

Testimonials

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Introduction

Testimonials have a big influence on farmers so I'm grateful to the following who wrote these.

A GrazingInfo subscriber and organic dairy farmer in the Waikato wrote -

"You have been so generous with your advice. Using your methods is going to save us heaps of money and obviously benefit the planet."

The Japanese Gallagher electric fence importer distributor wrote -

Dear Mr Vaughan Jones

Two of your clients in Japan have won our Emperor's Most Profitable Dairy Farmer Awards, and are very grateful to you.

A third, Mr Imai, after you showed him controlled grazing, has reduced his costs, bought his neighbour's farm and doubled his cow numbers to 170, which is three times the national average.

Thank you very much indeed.

Yutaka Miyawaki

Tokyo

Phil Taylor, a sheep and beef farmer on 260 ha in 160 paddocks at Ngaroma near the middle of New Zealand's North Island wrote the following on Graze-L, a world-wide Internet forum of 800 grazing farmers, when discussing soil versus herbage analyses.

I had believed the fertiliser science's "conventional wisdom" perpetrated by our major research establishments, agricultural universities and most fertiliser companies. Fertiliser science is very complex so not feeling competent in it I always took advice - from the most credible consultants, I might add. None of these consultants would give any advice without a soil test. So I have spent a lot of money over the years with laboratories.

Invariably the advice was - more superphosphate, some K with N out of season to fill the pasture feed gaps. "The pH was 5.8, so they said that there was no need for lime."

Using their recommendations I have spent as much money in many soil tests each year and fertilisers in the last 12 years as would have bought the 400 hectares (1,000 acres) next door, and for little benefit on our farm.

The results were almost no earthworms, 50 mm (2 inches) of root bound thatch on the soil surface, little to no growth in the winter and early spring, and areas of inert lifeless soil, evidenced by green urine patches running down the hill sides rather than soaking in.

After application, pastures would give a boost then the farm would go into a lull which was as though the environment had been poisoned.

Animal health problems frustrated me. I had nitrate poisoning in my cattle, ill thrift in the autumn, copper deficiency problems, not enough selenium absorption and poor sodium intake by the cattle in spite of the fact that sodium levels were shown to be OK in the soil.

The cost of the fertiliser was bad enough but the loss from sub-clinical health problems in

my cattle was probably a greatest cost.

After being totally confused about fertilisers on my Taupo ash soils, at a chance meeting in 1992 with Vaughan Jones, I explained my problems.

He visited our farm, saw the thatch, low-fertility Velvet grass (Yorkshire Fog - *Holcus lanatus*), small and few clovers, animal health problems and very few sick looking earthworms, took pasture samples and recommended lime. \$15,000 dollars worth went on - half the usual cost of fertilisers.

The fertiliser subsequently recommended was no more expensive than previously. After two years of the best reactive phosphate and trace elements calculated from pasture analysis, animal health problems almost ceased, earthworm activity increased causing dung patches to disappear quickly, grazing was much more even, thatch started disappearing, roots penetrated the soil to 22 cm (9 inches), green urine and dung patches in the early spring disappeared - without the use of artificial N. Clovers made more, giving the whole farm a green look which made it stand out in the area.

During the three years of the beef downturn I applied no fertiliser, and yet I still had 17 sheep equivalents (17 NZ stock units) per hectare (7 per a) with everything going away prime, cattle in 18 months (except for a handful) and lambs at around 17 kg (37 lb) dressed weight.

Feeding the soluble mineral mix from DeLaval through the drinking water helped with animal health, growth and finishing.

All elements, including manganese, which used to be toxically high (385 ppm caused by low calcium and using Serpentine Super), are now in the medium to high level and balanced, according to recent soil tests I took out of interest. How can this be happening with no fertiliser for two years?

The conclusions I have come to are that soil tests are not to be believed and there has been a catalytic response from the Vaughan's complete and correct fertiliser recommendations starting with lime and using reactive phosphate, elemental sulphur, salt and trace elements.

Pastures used to be mostly Velvet grass. Now there is more ryegrass and clover.

