

# Walling's beet harvester a top unit

For three years now, Walling Contracting Southland has been lifting beet using its Agrifac Big Six beet harvester. The low-ground-pressure, three-axle, six-wheeled machine has proved it can harvest paddocks with ease even in the wettest of Southland conditions. With a full array of beet equipment including the Cross Rhino de stoner/washer and precision planters, Walling Contracting's owners Ben Walling and Sarah Flintoft and their team have well established themselves in the beet lifting industry.

"We certainly are far from being experts but have had more dealings with harvesting beet than most in New Zealand and still have a lot to learn. There certainly is a lot of information coming thick and fast to potential growers from all sources as a lot more come on board to promote it," Ben says.

Walling Contracting Southland had an established silage, baleage, ground cultivation and excavation business as a backbone and the purchase of the beet-lifting gear has been a sensible addition and complements their other services.

Both Ben and Sarah say they have been extremely fortunate to have great forward-thinking clients who have been prepared to give it a go and follow the steps needed to get the best from their lifted beet. One of their clients trialed three hectares of beet to harvest two years ago and has steadily



Long storage . . . Piles of beet being correctly stored.

PHOTOS: SUPPLIED

increased that amount to what would be 120ha for lifting next season, purely from experiencing such great results and finding beet incorporated so well into their feeding systems.

This particular farmer had managed to cut out a lot of high-cost feeds by replacing them with washed and chipped sugar beet at about quarter of the price and noted significant increases in production since switching to beet.

Walling Contracting Southland is also fortunate to have good employees on hand to operate such a machine.

Our workshop manager/driver Tim McFarlane has taken on the role of operating the beet harvester for the past two seasons, and he handles with great skill.

The key to a successful crop of

harvest beet is planting, harvesting and storing the beet correctly and not cutting any corners.

Farmers need to work closely with their agronomist as well as their planting contractor and harvesting contractor in order for all to work from the same song sheet and get the best out of the lifting crop.

Farmers need to choose a beet that is best suited to what they want to do with it.

"If they plan to feed it out on to the paddock whole and unwashed, then a low-dry-matter clean-skinned lifting beet would suit best such as splendini or lifta.

"If they wish to store it for a longer period, then a high-dry-matter beet is a better option," Ben says.

As long as the seed companies are aware of the farmer's ultimate aim with the crop, then they should



Moving along . . . Walling Contracting Southland's Agrifac Big Six beet harvester in action earlier this year.

be able to ensure the correct variety is supplied.

When it comes to harvesting the beet, Ben says washing is best, as it allows a storage time of six months or longer and takes the soot, sand and dirt off the beet.

"When farmers put unwashed beet through mixer wagons, it can do damage as the sand and dirt tends to wear parts etc".

For successful storage of the beet, a pyramid-shaped pile well away from concrete walls and stacked up bales is best, as it allows the beet to breathe while stored.

But the biggest piece of advice Ben can give any farmer growing beet is to not second-crop harvest beet.

This is due to any leftover beet from the first year going to seed the following summer.

The seeds remain viable in the ground for many years, creating a problem similar to wild turnip.

This is a major problem in parts of Europe, with some areas no longer able to grow beet because of it.

Through running trials and testing themselves along with clients Walling Contracting Southland had learnt a lot and had followed plenty of good advice from overseas farmers and contractors.

"Beet is a very cheap, superior feed which we can grow right here and we are really only just catching up," Ben says.

The downtime winter period is non-existent for Sarah and Ben now with beet harvesting, and also wintering about 4800 cows. To see footage of the harvester in action, visit the facebook page: [www.fb.com/wallingcontracting](http://www.fb.com/wallingcontracting).

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