



Whatever it takes to stay fit

Des Silvester's love of farming has always been matched by a determination to do whatever it takes to keep fit. When you're fit you enjoy farming more, and you enjoy life more.

In his younger days Des was a representative rugby player for Thames Valley, then he was a coach, a tramper, a marathon runner and a tennis player.

When his knees got a bit dodgy, he became a cycling enthusiast. He joined a regular riding group and did the Coromandel K100 and the Lake Taupo Cycle Challenge. He signed up for cycling expeditions in South America and a month-long ride with his wife in Tibet.

"People ask why would you do that, but I've always gone for tough assignments. I just like challenges and setting goals."

Fit4Farming Cycle Tour

When Ian Handcock told Des about the Fit4Farming Cycle Tour, he leapt at the chance to be involved. The Tour was a nationwide cycle tour to focus the spotlight on health and fitness in the farming community. A peloton of 20 farmers and sponsors cycled 1,400 kms from Ngatea to the

Bluff, making six stops along the way to host an event day for local rural communities.

Des prepared hard for the event.

"I rode probably 120 kms once a week and then a lot of little rides in between. The weight just fell away. I lost about 20 kilos from when I began training nine months before the Tour. It definitely felt good."

"I've been trying to lose weight for years, and have struggled at times," says Des. "With my metabolism, if I don't keep fit I'll beef up."

Des enjoyed the Cycle Tour hugely and learned a lot from being around some very good riders.

"When it come down to it, it's about performance. You want your engine to perform."

It's all what you want and I want to keep fit.



You get in a group like this and they start pushing, pushing, pushing. You know you have to be in good order. As the Tour progressed I could feel myself getting stronger and stronger. I'm an asthmatic so I start slow in the morning. By afternoon I'm away."

Fitness first

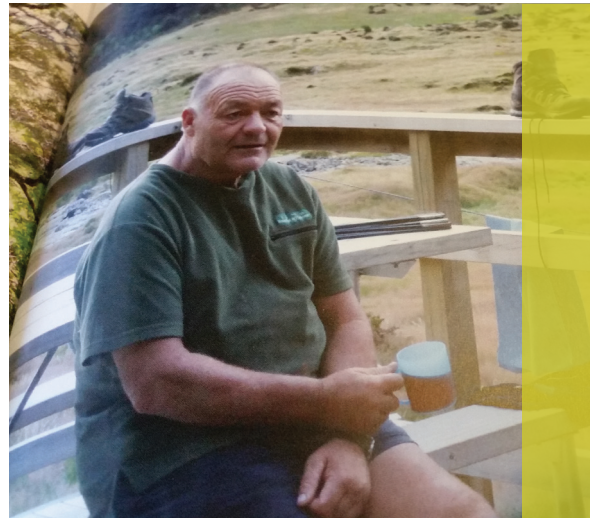
Keeping fit should be a priority for farmers, especially these days when farming is not so physically demanding, says Des.

"Doing things to keep yourself fit is really important. It keeps you positive. When I was a young farmer everything was done manually, but that's not the way it's done now as everyone knows. We have these big flash tractors and modern technology.

"In Dad's time farming was even harder. So over the years it's just got easier and easier. Milking's got easier and easier. The stresses are higher, but the physical aspect of it is not. We used to run to get the cows, now we sit on a motorbike."

Farming used to be a lifestyle but it's big business now, says Des, with all the pressures that go with that. Rising land prices, the low pay-out, and climate extremes all add extra pressures.

"The big benefit of being fit and active is that it clears the mind. When I'm out riding, I have time to think about what I want to achieve. It gives you a fresh outlook. Especially with the downturn



now, you're always revising your situation. It's about making a plan – you won't feel better until you have a plan in place to work from."

Des and his wife own a dairy farm with 380 cows, situated about six kms out of Paeroa on State Highway 26 to Thames. They have owned it for nearly 30 years and raised their kids there.

"It's a nice quiet spot to be, a great place to bring the kids up," says Des.

Farming freedom

Farming is a lifestyle he has always enjoyed.

"I like the freedom. You can work hard and long hours at times, but later on when you have the opportunity you can enjoy yourself. Once all the farm jobs are done you can go and do what you like. At our age now we've done all the hard yards and we're able to take advantage of what we've done in the past."

Keeping active is part of the family philosophy. All four of Des's sons are in dairy farming, and they take time out together fishing and playing tennis. His daughter is very fit too and is training for the Queenstown marathon. When the grandkids come to visit he takes them for a ride on the Hauraki Rail Trail which borders his farm.

Never too busy

Des doesn't buy the argument that farmers are too busy to exercise.

“There’s always time, it’s just about allocating that time to yourself. And getting out and doing it even when you feel tired. Some days I feel absolutely shattered. And then I get out there and within ten minutes I’m starting to come right and I’m enjoying it.”

The drive to stay strong and healthy is a lifelong habit now. There’s plenty of fruit and vegies in the diet and the plan is to keep on moving. Sitting back and taking a cruise is not on the agenda.

“There’s a lot of extremely fit 70-80 year-olds out there now,” says Des. “It’s all what you want and I want to keep fit.

“I used to love going to rugby training, and running. I can no longer run but I can ride. Now I’m just learning to cycle better. I’ve invested a bit in cycling so I intend to ride well into my 70s, or as long as I can. I don’t intend to die on a couch.” ■

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