



whole family makes SOUTHLAND CONTRACTING BUSINESS TICK

TE ANAU CONTRACTOR STEVE JAMES KNOWS HOW LUCKY HE IS TO HAVE HIS FAMILY WORKING WITH HIM IN HIS BUSINESS, STEVE JAMES CONTRACTING. AS WELL AS HIS WIFE KERRI, HIS TWO DAUGHTERS AND THEIR HUSBANDS WORK IN THE BUSINESS.

Steve and Kerri own and manage the contracting business alongside their 330-hectare farm and a motel, Radfords on the Lake, which offers five-star accommodation on the shore of Lake Te Anau.

Neither Steve nor Kerri is from Te Anau. They both moved there with their respective families in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when their parents were successful in the ballots for Lands and Survey farms.

After leaving school, Steve worked on local farms and stations before he started making small conventional bales of hay in 1983.

“There was a lot of Lands and Survey work in the area at the time,” Steve says. “I started doing small bales of hay with another guy I was in partnership with for 25 years.

“Simon Aspinall and I were in business under the name Aspi-

nall and James Contracting. We had Welger conventional balers and employed two staff, along with the two of us.”

The workload of Aspinall and James Contracting expanded, and Steve and Simon soon began offering 5x4 round bales of hay and 4x4 round bales of balage as well as a full range of cultivation services.

They continued their partnership until 2006, when they decided to go their separate ways and develop their own businesses.

TWO SIX-FURROW KVERNELANDS DO THE PLOUGHING FOR STEVE JAMES CONTRACTING.

Steve’s business was rebranded as Steve James Contracting and has continued to grow. It now does direct drilling as well as cultivation and baling.

“We still work in with Simon on the balage side of things but we do our own ag work,” Steve says.

“Since 2006 there has been a ▶

KERRI AND STEVE JAMES HAVE BEEN CONTRACTING IN THE TE ANAU DISTRICT SINCE THE 1980S.





THE BALING SIDE OF THE BUSINESS RUNS KUHN MOWERS, TEDDERS AND RAKES, AND A LELY WELGER RP 160 HIGH-DENSITY BALER.

greater need for balage and we have grown from there. With farming practices changing in the area, we see a lot more lucerne being grown. It can be cut up to four times in a season.

“This has been very beneficial to farmers as they can count on good-quality winter feed, even during dry summers. Our balage season now runs for seven months of the year because of this.”

Steve James Contracting started direct drilling about five years ago. Steve and Kerri’s daughter

and son-in-law, Shelley and Kane Walsh, are in partnership with them for the direct drilling arm of the business.

Kane began working for Steve over his Christmas holiday break while he was building in 2007. This sparked a passion in him for agriculture and he now does Steve James Contracting’s direct drilling work, and also operates a fencing and agricultural spraying business.

The spraying operation runs two Landcruisers with spray units built by Gilchrist Brothers Ltd.

Shelley says the spraying work has complemented the direct drilling well, as Kane can co-ordinate the entire job from spray-out and direct drilling to pre-emergent pesticide spray applications.

“Kane was originally the main operator of the drill but with his workload increasing, his father Dave has been the main operator for the past two seasons, along with other trained staff.”

All direct drilling is done with a 5m Allen CD 5000 custom drill, which was purchased last year.

“We started with an Allen CD 4500, which we had for four years, but decided it was time for an upgrade,” Kane says.

The new CD 5000 drill offers all the same features as the CD 4500, with updated seeding computers.

“We believe this drill is top of the line. It has the latest seeding and fertiliser technologies available. It is also a strong drill and proven to withstand the often challenging terrain in the Te Anau

KANE WALSH USING THE TRACMAP SYSTEM, WHICH MAKES JOB MANAGEMENT MUCH MORE EFFICIENT.

basin. It is also fitted with auto steer in the tractor, which helps improve efficiency and accuracy and minimises operator fatigue.

“We have had Tracmap installed, which is great for job management. We can confidently send a new operator to a job and highlight any hazards. We send the completed jobs through to farmers for proof of placement and to document how the job was completed.”

