

Agility

Juggling farming and Agility

Supplied by Rosemarie Baker

I'm a farmer's wife, mother and Agility competitor.

This past April, Bryan and I will have been married for 17 years; we have two children — Alex 11 and Zoie 7. Between us we currently have 12 dogs.

We have been farming mainly around the Central Plateau: sheep, beef and occasionally deer. We currently live on Landcorp's Edenham Station, an 1800ha sheep and beef breeding/finishing farm in Central Hawkes Bay. Bryan is the manager and I am the farm admin officer. I also help with all the bigger jobs which includes docking, weaning, scanning, drenching, dog training etc. Life is pretty full-on here.

In the early 2000s, I started competing in Agility with my Huntaway Rex, who got me hooked. I currently have five dogs: two have retired, two are competing and the youngest has just turned one.

I am currently a member of Central Hawkes Bay Dog Training Club and have in the past been a member of clubs in Taupo, Tokoroa and Napier.

Living rural means we live a fair distance from most clubs but I am lucky enough to have, over the years, acquired most Agility equipment to train my dogs at home.

I fit in training when I can: five minutes in the morning, quick play at lunch time and five minutes before feeding the dogs. Training

may not happen at all when the farm's busy.

When the children were a little younger Bryan and I had set nights, especially over winter, so I knew when I could train/run my dogs. I'd also had a play pen setup in my Agility area to stop children appearing in tunnels when I was about to send a dog through.

Both children are now at school, so I normally get up a good hour before I have to get them up so I can run and train the dogs. It's harder in spring with lambs and calves to feed as well. During school holidays, the children are dragged along with me or bribed to come for a walk — chocolate works well!

Shows are worked out at the start of the year, when Bryan and I fight over the wall planner to work out weekends off the farm. Some dates are set in stone — NZDAC for me and opening weekend and the roar for Bryan.

I am lucky enough now that my Agility dogs don't have to do a lot of work on the farm. Rose, my little white-faced Heading Dog, was my last real dog who earned her keep. She still gets to play and helps me start all the young dogs around sheep.

I also start all the young dogs for Bryan which is a great way of learning how to work with all types of dogs, which I believe makes me a much better handler for my own dogs.

I also went through a stage where people would give me dogs

that had been labelled as useless or wouldn't work. Getting them to work through any problems and seeing them turn into well-trained dogs was a real joy.

Farming is one of the best ways to bring up your children and dogs. I wouldn't change it for the world and Agility is the perfect hobby to do with my dogs on the side. To be honest, farming and Agility complement each other very well. I appreciate I have a husband that understands that I need to get outside and train my dogs: otherwise I'm a grumpy wife!

Here are some pros and cons of combining farming with Agility:

Pros

- A nice well put together working dog will make a great Agility dog.
- Extra dogs blend in well.
- Lots of room to exercise all those extra dogs.
- Dogs get used to working with lots of distraction and around other dogs. With my dogs, it's not at all uncommon to have a lamb, deer or child appear in the middle of a training area.
- Working stock is a great fitness tool.
- Getting a nice clean muster gives you the same high as a good round in the Ability ring — maybe an even better one!
- Agility gear makes great obstacle courses for children's birthday parties!
- Working stock gives dogs real confidence in themselves and they just seem to 'grow up'.
- Riding/balancing on the back of the bikes helps the dogs' confidence on contact gear.



Cons

- After working all day both dogs and humans are too bugged to do Agility training.
- Working is quite hard on the dogs so their working life tends to be shorter.
- Farming is not a 9-to-5 job so in busy times fitting in training is non-existent. Not having enough time to train all the dogs, especially if I'm working a dog for Bryan.
- For some dogs, stock work is way more exciting than Agility.
- Lots of stock poo for dogs to roll in right before a show makes for a smelly car and travel.
- I've also slipped over more than once on cattle poo in my training paddock...
- In the yards dogs tend to slide over the rails rather than jump, which can create bad style.
 - Dogs can wear their pads out while working in the yards, which is not great before a show.
 - Work comes first which sometimes means I can't go to Agility shows, with big operations that will carry on over the weekend.
 - Especially over spring when we have lambs and calves to manage, the dogs are never as fit as I want them.
 - Timing sometimes means we have a pup each, which gives me two dogs to train.
 - Time and energy sometimes you just don't have either.
 - I've learnt the hard way not to attach a young dog to a pram while shutting a gate when moving stock. (He's OK!). 🐾



Susan Lorenz