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**MEDIA RELEASE**

**Reporoa Farmers Steer for Themselves**

Malcolm Cane has always preferred to do it himself, from silage and haymaking to drilling and cultivating. Looking back over 30 years of deer-farming, it’s probably been a big part of his success.

He and his wife Kathy farm 390ha at Reporoa, of which 146ha is leased to a dairy farmer. The Canes run about 1000 stags and 500 hinds, plus about 500 mixed-sex weaners at any one time. It’s a gentle contour on their part of the volcanic plateau; good, rolling tractor country and well-suited for deer as long as it rains every so often.

As a teenager Malcolm began a hay-carting business and in the off season he was contract fencing, along with an 18-month stint working for a local dairy farmer John Hathaway. After seven seasons of hay-carting and fencing, at age 22 Malcolm was able to make a down-payment on an 80ha block in the area that he had always been fond of.

“We had hay trucks and we picked up around 100,000 bales every summer. That’s how we got started and that’s how we got the deposit on the farm.”

Bankers were pretty pessimistic about farming and there was little to spare: “We had fifty grand and we had 50 deer. And we still had to go to about three banks because interest rates were about 19%.”

Even 10 years later, the Canes had not fully stocked those 80ha. They owned their own animals but also grazed for others. It was a struggle for years. “I used to fence off the place, so I could afford to buy fencing gear to fence it up in the weekends. It’s a little bit different now, we have been able to borrow against the rising property values and keep developing. They wouldn’t give you the money in those days.”

Malcolm says he’s as much as stockman as a machinery guy. His dad, Laurie, a Reporoa dairy farmer, only ever had Case Internationals and Malcolm got started with the brand too: “I had a small International when I was doing the hay, we had a sweep on it. I then had about 15 years after I bought the farm where I couldn’t afford a helluva lot, but then I bought two Case IHs: a 115 and a Puma 165 off Giltrap.”

Malcolm does all the cultivation himself and prizes his machines, which have always given him a degree of farming independence. Having his own hay-baling gear, for example, literally allows him to ‘make hay when the sun shines’. “It means we’re able to bale crop when the weather is kind, instead of lining up behind everyone else. That’s especially important when there have been very few fine spells.”

He makes 1500 baleage wraps a year with a trusty Kuhn baler. Being able to cut hay on demand is priceless for the deer, as they tend to be picky eaters. “Deer are that fussy that we cut the lucerne every 30 days. If it’s left any longer it’s not very palatable for them.”

Malcolm usually cuts it five times a year and has been cutting and baling that way since he bought a Kuhn baler five years ago. It’s been brilliant, he says.

Case IH and Giltrap Agrizone recently loaned the Canes a new Puma 165 CVT in a sponsorship arrangement in conjunction with their high-achieving son Sam, who remains a farm boy at heart despite being a professional rugby player.

The Canes also put 20ha a year into swedes, fed to the stags from mid-May to mid-July before the area goes back into grass in spring. Malcolm says while he probably won’t use all the electronic features in his new Puma cab, he’s enjoying many of its features and it’s a nice smooth ride. “Put it this way, you don’t really feel like you’re working when you’re sitting in it.”

After taking on their lease a few years ago the Canes went into partnership in a hunting block in the Paeroa mountain range. Part of the property was originally in pines, then returned to pasture. With an eye to the game market, the investors ring-fenced the remaining area for trophy hunting, known as Broadview Hunting estate.

Malcolm says they’ve had plenty of highs and some terrible downs in their 30-odd years in deer farming, so they’ve always been keen to spread their risk. While they’re long-time velvet and venison producers, trophy hunting added another dimension. “The fluctuations in the deer industry have been pretty significant, and we had two really bad droughts to navigate you can’t really survive unless you diversify. And we’re actually just heading into another challenging time because of this Covid, with the restaurants not being open in Europe and the borders being closed which excludes probably 30 to 40% of our income which has been from trophy stags in recent years.”

On the positive side, interest rates are low “so you just batten down the hatches, be smart and not spend too much money.”

As a sideline to the trophy hunting and selling velvet to New Zealand agents, Kathy is increasingly involved in producing and distributing Canes Deer Velvet, a business she and Malcolm have built up gradually over the past 20 years. Having their own brand helps balance their production and minimizes risk when the velvet market is a dip.

The Canes produce about five tonnes of velvet a year, which is more than is required just for the capsules, so they also sell a fair bit of raw product into the normal channels. But they’re starting to reap the benefit of their years of work on the brand, with growing sales into Asia.

“The last couple of years we’re really starting to give it more of a push, now that we haven’t got kids at home. Now we just need a bit of help on the marketing side. I’ve been trying to get one of my kids to marry a marketer,” Kathy says.

The Canes have three children, Sam, and daughters Sjaan and Lia.

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**Images:**

1. Sam Cane Gift-51.jpg