

Ode to 2023

21 December 2023

An Ode to 2023, Covid no longer deadly, the pandemic gone from public obsession
Also gone our young PM, creator of political mayhem, during a global recession
She left behind, a legacy to be kind, and a wide smile brimming with confidence
But that couldn't hide, the rot found inside, a Govt. sadly lacking in competence

Their Auckland light rail, always looked frail, an economic disaster in waiting
So Jacinda she went, personal capital spent, enter Chippie who just loves debating,
Sadly he found, when he looked round, a light weight cabinet of dubious standing
Cool Stuart Nash, gave info for cash, while Kiri Allen crashed in a drunken landing

And Meka went too, I hear you say who?, jumped waka to join Te Pati Maori
Plus Michael Wood, who never could, learn to sell shares, were they kept as his dowry?
So the public did say, you've had your day, sent woke centralization packing
Voted Labour out, the left in no doubt, removed in an electoral sacking

That's democracy in action, purges the faction, that forgets their ultimate employer
are the public at large, every three years in charge, have the power to make or destroy ya
For better or worse, or is he a curse, can a three-way marriage with Winston be stable
Time only will tell, if things can go well, the consummate diplomat now at the table

Called the media out, for having their snout, in public funds promoting the Govt. agenda
Independence they lost, paid a high cost, the fourth estate no longer the public defender
Auditor general has reported, infrastructure spend rorted, by roads of dubious use
Pet projects promoted, for which no-one voted, clear cases of ministerial abuse

So we will see, as we leave 23, what the future holds with the right back in charge
For now we all know, there is no more dough, austerity looms on the horizon so large
A plan for 100 days, to find new ways, to fund tax cuts and get kids back in school,
Let people smoke, personal choice for all folk, the market to once again rule

As from Hobbitsville we gaze, at a world in a haze, of bomb dust and pollution
From Israel to Sudan, there is no plan, to combat killing still the cruelest solution
 Hamas did attack, so now Gaza ransacked, thousands of citizens collateral damage
Who knows who is right, always a fight, different Gods to which they pay homage

The Israeli attack, has taken aback, world attention from the Russian invasion
Ukraine can't advance, victory no chance, stalled forces a complex equation
Throughout the ages, conflict contagious, Armenians this year did also flee
For thousand of years, grievance ends in tears, minorities the ultimate refugee

Easier to ignore the pain, nothing to gain, some fences just can't be mended
Rather fly to Dubai, where 90000 did try, a COP commitment finally appended
Emissions still rise, with greenwashing lies, global warming continues unabated
The planet won't care, if we humans aren't here, an occupancy blip we truncated

This was also the year, that India did cheer, it's most populous has overtaken China
Over a billion mouths to feed, a growing greater need, for food and resources not minor
Their cattle population, quite a revelation, four hundred million all burping methane
They don't produce meat, far too sacred to eat, vegetarians they would rather abstain

Of interest this year, we really didn't hear, so much from the plant based fanatics
Vegan food out of favour, people don't like the flavour, meats easier said the pragmatics
Fermented food, is now rosily viewed, as the saviour to remove livestock from the land
But for here and now, I think the Angus cow, is safe from these alternatives so bland

Whatever your view, be careful with stew, especially when eating in rural Australia
Because you never know, into it what will go, death cap mushrooms a deadly failure
Seems a novel way, to make your family pay, for some slight or was it just a mistake
For those who died, the court will decide, did purpose or accident seal their fate?

I guess we could ask, set a challenging new task, for CHATGPT to view all the details
In future will we need, a jury or do we cede, to AI the balance of lady Justices scales
The digital world, did this year unfurl, this technology caused a paradigm shift
Let the algorithm write, words that delight, students need to learn grammar cast adrift

The generation divide, has grown ever wide, free speech shut down in a millennial lock
Hate speech ill defined, face to face discussion a grind, the youngsters prefer time on Tik Tok
The boomers confused, they allow differing views, personal opinion spoken with passion
But social coercion, and language immersion, means reasoned debate is now out of fashion

New drugs in the locker, the puberty blocker, stops teens from reaching maturity
Am I a he or a she, choose what you want to be, muddled minds and body insecurity
The entitled few, demand promotion review, want your job or much better offers
So many home grown, to Aussie they've flown, higher wages to put in their coffers

Let's finish with sport, who do you support, Spain's win was sealed with a kiss
A celebratory whim, or misogynist him, taking liberties or an oversensitive miss?
But the football was great, we did celebrate, World cup winners the year did anoint
Richie was thru, but the TMO tragically blew, to let the jarpies win again by a point!