When it comes to making money in today's beef industry all the recommendations given must give a cost/benefit based on pasture testing and observation. I hadn't had value for money over the years until Vaughan arrived.

The fertiliser mixes varied slightly each year depending on the pasture analyses, and were about 450 kg per ha in total, based on reactive phosphate - 0 N, 54 P, 0 K, 31 Elemental S, 1 Mg, 135 Calcium carbonate, 32 salt, 6 borax, 0.4 kg cobalt, and 0.5 kg of Selcote Ultra selenium, all per ha.

Vaughan Jones is a very well respected consultant. I know a number of farmers who have made large amounts of money using his advice.

Gary Wilson, when near Matamata, Waikato and now dairying in Canterbury, wrote, while dairy farming near Matamata I suffered bad bloat for decades and was a Ruakura bloat monitoring farm; but after I changed from 30% potassic super to Vaughan's recommendations of the best reactive phosphate, elemental sulphur, salt, trace elements and lime as needed based on pasture analyses, and feeding DeLaval FeedTech minerals in the drinking water, bloat disappeared completely, production increased, and pastures improved from being open and sparse with gaps, to being dense clover based. Ruakura gave up the farm because there was no more bloat to monitor, but didn't ask me or tell anyone why it had stopped!

My calves looked and grew better than ever, with much less worm drenching.

Tony & Gwen Ashford, Ngatea, Waikato, wrote, “We met Vaughan Jones in 1989 when our farming had gone a little off the rails. Our peat was dead, and we’d had facial eczema.

“On that first farm walk, Vaughan pointed out quite a number of things we could do to improve our lot. Liming, pasture sampling, cessation of helicopter spraying for weeds and for facial eczema with a fungicide, cleaning the water troughs and supplying Solminix (now called DeLaval FeedTech soluble minerals) through an on-line dispenser, and using reactive phosphate fertiliser with other needed elements were a few of his suggestions.

“Our stressed cows that made milking unpleasant calmed down and we never looked back.

“When we phoned our vet in October to come and inoculate our calves, he thought we must have left the district because we had not called him, whereas previously we had him out every week.

“After three years our same number of cows could not fit in the yard because they had got bigger and production had increased by 22% from the same number of 150 cows, with no animal health problems and no milk fever.

“Thank you, Vaughan.”

Production from 53 hectare one metre deep peat with stumps & no bought feed.

89/90 40,000 kg MS from 140 cows, 286/cow. Helicopter sprayed whole farm against FE and with 24-D for weeds. Cows got bad spring eczema.

90/91 43,000 kg, 139 cows, 309/cow, 481/ha. Shocks in troughs. No spraying.

91/92 47,000 kg, 135 cows, 348/cow. Only five empties. No spring eczema, no ointment had to be bought and applied. No retained placentas.

92/93 52,000 kg, 138 cows, 377/cow. Reared 96 calves, sold 45.

This is a 30% increase in production per hectare and per cow in three years with animal health improving unbelievably, so much so that when their vet saw them in town he asked again if they were still on the farm. Did the vet ask what they were doing, and tell his clients? Not likely, because he would lose 90% of his business.

Ian McDonald, Patetonga, Waikato, wrote, “Our farm is all peat, five to six metres deep. Vaughan Jones became our farm advisor in 1991.

“I was most interested in his ‘complete picture approach’, using lime and fertiliser recommendations (based on his pasture tissue mineral analyses Spreadsheet) to give better soils, animal health, per-cow performance and farm profitability.

“He took pasture samples each autumn. From the analysis of these, Vaughan made his recommendations for the fertiliser which we applied once a year. His recommendations are based around lime, Sechura or Gafsa reactive phosphate and trace elements - all slow-release products.

“It was interesting to see the improving levels of the various elements in our pastures over the years.

“Our animal health improved greatly with the aid of Solminix soluble minerals, Mag chloride, zinc sulphate and selenium added to the water, as well as Selcote-Ultra in the fertiliser. We only had to treat two or three mild cases of milk fever or grass staggers out of 360 cows (later only one out of 500).