TracMap is an in-cab GPS display unit that works with a cloud-based job management system. Kane can watch the job as it hap-

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CONTRACTING HAS BEEN VERY REWARDING FOR THE JAMES FAMILY

Steve and Kerri love having their daughters and family around them and they say they are also very lucky with their staff.

“Without our staff we wouldn’t be able to operate,” Steve says.

“We have good, experienced operators and we

try to keep them as safe as possible.

“Our clients, who have been with us for a lot of years, are very supportive of us. We are most appreciative of that. Over the past 37 years we have built many wonderful friendships and had some amazing opportunities.” **RC**



TWO SETS OF AUSTRALIAN-MADE GRIZZLY DISCS DO THE CULTIVATION WORK IN HARD GROUND.

◀ pens and view all the data as it is produced. He can then invoice accurately once the job is finished.

A Case IH Magnum 235 pulls the Allen drill. It drills 1500 to 2000 hectares each year. Both the tractor and drill are equipped with good lighting and multiple trained operators can use it for shift work to get work done within tight timeframes.

“The Allen drills are a good, solid and robust drill and they handle our country well,” Steve says.

“It’s pretty hard and rocky where we are. We drill a lot of grass and crop, including brassicas, barley and oats.”

Steve bought his first Case IH tractor in 2000. It was an 8910, and the following year purchased a brand new Case IH Magnum 180. He has continued to buy new tractors ever since.

The business now runs 11 Case IH tractors. They range from 125-280 hp, and include a Maxxum 125, a Maxxum MX 170, an 8910 Magnum, a 235 Magnum, a Mag-

num 280 CVT, a 195 Puma, two 210 Pumas, a 215 Puma, a 220 Puma and a 240 Puma. A couple of additional tractors are used during the height of the season.

“We have found the Case IH tractors to be reliable, proven and hard-working,” he says.

“We bought our first one back in the early days of the business and we have had a great run with Agricentre South in Invercargill.

“We have excellent rapport with the sales manager Richard Clapperton. We get fantas-

STEVE JAMES SAYS DEMAND FOR BALAGE HAS BEEN GROWING IN THE TE ANAU BASIN SINCE THE MID-2000S.

◀
tic after-sales service and they employ great mechanics.”

Steve James Contracting’s cultivation services include ploughing, discing, rolling, levelling, harrowing and roller drilling.

It runs a modern fleet of cultivation machinery, including two six-furrow Kverneland ploughs, two Hooper low-blade discs with harrows, two sets of Grizzly offset discs for hard ground, a 6m Kuhn Optimizer cultivator, a 3m Aitchison roller drill, and a 6m Quivogne roller drill with airseed-er purchased new last year from Farm Chief.

The business also offers a full range of hay and balage services, including mowing, spreading, raking, baling, cartage and wrapping.

It runs Kuhn 350 mowers, Kuhn tedders and rakes, a Lely Welger RP 160 high-density baler and a Lely Welger 535. Both of them are variable chamber high-density balers.

“Living two hours from the nearest service centres means we need to have reliable and prompt service for breakdowns,” says Steve.

“We have had superb service from Chris Diamond and the team at JJs Invercargill. When time is of the essence it is great to know we can count on all of our service teams.”

They also run a truck and trailer for carting so they can provide full-contract balage and hay jobs.

“About 95 percent of our balage goes into tube wrapping and the rest is individually wrapped. Simon has one wrapper and I have the other and we work in together with the balage. I have a McHale single wrapper and he has an Anderson tube wrapper.” ▶

KERRI AND STEVE’S DAUGHTER AND SON-IN-LAW SHELLEY AND KANE WALSH WORK WITH THEM IN THEIR DIRECT DRILLING OPERATION AND ALSO RUN A SPRAYING BUSINESS.



Steve and Simon make balage on 13 out of 14 Pamu (Landcorp) blocks in the Te Anau basin. They also provide their services to private landowners, some of whom are second-generation farmers on their land. Most of these properties are sheep, beef and deer farms.

Steve and his team work within a 50-60 km radius of Te Anau and do not go outside the basin.