Derrick Moot

Interpreting the ode!

For those not in NZ, our PM resigned in January – which I think I predicted in last year's message – her lack of economic knowledge and plummeting popularity meant re-election was impossible so her personal brand would have taken a beating had she stayed. Her replacement as PM was undermined by Ministers who lacked the authority and integrity their roles require. Their election loss was a foregone conclusion - despite a desperate attempt by our mainstream media to keep the Govt. in office. They had been paid by a public interest journalists fund with strings attached...of how they had to report on certain issues- particularly related to the Treaty of Waitangi. This was called out by our new Deputy Prime Minister, Winston Peters, and the media hate him for it – it is entertaining for the general public to watch the journalists squeal. The new right-wing Govt. is now on a 100 day journey to reverse many popular and unpopular policies of the previous Govt. That's democracy - you get some of what you want but never all of it!

The FRC

Last year started badly for the FRC – the day I sent my Xmas letter we learnt that Dr Keith Pollock had died while out walking on the Port Hills. Many of you will remember Keith as the pedantic technician who drove you crazy asking questions – never a short conversation – but always an important one and always with the aim of ensuring the integrity of your data. We miss Keith but his presence is felt in all that we do and the care that we take in our ongoing data collection. “Is that how Kieth would do it?”

On a happier note – our other long term field technical guru Malcolm Smith received a richly deserved life-time achievement award for services to agriculture from the NZ Association of Animal Production. The citation is available on our website.

<https://drylandpastures.com/blog/>

This year we have also moved back into arable research with Mariana securing work on high yielding wheat crops to see if we can get the APSIM model to predict how high yields can go in our environment. This, along with the establishment of the RADE (Regenerative Agriculture Dryland Experiment), have kept the pool of casual workers busy this year. The RADE is an 8 ha farmlet comparison of conventional versus regen dryland pastures. The lucerne with cocksfoot and sub system we developed from MaxClover tested against multi-species mixes with lucerne in that mix. Both systems are being run at low and high P fertility and self-contained. This is a six-year project that we will plug many post grad students into and use for undergraduate teaching.

This year I spent my second year on council – still struggling to understand how out of touch managers can be from their staff. Galloping managerialism has been a global phenomenon over the last 30 years and Lincoln has embraced it. Sadly, the quality of education is declining with student attendance in class sitting at about 60% and most courses no longer bothering to have a final exam. Dinosaurs such as myself, are shunned for daring to require a closed book tests. For most of the students in my second-year class - my 3 hour final was the first closed book, pen and paper exam they had ever written. The resilience of this cohort is limited because they have never had to perform under pressure – employers are struggling to deal with their limited attention span and constant need for reassurance and pay rises. As a consequence I have been lined up to do a remedial teaching course “because the students of today are different from the ones we had 15 years ago” I’ll say- and I’ll tell you which group I’d rather teach....definitely becoming the grumpy old man.

The students

Within the Regen Ag my Teaching Assistant Lauren Jones is also measuring lucerne responses to P. She has found no response which confirms her work in Iversen field. We are growing over 20 t DM/ha on an Olsen P of 4....waiting to hear what explanation she comes up with but so far the soil scientists are also stumped. After much angst Breanna Taylor left her PhD in 2023 and is now happily working as a field agronomist as is Charlotte Webb in Australia who still has a thesis to submit....While, Thinzar Myint, Arul Sharma and Annette Mwayawa are all spending the Christmas period hoping Santa brings favourable examiners reports. Laura Keenan hopes he brings more hours in each day so she can get her writing finished and Fiona Anderson hopes I will deal with her first paper draft. The new RADE will

have a swag of students start PhDs next year – to go along with the three Honours students who completed their work in the plots in 2023.

