

WAIPAOA | CADETS

Story **Andrew Stewart**
Photo **Andrew Stewart/
Laurence Burkin**



Mornings start early on the East Coast to beat the heat during the middle of the day. Todd Harris waits patiently for the sun to rise over Waipaoa.

5 at a time

The sheep and beef sector workforce is in a perilous state. Forestry, dairy and lifestyle blocks have all combined to reduce the number of farms and therefore staff. But as Andrew Stewart discovered, a dedicated team of East Coasters are working hard to produce the quality farm managers and owners of the future that are so desperately needed. They will come from Waipaoa Station, five at a time.



Cadets Jason Wyn-Harris, left, and Todd Candy help manager Rob Telfer draft cattle.

“If I drop Maggie’s reins will she f#@k off on me?” came the comment floating across the scrub filled gully. It was one of the funnier questions heard during a morning mustering with the second year cadets on Waipaoa Station.

It was important to remember that these guys are training to become farm managers, and the odd f-bomb is part and parcel of farm life, especially when mustering sticky lambs on steep hill country. The saying “you show me a farmer who reckons they never swear and I’ll show you a liar” came to mind.

Sometimes, when heading off to write a story, you wonder what you have got yourself into. Driving into the cadet HQ on Waipaoa Station, 70km inland from Gisborne, was one of those times. “Frank the Tank”, the two-wheel-drive Holden work ute, was struggling to stay on a farm track pulverised by recent bad weather and pesky forestry workers who had started roadworks then vanished. The 8km trip seemed to take forever but faith had to be put in the authenticity of the directions and, sure enough, after some serious sliding, the buildings came into sight.

Not sure what to expect in this isolated outpost, it was a pleasant surprise to meet the first year cadets and their training and operations manager, Laurence Burkin. The facilities were immaculate, hands were extended in welcome and it took only a couple of minutes to feel like part of the furniture. The 13-room Lockwood quarters with adjoining cookhouse, lounge and lecture room were once the home to single shepherds on Moonlight, a satellite station of the original Waipaoa. Five

first-year and five second-year cadets now work, live and breathe farming during their two-year stay on the station.

Although everything seemed to be running like clockwork, Laurence explained that getting the school to its current state has involved a lot of hard graft by many people. Charged with running the programme from its inception, Laurence and wife Di previously worked at Smedley training farm in Central Hawke’s Bay.

“ The idea is to build up a reputation so employers know what they are getting before the end of the course. ”

Training and operations manager, Laurence Burkin

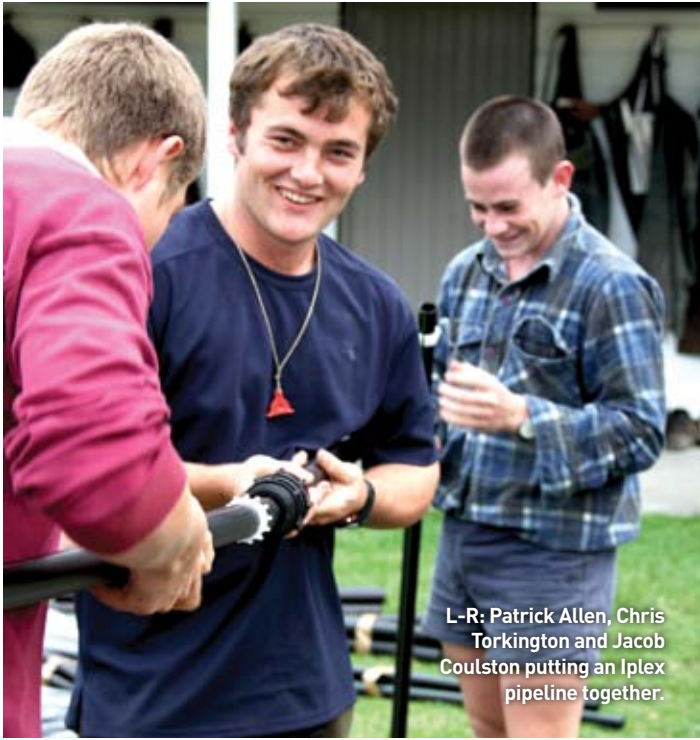
When the concept of the Waipaoa School was floated in 2006, he was contacted and asked if he would be interested in setting up and running the programme. The opportunity to put what he had learnt into practice was a powerful incentive and so they made the move north.

The training at Waipaoa is all about being pro-active, rather than reactive to something that has already happened. (See: Training philosophy box). Cadets are encouraged to be polite, honest and well mannered and this was clearly evident in meeting them.