“Cow fertility improved, so we didn’t induce or use CIDR’s to encourage cycling.

“Profitability improved greatly: we had lower vet bills, better cow fertility and per cow performance of 380 kg (836 lb) MS per cow and 1050 per ha (945 lb per a) from peat, some of

which flooded

“Soil condition improved as well, with greater numbers of earthworms evident.

“Dry knobs, which are common on peat farms, disappeared. The peat became softer and more friable, which allowed better rain penetration in the autumn.”

End

Ian has since bought two neighbouring farms and built a beautiful retirement home and a holiday home for their family, on an elevated sections at Whitianga and bought a boat. His son Paul now sharemilks 700 cows in a rotary on their farm with one helper.

Grant McGregor, sharemilker, Taupiri, Waikato, wrote, “Throughout my farming career I have been exposed to a wide variety of farm management strategies and practices. Those practices that have had the greatest impact for us are those that Vaughan Jones has promoted. He has a wealth of knowledge and experience to pass onto those who are willing to listen. His strong database and trial results help to endorse his views. Couple this with a peat farming background, contracting, and many years’ consulting and it rapidly becomes evident that he has a great deal of experience to draw from.

“Farming in general does not have to be complicated, but hinges around doing the basics well. This is one issue that Vaughan pursues with passion. It is very easy for farmers to embrace new technologies and strategies, but unless you have a solid base to work from, the end result is disappointment and can, more often than not, create a great deal of unwanted expense.

“We have had three sharemilking positions over 14 years on peat. One owner insisted on the establishment’s ideas, that set us back. Two of our positions were with Vaughan’s clients, wherein we improved the peat and pastures, increased production and profits significantly, and, if I may add, with far less stress.

“To do well you must refine your operation on many levels. Soil vitality, animal health, pasture composition, etc. Neglect any one of these and you will not achieve optimum performance. This is where Vaughan’s recommendations and knowledge are invaluable. Very quickly one finds that a proactive approach to management can be adopted rather than the reactive situation many farmers get into.

“One industry issue that is gaining attention at present is a call for a 4% increase in farming performance. The answer is staring us in the face and operates under the guise of “common sense” and attention to detail. It is not about spending a fortune to increase productivity. Anyone reading through Vaughan’s views is, I am sure, going to find useful items to adopt. Don’t be frightened to put those ideas into practice - especially pasture herbage analysis before liming or fertilising to correct soil levels, and feeding balanced minerals to animals. Each time we applied the above we were more than satisfied with the results.

“The satisfaction gained from seeing peat improve and allowing stock to perform to their optimum potential - without the current craze of high stocking - are the rewards we have attained from utilising Vaughan’s experience.”

Margaret Porteous, organic dairy farmer, west of Hamilton in the Waikato, wrote in the year 2000, “I can definitely see the benefits of having good organic fertiliser recommendations as prescribed by Vaughan Jones, our new consultant.

“I’ve noticed that pastures are much more healthy looking and animal health has been very good this year and with only one case of milk fever and no penicillin used except on a few of the

last cows to calve. I then had to treat some for mastitis and lameness. Although this spring pasture growth has been very sluggish due to colder and cloudier weather than normal, our pastures, although not with a great surplus of grass, look denser and greener compared to neighbouring properties. My neighbour commented on how healthy our pastures were. The cattle seem so much more contented.”

USA

Brad Cowan, Astoria, Washington State, USA wrote in graze-1, “In 1999 we were milking 70 cows on a crappy farm, but I did have the good sense to know who knows way more than I do and to listen. Vaughan Jones gave us the direction we needed to map our future and helped us an incredible amount over the years. We now lease a lot of land and milk 900 cows seasonally in an NZ rotary on pasture. Cows that need huge amounts of energy supplements and last two lactations are losers here.”

Austin Moore of North Whitfield, Maine, USA, came to one of my seminars in 1982, changed to grazing and seasonal milking in 1983 and loved it and started making higher profits. He found that he had time to watch his cows graze and drink and his heifers grow.”

