: I'm told some shareholders are revolting re TAF, but I reckon most of them are pretty, bloody awful. I am sending you in to sort it! #lapdog



dbroadmareorganicsnz: I don't care what the market, Fonterra or anybody says: organic products are economically viable even if nobody is buying them. #peoplejustdon'tknowwhatsgoodforthem



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