The classroom plays a vital role in the life of the cadets, especially in their first year. Combined, the cadets have to complete 34 assignments in the course of a year with subjects covering all aspects of farming life. (See: What do they learn? box)

During *Young Country’s* visit, Rory Learmonth and Peter Carswell from Iplex Pipelines in Palmerston North were on site to talk about water systems. The modules involve a combination of classroom learning and practical exercises aimed at putting the theory learned into practice. Companies such as Iplex Pipelines, BNZ Partners, Farmlands, Beef + Lamb NZ and Ravensdown have all bought into the concept of Waipaoa. Reps regularly take the time to travel to the station to teach the boys in the classroom and their buy-in has been crucial to the programme’s success.

During a break in the study, Laurence took the chance to talk to the boys about social issues they might observe in their careers, like how to manage the emotional challenge brought on by extreme events like the recent rainstorm in the lower East Coast region. Although the course emphasis is on learning technical farming knowledge, knowing how to identify and manage factors that elevate stress in the workplace is equally important. Despite the tee-totalling regime on campus, the boys are free to let their hair down in the weekends once they are off the station. They are also able to enjoy a beer under staff supervision at events such as local dog trials.



L-R: Patrick Allen, Chris Torkington and Jacob Coulston putting an Iplex pipeline together.

Laurence also said his door is always open to the cadets should they wish to talk to him about anything. Having 10 young men living together does cause some moments of conflict, but he described these as “more like handbags at 40 paces than anything else.” The open door nature means situations dissipate pretty quickly and the cadets are able to be taught about dispute resolution.

On arriving at the station the first years are paired with a second year “mentor”. They keep this relationship throughout the year which allows knowledge to be passed from the more experienced cadets.

Life skills are also a key part of the learning process. Under the

Waipaoa Station Farm Cadet Training Trust history

The heartland hills surrounding Gisborne are home to some of the best farmland in the country. An influx of forestry planting in the 1990s has reduced the amount of land used for sheep and beef farming. As a result stations that were churning out keen young workers into the sheep and beef sector have disappeared.

One of those majestic stations still remaining is Waipaoa; formerly 13,200ha but has now been reduced to 1800ha as chunks have been sold off. Current manager and co-owner Rob Telfer bought the farm in 2002 with business partner Andrew MacPherson. Frustrated at the lack of quality young staff entering the industry, Rob came up with the idea to use the station as a residential training school.

It was not until 2007 that the idea came to fruition and the first five cadets arrived. Funding was hard to obtain and in the end a group of local farmers chipped in to get the ball rolling. Partnerships have since been built with industry training organisations, sponsors and more local farmers and the school has gone from strength to strength.

The trust leases the buildings needed for the cadets and in return the farm pays the trust for the work the cadets do. This means course fees are kept to a minimum and the cadets are free to focus on what they do best, learn farming.

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Second year cadets Ben Te Kahika, left, and Todd Candy muster cattle on a crystal clear morning.



Samuel O'Fee, left, and Hamish Stewart gluing plastic fittings together.

So what do cadets learn and achieve at Waipaoa?

- Gain a National Certificate in Agriculture at levels three and four
- Practical hands-on farming experience on an iconic East Coast station
- The fundamentals of running a successful farming operation in accordance with best industry practice
- Time and self management
- Leadership and how to work with others
- How to ride a horse and break in a dog
- What opportunities there are in the agriculture sector, including service and retail
- Gain first aid and agrichemical handling certification
- How to network for jobs
- The confidence and experience needed to make their own decisions in life, including where they go after Waipaoa.

watchful guidance of cook Leigh McIlroy the boys are taught the importance of eating well, preparing and cooking food and mucking in when needed. The day starts early. The cadet on duty is expected to have the house cow milked before breakfast and the others must have their lunches made and rooms tidied.

Feeding such a troop of hungry young men presents a challenge in itself. A vege garden, mutton from the farm and plenty of venison and wild pork contribute to filling the never full bellies of the hungry cadets. Although she is fairly self-sufficient, Leigh drives an hour each way into Gisborne on Tuesdays to stock up for the week with the farm truck sagging under the weight of supplies on the return leg.

As the mother figure at the headquarters, Leigh is much more than a cook and cleaner. During the two years the cadets are with her she is the first port of call for any issue they have and she loves the interaction and never-ending questions. Needless to say she becomes very attached to “her boys” and has been known to shed a tear or two when they move on to greener pastures.

