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photograph by **ALAN STEVENS**

FASCINATED BY ANIMAL SCIENCE

THE EXCITING FIELD OF GENETICS

ONE OF THE CHALLENGES WHEN DECIDING WHAT CAREER YOU WANT IS GETTING YOUR HEAD AROUND THE INCREDIBLY DIVERSE RANGE OF JOBS THAT EXISTS THESE DAYS. FOR EXAMPLE, HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF A **GENETIC EVALUATION DEVELOPER**?

That's Melissa Stephen's job title. Employed by DairyNZ, her role is to translate complex ideas and data into information that is quick for farmers to understand and make decisions on. Dairy farmers want to know which animals, bulls in particular, are going to produce the best performing herd, which is where Melissa and others like her come in.

Melissa (27) has a Bachelor of Commerce majoring in Agricultural Management from Lincoln University,

and studied Genetics for Livestock Improvement extramurally through Massey University after graduating from Lincoln.

Although she grew up in the city, Melissa has always loved animals, dogs especially, so a semi-rural university was the perfect choice for her. "I absolutely loved Lincoln; it was just the kind of environment I wanted to be in," she says. "It was full of like-minded people just as keen on animals, the environment

and being outside as I was." Melissa even had her own heading dog, Blue, who she entered in to sheep dog trials. "After lectures I'd train him three or four times a week, on sheep in a paddock nearby."

When she left school, Melissa had her sights set on becoming a rural banker but at Lincoln she became interested in animal science and any chance she got, she opted to take animal science papers. This meant she could have swapped

to a Bachelor of Science, majoring in Animal Science, halfway through but Melissa stuck with her Bachelor of Commerce to keep her options open – something she encourages others to do. "Your ideas of what you want to do will change over time."

Melissa's interest in genetic evaluation was sparked after graduation, during her time working as an information services administrator for a dairy genetics company. "I find genetics really interesting. It's an exciting field to be part of and is moving forward at a million miles per hour!"

And with these speedy advances comes more and more data that needs to be interpreted by someone who knows what they're looking at. "Data is useless on its own," says Melissa. "It needs to be turned into information before it can help anyone."

In her final year at Whangarei Girls' High School, Melissa took statistics, English, art, biology and classical studies, which she swapped to from chemistry. ("Not a great move as I had to do chemistry at uni!")

She says English and statistics have turned out to be the most useful subjects in her current job, although biology was helpful for animal science.



"I find genetics really interesting. It's an exciting field to be part of and is moving forward at a million miles per hour!"
— **Melissa Stephen**

MELISSA (RIGHT) TALKS WITH MARION REYNOLDS, A FARM MANAGER IN TE AROHA.

KEY FACTS



- **MELISSA STEPHEN** HAS A BACHELOR OF COMMERCE MAJORING IN AGRICULTURAL MANAGEMENT FROM **LINCOLN UNIVERSITY**.
- SHE ALSO STUDIED GENETICS FOR LIVESTOCK IMPROVEMENT EXTRAMURALLY THROUGH **MASSEY UNIVERSITY**.
- **MELISSA** WORKS AS A GENETIC EVALUATION DEVELOPER FOR **DAIRYNZ**.



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