The Gallagher importer/distributor, Henry Swayze of Tunbridge, Vermont, invited me to USA in 1981. I got him to change from winter housing his ewes to 100% grazing. He was able to increase his flock size from 50 ewes with lambs (limited by barn size) to several hundred. His workload and costs dropped and his profits increased. His pastures and animal health improved. Pneumonia and feet problems almost vanished. Farming became a pleasure and more valuable.”

Canada

Smith brothers in Vancouver Island were milking 600 cows and losing money. I got them to decrease to 300 cows to save having to buy so much grain and feed from the mainland, improve their pastures and use just one milker in their 12 a side herringbone parlor, and their net profit went right up.

Bill Gallagher, Managing Director, Gallagher Animal Group Ltd, wrote, “The Gallagher Group’s 20 hectare Gallagher Peat Farm, which Vaughan Jones, when our Group Marketing Manager, set up as a demonstration farm, is two metre deep peat and is part of the Rukuhia swamp. It was covered in manuka (*Leptospermum scoparium*), gorse, rushes and ragwort.

“Vaughan organised the development and grazing. The gorse, rushes, buttercup and ragwort germinated profusely with the new grasses and clovers, but they didn’t have to be sprayed as is usually done, because the dairy calves and heifers under controlled grazing in 20 paddocks ate them with the lush pasture that grew under the correct draining, liming, fertilising and rotation. The few weeds that grew under the electric fences were grubbed.

“Vaughan ran many cultivating, fertilising and pasture trials and field days on the Gallagher Demonstration Farm, which was admired by many.”

Dr Koos Baars, ex Ruakura now a Private Farm Consultant & Journalist in Hamilton wrote the following.

I have known Vaughan Jones since 1985 when I was at Ruakura Research Centre and tested the electronic PastureGauge© he had helped develop. After I was made redundant in 1994 Vaughan helped me get started in agricultural consulting and article writing for the agricultural media.

I found that his knowledge of soils (peat in particular), pastures, animals and how to profit from farming, was far in advance of most others. I later learned from his reports and newsletters to farmer clients that Vaughan led the field in many things -

1. At the Dairy Research Corporation field day in March 2000 at Ruakura, they, for the first time, recommended 17,000 kg per ha of agricultural lime when establishing pastures on peat. Vaughan had been applying and recommending this rate since 1958.

2. In 1958 he developed extinguishing peat fires by smothering them with repeated rotary hoeing.

3. In 1959 he installed the world's first straight rump-rail herringbone with cows standing at about 60 degrees instead of 30 degrees to reduce the pit length which reduced milker walking distance and allowed cows to walk in and out much more quickly. Cups were then easier to apply between the back legs.

4. In 1984 he suggested to Dr Brian Wickham and the NZ Livestock Herd Improvement Corporation team that if the selection of high producing cows for bull selection (BI) was not done on a weight basis and without using more items of merit than at the time, cows would get bigger and end up like North American ones, i.e., large, inefficient and with bodies too big for their legs. Vaughan wrote a programme which sorts cows by profitable production and shows that New Zealand Jerseys are more efficient and profitable in producing milk solids even than the USA milk production record holding cows which have low solids figures. A breed production per cow per ha survey he did in 1987 through the Dairy Exporter found that Jerseys were the most profitable. LIC's Breeding Worth (BW) and Production Worth (PW) also showed this.

5. In about 1985 he identified that black muck (from blood) around pin bones was a symptom of coccidiosis and a cause of many weaned calves not growing, as they should. Some veterinarians did tests and disputed that it was coccidiosis, but treatment cured them. Some Vets later acknowledged this.

6. He wrote and used 60 spreadsheet programs for consulting and sold them worldwide from 1990 to show -

- A complete and accurate Economic Farm Surplus (EFS or profit) allowing for all aspects, including deducting the farm home and section. Ruakura/Dexcel (NZ Agricultural Research) only started promoting profit budgeting in 2001.
- The optimum number of cows to milk based on the production per cow from the previous season. It showed that if a herd was not averaging at least 350 MS, it was losing money for the owner. The Dairy Research Corporation (DRC) only started promoting this concept in 1999.
- In pasture tissue analyses the causes, effects and symptoms of low and high element levels in pasture tissue.
- The financial benefits of off-farm investments, to my knowledge still not promoted by anyone else.

