

## Strengthened farming partnership drives change

Ro McDiarmid



Energised by new knowledge and confidence gained from the AWDT's 'Understanding Your Farming Business' (UYFB) programme, Ro McDiarmid became a key driver of change in the sheep and beef farming business she runs with husband Karl, alongside his parents Jim and Sue.

Major development of a new 170 ha block to add to their home farm and leased block, while moving into bull beef and store cattle, presented challenges for the Ranfurly couple.

"We'd taken over the new block just as I finished the course so it couldn't have come at a better time," Ro says. "Every part of the course had something insightful and gave me confidence to become more involved and feel that I knew what I was talking about."

"After the course Ro was full of information and excited about prospect of how put things into place," says Karl. "At the time I thought 'oh my god' - all I could see was more work in front of me because time has been an issue with the changes lately."

However, Ro's greater involvement has helped tie many aspects of the business together, something the couple agrees will pay off in the future.

Ro took over responsibility for the farm books, something she'd wanted to do for a while. "We now know where we are on a monthly basis and are watching the cash flow instead of the bank account. We've have done a budget for the first time and are trialling a new accounting system which has given us a better day-to-day grip on the books."

"We discuss things more now," Karl says. "Ro asks the hard questions and I need to give a reason why I'm doing it. We've taken a microscope to what we do and are asking 'why do we do that and how can we improve?' instead of just doing what we usually do."

"UYFB made us look at our supporting team - staff, bank manager and accountant - who are all important to the success of the business," Ro adds. "I've learnt that asking better questions gets you better results. We're better prepared when talking about our financial position and have a stronger relationship with our accountant. Instead of thinking they've cost us money it's more a case of asking where have they saved us money."

New discussions about succession planning, staffing and performance reviews are now part of the farm's business planning.

*"We're doing the hard yards now – change is difficult but the knowledge and tools to help make that happen are proving invaluable," says Ro. "We're talking much more together now about the business – it's created a lot more arguments because I'm not always right anymore but that's a good thing," concludes Karl.*