Dining with them around the kitchen table on the first evening it was hard to keep a straight face with some of the conversation. “Does that make her a cougar?” was asked about one female met during a weekend away to the big smoke to which the answer shot back “nah, she was definitely a MILF.” This banter and ribbing is part of life for young blokes who have to make their own fun. Stories of what happened during the weekend are eagerly anticipated and encouraged by Laurence and Leigh. Although the cadets work hard and are taught manners and life skills it is important to remember they are training to become farmers and not monks so a bit of flexibility is par for the course.

The reputation of the cadets in the local community is also highly respected. Weekends are often sacrificed to head out dagging, shearing, docking or fencing for local farmers. This work ethic is highly sought after in the sheep and beef dominated landscape surrounding Poverty Bay. “The idea is to build up a reputation so employers know what they are getting before the end of the course,” said Laurence. Last year the five leaving cadets were offered a total of 26 jobs to choose from, proving the training is right on the money.

First year cadet Hamish Stewart worked on his parent’s farm near Marton during school holidays before heading to Waipaoa. Despite a strong desire to return to the family farm one day, Hamish was also wary of returning too early and after graduating was keen to work on farms in different areas to increase his knowledge.

Not all the cadets are from farming backgrounds. Ben Te Kahika, a second year, comes from Puketitiri in Hawke’s Bay and neither of his parents farm. He saw the opportunity to enrol at Waipaoa at a careers expo day at his school, thought he would have a crack at applying and was stoked to be accepted. Such is the momentum that has been built with Waipaoa that last year there were 56 applicants for the five first year positions.

Day two dawned clear after a night of pissing rain. Trust board member and local farmer Jim Brownlie was up at a sparrow’s fart to have breakfast with the boys and field the never-ending barrage of questions. For him, the school is an exciting and vital part of farming in the region. “We never had the opportunity these guys had in my day and to see them embracing it so enthusiastically is fantastic. They are like little sponges, always asking questions and hungry for knowledge.”

Waipaoa Trust's training philosophy for cadets

"Although agriculture is a vibrant, interesting industry that offers much in the way of opportunity and diversity, the reality is that farming is now a business and to gain employment at all levels, future generations will need to be highly skilled, not only in the practical component but in business application as well.

The Waipaoa training model has been developed keeping in mind that our graduates must be familiar with key business components such as record keeping, forecasting and analysis, human resource management and IT, but must be equally as competent at applying traditional practical methods out in the field."

he said. He regards it as a real privilege to be part of the programme and loves being able to give something back. "Jim is an absolute icon in our eyes. He is an inspiration to many yet remains humble in his quest for excellence" said Laurence. Jim is also a self-confessed "old teenager" and his time at the station surrounded by cadets is a highlight.

This strong affinity for the region is reflected in the cadets. For second year James Hurley, from Hunterville, getting accepted to Waipaoa felt like going home. His grandfather worked on the station when it was a lot bigger and his father Shane was born there. Although he applied to two cadet schools, Waipaoa was where his heart was and he was delighted to be given the opportunity.

Interest is also coming from the tertiary institutions, particularly Lincoln and Massey, about where some cadets will head upon



Mark "Chook" Bengston punching some lambs over a muddy creek.

leaving. Representatives now visit the station to talk to the cadets about their career options. James is aiming to head to university to study towards either an applied science or business management degree. He sees this as the ideal way of increasing his farming knowledge and giving him a broader skill base.

The second-year cadets spend most of their time out on the farm learning practical skills. Their heading pup from the first year is normally trained and ready for work and they are allowed to get an adult huntaway as well.

Manager and co-owner Rob Telfer (see Trust history box) is the ideal man for teaching the cadets horse skills. In a previous life he represented New Zealand in polo cross. A lifetime of equine knowledge is passed on to the cadets who are charged with learning how to handle, break and ride horses on the steep hill country.

Heading out with the second year cadets on Go the Ginga, a trusty steed allocated to visitors, gave the opportunity to observe them in the true station environment. With only two dogs each, teamwork plays a vital role in any mustering. The cadets were constantly talking to each other across the scrub-covered gullies.

Communication also plays a key part in daily life. Cadets are briefed on what to expect the night before then a morning meeting with stock manager Dave Stuart outlines who is going where. These meetings are not all one-way traffic where orders are dispensed. The cadets are questioned and encouraged to ask the reasoning behind what they are doing, which enhances the learning process.

Rolling down the road out of the station, it was hard to not feel a tinge of sadness. Spending time in the company of such hungry minds was inspiring. Equally inspiring was the dedication and enthusiasm of all the staff. Knowing that this place is churning out five exceptional workers into an industry desperate for quality staff went a long way to erasing any regret at leaving and replacing it with a new emotion - the strong desire to return.

If you would like more information or to visit the station phone Laurence: 06 862 1988.