7. From 1990 he encouraged researchers to do their work on a farm profit basis, not solely on maximum production. Dexcel now sometimes does this.

From my first meeting with him I found that I could ask him questions on a wide variety of agricultural topics and get answers that he had thoroughly researched and usually tested and proved on his farm and/or many of his several hundred clients' farms.

One example was in 1993 when I asked him from whence came his information on leaching caused by the high amount of sulphur in single Superphosphate (0 N, 9 P, 0 K, 11 S) and NZ Potassic Supers. He faxed the following to me.

In 1964 Hogg and Cooper found that mixing superphosphate and potassium (Potassic Super) markedly increased potassium leaching. Vaughan added, "Don't ask me why this was not publicised then and frequently since". Most fertiliser companies just promoted applying more K.

In 1984 Steele and others found increased losses of nitrates after applying nitrogen, associated with increased losses of calcium, magnesium, sodium and potassium.

In 1991 Heng and others from Massey University found much the same. Their Department of Soil Science measured the leaching of nitrogen, potassium, calcium, sulphur, magnesium, sodium and chlorine in two trials. They used field tiles so they could measure the drainage water before it entered the main drain. In a two-year trial, on a low fixation sulphur soil, they found that leaching of these elements was 38% higher with Superphosphate than with reactive phosphate (RP) and elemental sulphur.

The application in early winter of the 50 kg (55 lb per acre) of sulphate that is in 450 kg per ha of single Superphosphate gave a five times increase in leaching.

These results agree with the field observations of Gregg and Goh in 1978 and with Smith in 1983, all of whom found an increase in leaching after applying single Superphosphate.

The first autumn rains gave the greatest increase in nitrate leaching, because levels of nitrogen (N) had built up over the dry weather.

The scientists recommended that, where soils were acid enough and sulphur (S) was needed, elemental sulphur and RP be used.

Going by the many phone calls Vaughan received during farming downturns, it takes pain before farmers seek help and this many did from him. I sometimes heard the phone conversations that would start, "My production is not increasing", or "My perennial ryegrass is pulling", or "Bloat is a nightmare", or "Your client next door has no animal health problems", or "I have 10% empties, but your client down the road has only 3%, can you help me."

When he ran field days on his clients' farms or on the 20 ha Gallagher Demonstration Peat Farm on Kahikatea Drive, Hamilton, that he developed and ran, he would get up to a hundred attend, with a minimum or no advertising - just from his newsletters and word of mouth.

Vaughan spent his working life farming and in its industries, and since 1960 helped farmers to improve their peat. He has always been sure of his information and when necessary to get the message across, is forceful. With his thorough knowledge, wide reading, lateral thinking and hundreds of on farm trials, he was often well ahead of his time. For decades he has been recognised as an expert in developing, managing and fertilising peat.

He has addressed thousands of farmers, consultants and university tutors in New Zealand and overseas.

He is well aware that any farm is a system with many interactions dependent on each other, so he realised the importance of pasture tissue analyses and balanced fertiliser mixes with all necessary major and trace elements for the health of soil, plants and animals. In this he was years ahead of his time when most farmers only applied Potassic Super to their farms. He helped many farmers change their fertiliser policies - with tremendous success - during more than 30 years of consulting.

His messages were spread through the many farming articles published in New Zealand and overseas. During the 80's he was a regular speaker at Stockman Grass Farmer conferences across America, each attended by up to 500 farmers, and at agricultural universities in many countries. He introduced New Zealand farm equipment to North America and other countries and arranged ongoing sales, earning large amounts of overseas exchange annually, and is still doing so.

More recently Vaughan has contributed to international internet discussion groups.
Grazing farmers will benefit tremendously from this eBook.
End

There are dozens more testimonials, some of which will be in appropriate parts of GrazingInfo. Subscribers sent in 45 emails of thanks in the first six months of 2009.