Regenerative farmers: Oromahoe Farm

Oromahoe Farm is administered by the Oromahoe Trust and is located in the Bay of Islands straddling State Highway 10 between Pakaraka and Puketona. The farm is owned by shareholders affiliated to Ngāti Kawa, Ngāti Rāhiri, Te Matarahurahu, Ngare Hauata, Whanau Whero, Whanaurara (Whanau Aro) and Ngāti Kaihoro hapū. The history of the farm is complex, impacted by colonisation, urban drift and legal complexities. In the 1962 the land was aggregated into one unit to be administered by the Department of Lands and Survey. In 1987 The Department of Māori Affairs took over administration of the farm. In 1990, the current trust was established as an Ahu Whenua Trust. (For more information about the farm’s see this history by Freda Rankin-Kawharu. The trust has 1142 shareholders.

![Figure one: Oromahoe Farm.](image)

The farm covers 1097 hectares, with 754 hectares effective. 434 hectares are flat to rolling with yellow brown earths and 120 hectares of volcanic.

The farm winters 800 to 1,000 beef cattle and 1,000 to 1,200 breeding ewes. Most beef cattle are Friesian and Friesian cross bulls. The average stocking rate is 11 stock units per hectare (based on weight). The Average weight gain is 404 kg/ha increasing to 700 kg/ha for the techno system (see below).

Sam Kidd manages the farm with 3 other full-time staff with contractors used as necessary. Sam started working for the farm when he left school at 17 and returned to the farm 5 years ago as assistant manager, after some years gaining experience in other fields. He was promoted to manager in 2018.

**Soil and pasture**

In 2013, farm advisor Malcolm McCallum, in discussions with then farm manager, Ian Gadsby, concluded that pasture performance was disappointing under the standard fertiliser regime. The pair were Inspired by images in a farm magazine of a farm in Hawkes Bay that looked like a green oasis compared to neighbouring farms. The farm was advised by Quantum Laboratories, so Malcom tracked down Raymond Burr of Quantum. Raymond visited the farm, took soil samples and outlined the philosophy of
using balanced fertiliser based on comprehensive soil tests including trace elements. The fertiliser mix now includes all necessary trace elements and reactive rock phosphate. He has been tracking test results since the first Quantum applications (supplied by Avoca) and is pleased with the results. Climatic variations can produce confusing trends sometimes, but generally trace element levels are rising.

Pasture is mostly composed of rye grass, clover and kikuyu. Sixty hectares have been sown with chicory and plantain and this is re-sown as necessary.

**The techno system**

In recent years an intensive “techno” grazing system has been rolled out. So far 164 hectares are strip grazed with the stock moved every two days, up and down lanes of pasture. Staff use labour-saving ways to shift the stock – they use electric fencing and modified quads to be able to run over the top if the fence, catching the wire in a boom on front of the bike so the wire slides underneath on skids.

This method approaches Allan Savory’s method of intensive grazing by moving stock on quickly, so the pasture is not grazed too hard. Sam comments that pasture recovers much more quickly.

*Figure two: Cattle grazing in the techno system (note the fence lines in the foreground and at the base of the treeline)*
A further technosystem is being installed on steeper country with the intention of improving pasture production, controlling ratstail and enabling further wetlands and erosion prone areas to be protected and retired.

Social regeneration
The aggregation of smaller blocks into the Oromahoe block has enabled the farm to consolidate, recover from the impact of government interventions and chart its own destiny. The trust reinvests profits back into the farm and also disperses grants to “over sixties” and for education. Examples of the trust’s educational investment are Dr Selai Letica (a soil scientist) and Hirini Tane who has recently completed his doctorate at Otago University.

Hirini’s research is especially relevant to the farm. The Pā to Plate project focuses on the Waitangi catchment and is investigating how whānau can engage in short food webs focused on their whenua, helping them reduce dependence on the industrial food system. The project is led by Mereta Kawharu, who also whakapapas to Oromahoe.

When these graduates come home, they are able to support the trust’s thinking about how to further develop the farm to best supports its shareholders.

Environmental regeneration
So far 10.6 hectares of riparian strips have been fenced by 6.5 km of fencing, supported by the NRC Environment Fund. Some of these areas have been planted with more planned for the coming winter. This protects the waterways from intrusion by stock, creates a buffer to filter sediment and nutrient runoff and improves water quality. This is part of the trust’s environmental aspirations to improve both soil and water quality. Another strategy is the retiring of marginal land and tree planting these areas to enable the Trust to approach having a carbon neutral footprint.

Figure three: A fenced riparian strip protecting waterways
After over a century of turmoil caused by colonisation, it is heartening to see the Oromahoe farm contributing to its shareholders and community. The Oromahoe Marae, surrounded by the farm remains a social and cultural hub for hapu, and the continued prospering of the farm can only enrich the marae and hopefully enable it to develop as an economic hub too.

*Figure four: Malcolm and Sam looking north across the farm.*