Applications for next year's intake close on Friday August 12.

For more information or to support the trust: www.waipaoatrainingtrust.com check out the rest of the photos on the *Young Country* Facebook® page.



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CLASS OF 2011

Name: Hamish Stewart
Age: 18
Favourite music: Bit of everything except rap
Favourite movie: Pearl Harbour
Favourite TV programme: Two and a Half Men
Best meal: Venison burgers and chips
Hobbies and interests: Farming, deer stalking, duck shooting, rugby
Biggest influence on career: Dad and the rest of the farming community
Who would play you in your life story? Clint Eastwood
Who is a famous person you would most like to meet and why? Sir Tim Wallis because he pioneered the deer industry out of nothing except a bit of hard work
Dream car: Shelby GT

Name: James Hurley
Age: 19
Favourite music: Golden oldies
Favourite movie: Forrest Gump
Favourite TV programme: Home and Away
Best meal: Venison steaks
Hobbies and interests: Rugby, cricket and hunting
Biggest influence on career: The people of the Turakina Valley - from a young age they showed me the culture that people in this line of work can enjoy - and Emma Cameron who always pushes me to be the best I can.
Who would play you in your life story? Jono from the KFC Crushers ad
Who is a famous person you would most like to meet and why? Shane Bond - a top athlete who went through a lot in his career and still succeeded
Dream car: Bugatti Veyron Super Sport - 437kmh top speed, what can go wrong?

Name: Chris Torkington
Age: 17
Favourite movie: The Hangover
Favourite TV programme: Two and a Half Men
Best meal: Roast
Hobbies and interests: Farming, pig hunting, rugby
Biggest influence on career: The Old Man
Dream car: Toyota Hilux

Name: Mark Bengston
Age: 19
Nickname: Chook
Favourite music: Alternative
Favourite movie: Any comedy
Favourite TV programme: Two and a Half Men
Best meal: Roast mutton
Hobbies and interests: Hunting, farming and cars
Biggest influence on career: My parents
Dream car: 1974 Ford Capri

Name: Patrick Allen
Age: 17
Nickname: Mad Dog
Favourite music: Anything country
Favourite movie: Braveheart
Favourite TV programme: Cougar Town
Best meal: Mum's sausage casserole
Hobbies and interests: Rugby, hunting, farming
Biggest influence on career: Peter Allen my grandad and the old man
Who would play you in your life story? Jake Coulston
Who is a famous person you would most like to meet and why? Colin Meads 'cause he's the man at rugby
Dream car: beaten up old Hilux



Name: Jason Wyn-Harris
Age: 19
Favourite TV programme: Country Calendar - early years
Best meal: Hearty mutton roast
Hobbies and interests: Rugby, diving, hunting
Biggest influence on career: My parents

Name: Samuel O'Fee
Age: 18
Nickname: Sammy Brown
Favourite music: Reggae
Favourite movie: Gladiator
Favourite TV programme: Jersey Shore
Best meal: Roast lamb
Hobbies and interests: Farming, pig hunting, deer stalking, rugby
Biggest influence on career: Dad
Who would play you in your life story? Dai Henwood
Who is a famous person you would most like to meet and why? Vinny off Jersey Shore to compare notes on attracting female attention
Dream car: 1969 Ford Mustang

Name: Todd Candy
Age: 19
Favourite music: Any
Favourite movie: Man from Snowy River
Favourite TV programme: Country Calendar
Best meal: Back steaks
Hobbies and interests: Hunting, fishing, dog trialling
Biggest influence on career: My heading dog
Dream car: 3 litre 4x4 Ford Courier 2011.

Name: Jacob Coulston
Age: 18
Nickname: Jake
Favourite music: Anything and Cat Stevens
Favourite movie: Footrot Flats (A dog's Tale)
Favourite TV programme: Two and a Half Men
Best meal: Wild pork and watercress
Hobbies and interests: Farming, pig hunting, all sports (but soccer)
Biggest influence on career: The old man
Who would play you in your life story? Pat Allen
Who is a famous person you would most like to meet and why? Barry Crump because I'd like to listen to some of the yarns he spins.
Dream car: Hilux (the older 3L)

Name: Ben Te Kahika
Age: 18
Nickname: Benop
Favourite music: Anything good
Favourite TV programme: Two and a Half Men
Best meal: Roast mutton and veges
Hobbies and interests: Pig hunting, diving, farming
Biggest influence on career: My parents
Who would play you in your life story? My twin brother
Who is a famous person you would most like to meet and why? Megan Fox because she is MEAN
Dream car: Latest Toyota Hilux

