

## **Doug Avery**

Smashed by years of drought, eastern Marlborough farmers Doug and Wendy Avery realised in 1998 they needed to change direction not only in their lives but also in his farming methods. A seminar by Dr Derrick Moot, a senior plant science professor of Lincoln University, followed by a science project facilitated by the NZ Land Care Trust, led not only to Bonavaree Farm ( the Avery Property at Grassmere) transforming, but also the lives of Doug, Wendy and their family. The farm which struggled with just Doug and Wendy and a gross income of \$320,000 today employs 5 full time people and lots of busy contractors, and today gross income has soared to over \$3,000,000. The Starborough Flaxbourne Soil Conservation Group which Doug chaired, won a Green Ribbon in 2008 for leadership in improving drought affected land. The Avery family were South Island Farmers of the Year in 2010 and Marlborough District Council Environment Award winners in 2011. In 2012 Doug was made a Land Care Ambassador by the NZ Land Care Trust and in 2013 Doug was named Landcorp Agricultural Communicator of the Year.

In 2014 Doug set up a company called Resilient Farmer to promote more resilience into the lives of farmers and others. That business now runs Woolshed Sessions to help grow other farmers. Doug's book, " The Resilient Farmer" is now a best seller in NZ and abroad, and his speaking is now global. In 2017 Doug was made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for his services to Agriculture and Mental Health.

## **Recovery of Bonavaree Farm**

The recovery of the Avery's Bonavaree Farm Eastern Marlborough was a three pillared approach. Social, financial and Environmental. The drought ravaged property had many bare faces from eight years of continuous challenge, to which various processes were applied:

Salt bush, *Atriplex Nummularia* and *Atriplex Halimus* were trailed extensively.

Both took well on destroyed land but the *Halimus* being the best for stock. Its real value was on extremely broken country where castle type erosion was well under way. The salt bush seed was spread on this land and over time has bound up the soil, seeding and spreading. The great thing about this process was that it has never spread beyond where it was needed. Essentially now, the only extension of the salt bush planting, is the front row of shelter belts.

Tagasaste was initially only planted in limited areas. Today it has been the plant to flourish, self recreating, building soil and offering grazing. The Avery's dream was to create standing haysheds, but when it is extremely dry - the tags palatability is not so great. Bulls were used to graze these blocks and sometimes sheep. the bulls love smashing it down , rubbing and eating. This is done twice a year, and soon a new level of plant life grows on what was very limited land.

If fire happens to occur, the crop comes back stronger and the flower produces bee enhancing food in excess. This has greatly increased the survival of our queen bumble bees and hence pollinators of our Lucerne seed in February 2019.

*"We now have plans to plant much more of our very hardest country using this solution (Tagasaste)."* - Doug Avery