

Farming, tourism go hand-in-hand



The Pulpit

Philip Todd

FROM leaving school at 15 and starting work on a dairy farm to 47 years later now owning a tourism business that brings me face-to-face with many thousands of tourists every year I have been surprised at the debate around farming versus tourism. Farmers are unique in that they often work alone and separated from the day-to-day lives of others and this tends to make them pragmatic types who get things done.

In my role I have the luxury of having time to chat and the focus is on service rather than production and what doesn't get done today will still be there tomorrow.

However, the thing we all need to be careful of is the word versus. Farming is as dependent on our countryside as tourism is and we all need to keep that in mind as the one constant flowing through both industries.

Neither industry has a right over the other.

We should be engaged and looking to see ways for both to improve and add value.

Simple things are being overlooked because we are all too often working hard and failing to sit back and really think hard about what could be done better.

A good example of that is how many tourists leave New Zealand without having a meal of roast lamb? Does anyone really know? I would say well over 80% but that is just my feeling based on talking to people.

So, in our efforts to find new overseas markets we are missing a huge market right on our doorstep.

I worry that tourism takes too much for granted. We live in an amazing little country but is looking at scenery enough today? Like most things we have evolved and the baby boomers want more than a view.

The wine industry has realised that and is working hard to find niche markets but the food industry is still tied to thinking it's about cost rather than quality.

Here in Southland, where I would argue we have the best and freshest foods right on our doorstep, we have yet to see anyone grab the opportunity to work with the farmers and the tourism industry to bring something unique to people's plates.

Travelling in the United Kingdom brings it home when you see pubs



WORK TOGETHER: Philip Todd from Invercargill has experience in both tourism and farming and sees no reason for them to be opposing factions.

and restaurants with local fare – Devon cream and Cornish pasties. We don't even identify Southland lamb for visitors. I don't want to sound like a yuppie but we need a Brand NZ that captures the essence of our scenery, our people and way of life.

Farmers should not be thinking of debating the pros and cons of farming versus tourism, they should be thinking about how tourism could create opportunities that they could be part of.

Tourists are screaming for new experiences and that will be around good food, good wine and the chance to experience our unique landscape. They want to get to feel the place they visit and that means getting up and personal with the people. They want to understand what makes us tick and why we think living in NZ is better than other places around the world.

Good examples are the old Speights ads before we got all PC – ordinary people doing extraordinary things with some amazing backdrops. Every Kiwi bloke felt a tug on something deep when watching those ads and to me they showed something of a unique Kiwi culture.

That's what Brand Kiwi needs to capture. We don't associate with

sitting on a motorway waiting for the traffic to move. We associate with the musterer on a hill looking at the clouds rolling over the mountains and thinking things need to get moving. The 100% Pure campaign was a great marketing initiative but it has had its day and we need something else that grabs both Kiwis and those looking to visit NZ. That should be aimed at not simply our amazing scenery but also our home-grown food.

Not so long ago we chucked mushin-wrapped frozen lambs onto ships bound for the UK and thought nothing of it. We have moved a long way from those days but nothing will be more certain than in 10 years what is OK today will be looked back on in disbelief.

We all need to buy into a big picture NZ where whatever we do makes us all proud. Proud to live in such a wonderful country, proud to be the people who manage and oversee our productive farms, proud to showcase our way of life to people from around the world and proud to be part of the team Kiwi. It should never be one person versus another or one industry versus another. We are too small to have divisions and for too long we have trodden the road of affordability above all else. My blood boils when my wife brings home a tin of fruit from the supermarket and I look on the back to see "Product of South Africa". I live two hours' drive from the orchards of Central Otago and I have Aussie-owned supermarkets thinking I need feed from Africa?

The biggest issue NZ faces is the tendency to rush to legislate rather than educate.

Farmers should not be thinking of debating the pros and cons of farming versus tourism, they should be thinking about how tourism could create opportunities that they could be part of.

Many already do but the challenge is to really grab the visitors' attention with something unique and leave them amazed about the quality of food that comes from the hills 20km from the restaurant they are eating in.

Menus should cash in on our scenery such as farmed-raised venison with background pictures of the Takitimu Mountains or lamb from the rolling hills of south Otago

looking out towards the coast. Forget about wanting to be the cheapest and focus on quality and experience and get those experiences as close to the table as you can.

We shouldn't be celebrating our scenery or our farming we should be celebrating "All things Kiwi" and rolling out a welcome that sticks in people's minds long after their holiday.

Your View

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