

## LOCAL FARMER HUGE SUPPORTER OF TARATAHI GRADUATES – APRIL 09

Stu and Alex Weatherstone of Rotopai Farms at Pirinoa in South Wairarapa have taken on Taratahi graduates for nine seasons and Stu currently has four ex-Taratahi students working with him. Byron Hegglin, Scott Dormer, Bradley Legge and Isaac Kelsen were all full time students at Taratahi. Rotopai has an impressive 615ha (330ha milking platform), 60 bale rotary, 1,350 cow operation.

He needs to know that he can rely upon his staff at all times, whether it be in the milking shed or out on the farm. When asking Stu why he chose to employ Taratahi students he said it was for a variety of reasons. The students do not arrive at his farm completely green. All of the students have at least



**Stu with Scott, Isaac, Byron and Bradley**

completed one year of study at Taratahi and some of the graduates have done two years completing Level 4 qualifications.

The graduates arrive with a number of skills already under their belt so they are an asset to Stu straight away because they are able to help make decisions and get on with the job. They have spent time on different dairy farms gaining a range of knowledge as well as spending time in the classroom learning the theoretical side behind running a successful dairy farm. They have also been put through their paces when it comes to their technical skills such as chainsaws, tractor driving and fencing.

Stu said that the graduates are genuine people with a real interest in farming. With the theoretical and technical skills behind them not only can they milk the cows, Stu can trust that they will be able to put up a straight fence line. There appears to be mutual respect between Stu and the team and their sense of camaraderie was great to see.

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At present Stu's graduates hail from all over the North Island (Hawkes Bay, Hutt Valley, Te Kuiti and Featherston). They are all keen to work for someone like Stu who looks after his employees incredibly well and there is a mutual sense of acknowledgement that if they work hard they reap the benefits. Byron is second in charge assisting in overall management as well as looking after one herd, Scott is in charge of the shed and the once a day herd, Bradley manages one herd and Isaac is in charge of run off.

As Stu says "When you have workers you can trust to do the job right it can make the operation run more efficiently". Stu is able to help his farm workers if they choose to move into another job by using his contacts within the industry to set them up on their next property. Stu is now waiting for the Taratahi graduation so he can employ his next staff member.