They begin the agricultural season with heavy discing in August and then start sowing grass from September onwards through until after Christmas. The balage season kicks off in October and goes through until late April, while brassica work starts in November.

“From April on there is a lot of preventative maintenance to keep the gear in top operating condition,” Steve says.

“We have two permanent staff and one of them, Kerrin Wilson (Rocket), is a qualified mechanic. Rocket possesses a huge array of skills operating and maintaining machinery. He works in the workshop each winter repairing the gear and doing preventative maintenance.

He gets assistance from Steve Futter, who has been active in implementing standard operating procedures for all machinery to comply with health and safety.

Kerri’s father, Jock Burgess, works in the contracting business and has been essential in training new staff. Jock also does discing and roller drilling and helps out in the balage paddock during the season.

“We do the majority of our maintenance ourselves, with the exception of all major services, technical and warranty issues. We outsource these to Agricentre South.”

Steve says they have a low staff turnover, and the majority of staff have lived in the Te Anau area most of their lives.

“Our staff are crucial to the smooth running of our business and are very valued members of our team,” he says.

“All of our staff have excellent

MEMBERS OF THE STEVE JAMES CONTRACTING TEAM ARE (LEFT TO RIGHT): KATIE, NICK, ROCKET, KANE, SHELLEY, KERRI, STEVE JAMES, STEVE FUTTER, JOCK, AND BRADLEY.

communication skills. They are honest, reliable and take great pride in their work. Over the busy months from August to April, we have up to 13 operators covering the cultivation, direct drilling, hay and balage.”

Steve James Contracting uses an online cloud-based maintenance system to record all of its machinery maintenance, training and health-and-safety records. All staff are involved with the record-keeping, which is available on their phones for quick reference.

Steve and Kerri took over the family farm on Sinclair Road in 2000 and have since purchased a neighbouring property for sheep, cattle and deer.

Their youngest daughter and son-in-law, Katie and Nick Fraser, came home from Blenheim in 2016 to manage the farm. Katie and Nick also own and operate their own contract tailing business, as well as a sheep conveyor and sheep dipping business that operates in the Te Anau Basin.

Kerri runs and operates Radfords on the Lake. From there she does the majority of the administration for the three businesses. Their other daughter, Shelley, does all of the health-and-safety work for the farm, contracting business and motels.

Shelley takes a leading role in the entire operation. She also

operates the rake during the balage season.

“The business is very family orientated,” Kerri says.

Steve James Contracting is a member of Rural Contractors New Zealand and a registered contractor. Being accredited as a registered contractor helps ensure clients that they are operating to a high standard, provide the best possible service, and meet their statutory and regulatory responsibilities.

Shelley says being accredited as a registered contractor involves an in-depth auditing process every three years to check their systems, health and safety, maintenance and records.

The business has created a strong health-and-safety culture, led by Shelley.

“Our team are all first aid trained and trained on the machinery that they operate. They have the appropriate licences, wear hi-visibility clothing, and carry personal locator beacons on their belts at all times as another form of communication when cellphone coverage is limited or they are working alone,” she says.

“All our tractors have a hazard

sign attached to the front window of the machinery to advise the public of the hazards we bring.

“We have working practices and rules for effectively controlling hazards and the machinery maintenance is all electronically recorded for quick reference. Our team have a positive attitude towards risk management and compliance with the control processes.”

Steve is still out driving most of the time, but clients can still contact him directly. He says while the business still has room to expand, growth cannot happen without employing the right people for each job.

“If we were to get any bigger, the balage would become one side of the system and the agricultural work the other. We will probably get to that point quite soon.”

Kerry says Steve and his team are known for doing a quality job.

“Quality is something that we pride ourselves on. The gear is well-maintained and we like to turn up in a clean and orderly fashion. We do a lot of work on preventative maintenance to reduce unproductive time during the season,” she says. **RC**



CULTIVATION SERVICES THE BUSINESS PROVIDES INCLUDE PLOUGHING, DISCING, ROLLING, LEVELLING AND ROLLER DRILLING.