Our work with ex-students has also continued with Hamish Brown involved in the wheat modelling project that Mariana is leading with funding from GRDC. This meant the three of us visited Geelong to work with FAR Australia. We have also developed the AgYields database to the point where Carmen Teixeira has been travelling around NZ promoting it to researchers so they can think about either adding their data to it or extracting data from it. AgYields is an open access database that we are trying to get all NZ crop and pasture yields into it. So, if you have data that is still sitting in a thesis or a box that you thought you might publish one day (but never will – Richard x2, Marucs, James, Jenna, Hung) you might just find it has been extracted and added to the database – or you could do that yourself....

<https://www.agyields.co.nz/home>

This year the NZGA conference was in Rotorua and it provided a great opportunity to catch-up with Saman Berenji who is working in Tauranga doing research for Zespri. Yeganeh is also working for them, organizing people to test shipments of kiwifruit while they are on route to overseas markets. Shirin Sharifi has recently taken a job with the Climate Change commission and become a homeowner in Gisborne where Mehdrad is busy helping repair infrastructure after Cyclone Gabrielle reeked havoc. I was attending a friends 60th biking round Marlborough vineyards when I came across Daliya who was showing her extended family around the South Island. She is now also a homeowner in Oamaru where her work continues for Oceania Dairy. Rhea is off to Uni in Otago next year.



Derrick and Daliya – on the wine trail – drinking beer....I'd had enough!

On the local front we have seen more of Nicole Morris as she undertakes her role with Corteva and they have a trial that Jess Ross is overseeing here at Uni. Travis Ryan-Salter is working with Mariana on hemp and Harri Wulf is preparing to spend some time overseas

away from his carrots. Andy Dumbleton has popped up to help with some teaching and we will jointly start some work on understanding brassica physiology in the New Year. Emmanuel Chakwizira has graduated his PhD and joined FAR to advance their arable farm environment plans while Richard Sim has headed home to farm near Ashburton. We are looking forward to catching up with Andrew Fletcher in Western Australia next year in his role as secretary for the Australian Agronomy Conference and have enjoyed having Serkan Ates with us on sabbatical from Oregon for the past six months. Serkan also organised for 15 Oregon students to visit Lincoln and the South Island in September which was great fun and may become an annual event. I was pleased to be able to invite some of the farmers we have worked with to the Food and Fibre awards in 2023 where many former students were representing their companies to the undergrads to keep them motivated to finish. Laura Keenan started this event and Lauren Jones did a great job of keeping it on track for 2023- no pressure Fiona...

The Family

Angus has sold some real estate – but still not enough to move out of home... And I am still happy about that – so we both must be mellowing. He has been joined by William who returned from Wellington in August. He is working for a company that runs medical research trials. His medical degree and Deloitte experience combining into a position that allows him to be the interface between the clinicians and the computer people trying to automate the systems. He has bought a second hand set of golf clubs and periodically challenges Angus to one-on-one basketball to keep them both in some sort of shape! Thomas has completed another year with Contact energy and is settled in Wellington for now – but that could all change if the right offer comes along. Swimming still is his preferred form of exercise, and he drags Dad along when he is back in CHCH. Kirsty is working as a locum GP in the local practice but trips to Blenheim have reduced with her Mum dying this year – dementia is a cruel mistress, so it was blessing all round.



Derrick, Angus, William, Kirsty, Thomas in Blenheim for Grandmas funeral.

Finally, Storm defied all expectations, several rounds of chemo and has made it to another Christmas as the most spoiled dog who no longer even has to go on walks – with Thomas back for the holidays I have resumed my place at number 6 in the pecking order...and that's just fine! I was fortunate to have friends and family join me to celebrate my 60th in September so thoughts of retirement are creeping in – but then I see Mr Lucas still driving Caucasian clover seed production and remember I am just an apprentice – that is the pleasure and misdirection that teaching 19 year olds gives you every year....a false impression that you are not aging because they look just the same as they did 29 years ago!!

This year I think I have been most disappointed by societies inability to debate topics of importance that are more nuanced than a 30 second newsbite – so my motto for 2024 is to “be soft on the person but hard on the argument.”

May you have many interactions over holiday lunches where you discuss, debate, argue and enjoy the company of friends and family – and part agreeing or disagreeing but - still friends and family!

Best wishes for a relaxing holiday period wherever you may be!

Derrick