

A day in the life of... the Rural Liaison and Support team



Rural Liaison Nicole Foote talks to Lee Stream School students about the ecology of the Waitahuna River.

If you're a farmer in Otago, there's a pretty good chance you've already met one or more of our Rural Liaisons.

Between them, the team covers the region, giving out advice, answering queries, coordinating with catchment and industry groups and generally promoting good management practice on Otago farms.

Meet the team

Team Leader Bex Begg has been with ORC for nearly six years. Having grown up on a Central Otago farm “on the banks of the Clutha River”, Bex eventually found her way towards Balclutha, to farm and raise a family. Today, she's the ORC rural liaison for South and West Otago.

Bruce Monaghan, who's responsible for Central Otago, describes himself as an “ever present” figure since the Regional Council was formed in 1989. Prior to his rural liaison role, his focus was on land resources and soil conservation. Few in Otago have the experience and knowledge to rival Bruce's decades of work on Central Otago farms.

For East Otago, Dunedin, the Lower Taieri “and all areas in between”, Nicole Foote is ORC's rural point of contact. Nicole has had a range of roles at the council since she started in 2014, but she's most at home on the farm—“where the dogs are, and the open space”—and the rural liaison team suits her best.

A day in the life

Bex describes a Rural Liaison's job as “connecting people with each other and information, and translating that information into something practical and relatable in a farm situation.”

Nicole calls it “being a conduit between the rural community and the council.”

“A lot of our time is spent working with catchment groups and industry for the promotion of good management practice,” she adds, “Or ‘GMP’.”

Good management practice is at the heart of what the rural liaisons do: it means helping people to make on-farm decisions around planting, planning and land-use that result in improved water quality. There's good management practice—the things that are good to do—and then there's policy and regulation—the things you have to do,

which sometimes lag behind the GMP curve.

In short, the rural liaisons mostly spend their days promoting good management practice and helping farmers to understand and follow the rules. Given the policy changes happening at both the regional and national level, plus rapidly shifting market pressures—that can be easier said than done for all concerned.

“We work in an ever-changing environment, which means we need to be flexible and adaptable to change,” Nicole tells us. “Whatever the focus is today, it might shift to something else tomorrow, and people are looking to their rural liaisons for some guidance.”

It's about the people

All of the rural liaisons are passionate about the job, and the communities they work with in particular.

“Working with farmers who are passionate about what they do— that's my favourite part of the job ... Not just for themselves, but for future generations.”



ORC's Rural Liaisons out and about, helping with riparian planting, teaching school students, visiting farms and talking to expo visitors.

“It’s great to help empower them to make positive changes during a time when there is a lot of policy coming their way,” Bex says.

“I love just being able to respond to enquiries, to catch up and answer questions,” Bruce tells us, “Also presenting to community groups and catchment groups, providing clarity and pointing people in the right direction for more information.”

“It’s about the people as much as the environment,” Nicole agrees, “I often come away from farm visits inspired by what people are doing in the biodiversity and land management space.”

So, what is the latest advice from the rural liaison team?



“If you haven’t already, it would be a good idea to think about how you will graze next year’s crop paddocks and document it in a winter grazing plan ready to implement.” – Nicole

“There’s lots going on, so keep up to date through your local catchment group and your industry body.” – Bruce



“If you haven’t got a Farm Environment Plan– it’s time to develop one.” – Bex

What does a catchment group do?

Visit www.orc.govt.nz/wcg to see the great work the Waiwera/Kaihiku Catchment Group are doing to improve water quality with support from ORC’s ECO Fund.