

Submission to the Hearing Committee for the Resource Consent application from Central Plains Water.

Name Tim Cookson I support the application.

Background

My name is Tim Cookson. I farm with my wife Lucy and three sons on 391ha of land on the plains west of Hororata. At present we have no irrigation, the farm would however benefit immensely from irrigation as per our neighbours.

The farm has been in our family since 1926 and Lucy and I are the 4th generation to have the privilege to farm here. Our eldest son has recently started schooling at Hororata Primary School, he is the 6th generation of our family to be taught at the school. Hence we have had a long association with the Hororata area and hope that it may continue into the future.

The farm has light soils (Lismore Stony Silt Loam) that have a low water holding capacity, and is also subject to a variable rainfall. Thus we can get droughts at any time of the year and during the summer months where there is high evapotranspiration we are basically only 10 days away from the next drought. Simple maths here; our soils hold about 70mm water, when they get to 20mm available water, plant growth slows to a standstill (the last 20mm is very hard for the plants to extract). Evapotranspiration during the summer is typically 5mm per day (can be higher with the addition of north west winds) thus $10 \text{ days} * 5 \text{ mm per day} = 50 \text{ mm soil moisture utilised} = \text{drought}$.

Droughts are typical on the farm, during these periods stock production levels drop with reducing feed levels, store stock values drop as there is a greater supply to the market of the same animal and we are exposed to increased costs with use of supplementary feeds.

A Dry January on the farm.



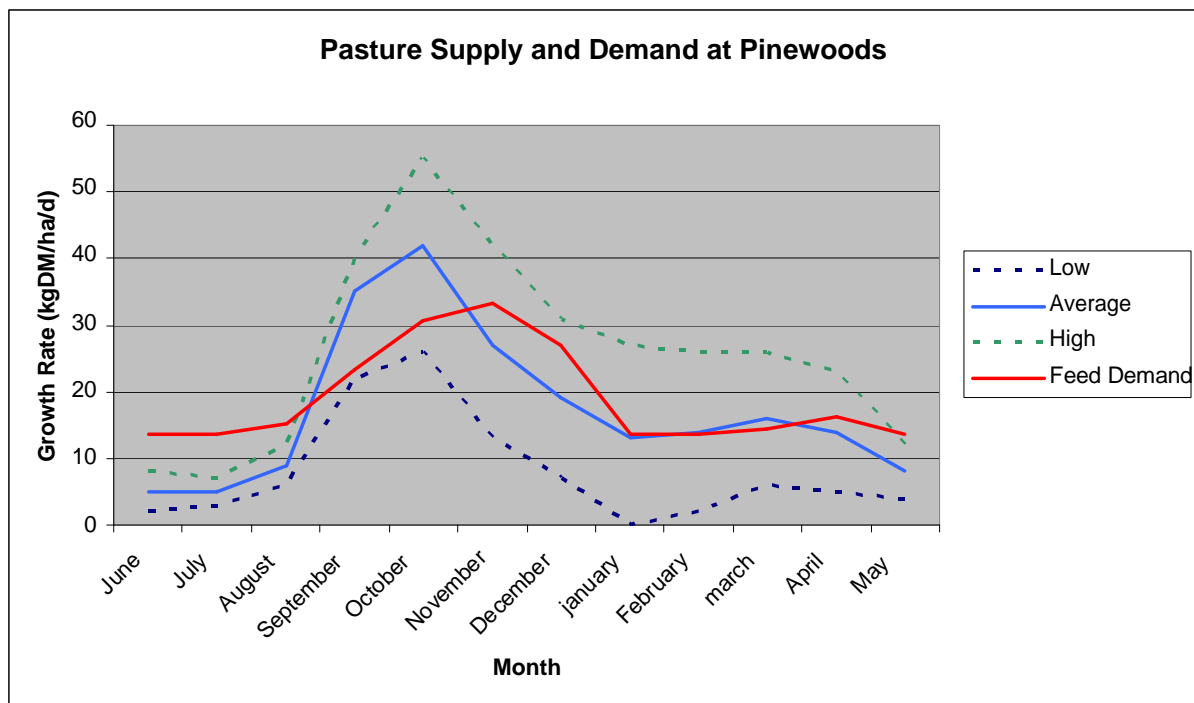
A wetter start to summer



Due to the unreliable rainfall in combination with light soils we are forced to run a conservative number of animals and build into our system “get out of jail cards” via carrying quite large amounts of supplementary feed and a system that allows us to rapidly destock our property of non capital stock if and when feed levels get too low as a result of dry conditions.

This continual unreliability of not knowing whether we will be able to finish our lambs or sell them store or if we can graze 500 dairy cows or 3000 makes budgeting a nightmare and also passes a lot of risk to our associated farming partners. The meat company we supply is depended on average rainfalls for us to be able to deliver a set number of animals over a set period at a set weight. This all goes out the window if the rain stops, however their customer eg the housewife on the otherside of the world still wants her roast lamb 12 months of the year and couldn't really care if we have no feed, why should she!

Pasture supply variability at Pinewoods



The farm history:

In 1950s-60's: The farm carried approximately 1000 sheep plus replacements and employed my Grandparents along with a married couple and a single man. (3 full time men) At this time the farm was 351ha. During this time product prices must have been very good as my Grand parents were able to afford long overseas holidays on an annual basis.

1970s-90's: My parents took the farm over; this coincided with removal of SMP's and forced them to increase stock numbers in order to keep their heads above water. Sheep numbers were raised to 2500 sheep plus replacements via intensification and costs were trimmed with my parents running the farm with casual labour help.

2000's: Lucy and I purchased the property from my parents and also added an adjoining 40ha block of land. With rapidly increasing land prices during this period we have been forced to further intensify the property and change the farming system in order to maximize the return from it. Unfortunately sheep farming for us is no longer profitable and we have had to make a business decision to enter into dairy grazing in order to keep profitability in the farm. Labour units = My father + myself 60% (I also work off farm)

Where to from here:

Bare land prices in our area now start at around \$15,000 per hectare (\$6,000 / acre), so buying additional land to farm sheep or dairy grazing is uneconomic. For our business to expand and we will have to in order for it to survive, the best option we have is to irrigate. If we were able to irrigate we would be able to produce 2x as much as we could now so in some ways it would be like buying another 391ha. **BUT** we would not have the unreliability we are exposed to currently under a dryland farming system as irrigation is basically used as a supplement to existing rainfall. Also I am sure that we can irrigate his property for less than \$15,000/ha.

In Summary

If this property remains as a dryland unit, the farming options will remain quite limited to the likes of sheep, cattle, dairy grazing, minor cropping. The biggest problem being lack of consistency in production in whatever we do.

If irrigated the options are unlimited in terms of what could be grown either as a feed source for animals or the multitude of cropping options that exist ie grains, small seeds, process crops, horticulture. The best part I think would be the consistency in supply of whatever we choose to do.

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