

# Greeting a season of sustainability

## GREEN WAYS

Christmas is coming on a wave of wrapping and brightly coloured excess. So how do we make Christmas more sustainable? **Holly Cole** looks at a few options.

**Minimal Giving?** Marie Kondo may have sparked a new wave of minimalism with her popular books and tv shows, but with Christmas products now appearing in our stores before anyone has even purchased the Halloween stuff, Greenways ponders ways to approach the season of giving without excessive resource consumption or waste.

**Timing** We all know the best way to avoid unconsidered panic-buys is to plan ahead. Make your Christmas list and then write next to each name the first thing that comes into your head about that person. This will be an excellent guide when considering their gift.

**Meaning:** The old adage "It's the thought that counts" holds a clue for meaningful giving. Why not begin a tradition in your family of turning the Christmas card into a Christmas letter? Schedule the time to sit down and really consider all the things you value and appreciate about the recipient, and write it down! Writing the year in review of your relationship with that person is a great idea too: even include challenges or misunderstandings if they have occurred, as overcoming these challenges is often what brings us



Karen Brewer pondering gifts for this year at the Nelson Organic Co-operative.

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closer. The result will be a true keepsake and celebration of that time in both your lives.

**Experience:** Objects come and go, but an exciting experience is never forgotten. Consider buying or contributing to an experience, preferably something your loved one would enjoy but never purchase for themselves. Look at local evening classes, workshops, entertainment or adventure activities depending on their interests. To make it more special, why not accompany them? A card that is a handmade voucher for a movie or dinner date with the person is like getting two gifts in one.

**Vouchers** If you really can't decide and for family that aren't local, googling "ethical online

shopping" and purchasing a gift voucher from one of the many fantastic ethical retailers you find is a good option too. Or if you know your loved one uses a particular online or streaming service, why not buy them a voucher for that?

### Charity:

While it will be no fun to explain to a five-year-old that you gave money to a charity in their name, this is a great option for the person who 'has everything' or if you get the CEO in this year's Chris Cringle. Oxfam and Save The Children both have great options at a variety of prices where you can buy essential items such as a coat, a hen or a school uniform for a family in need, and your recipient gets a lovely card to mark the act of gen-

erosity on their behalf.

**Better Things:** There are plenty of options that don't require you to buy a new gift and all the excessive packaging that usually entails. Making gifts may be time consuming, but it can be rewarding for both parties and results in a truly unique gift. Don't try to learn an entire new skill a month out from the silly season though: better to look at things you may have made over the year and see if any of it would appeal to a particular individual. If you are not a 'maker', there are plenty of local artisans in the region to draw on. Regifting or purchasing second hand is perfectly acceptable too.

**Tell retailers what you want:** If you do end up buying something

new, you can still be a force for good. Retailers are always asking for customer feedback, so take a few minutes to chat to the smaller store owner and fill out the big retailer's form to give them the information they need. Tell them that you are concerned with the excessive packaging and lack of sustainable products and materials. Tell them that you want them to accept all the packaging back free of charge and see that it is properly recycled. They can't change if we don't ask for it.

**Take Control:** Christmas often ends up being a stressful time for families, but it is important to remember that you can make of the holidays what you wish.

Moving to a more ethical lifestyle is a journey the whole family can go on together.

It is never too early to discuss the issues of waste and unethical production with youngsters, nor too late to talk to great Aunt Edith about why Tilly the teenager would prefer Spotify to soap. It is a good idea to start these discussions well before the season to keep expectations in check.

We love the '4 gifts' rule for immediate family that we found in Lauren and Oberon Carter's book *A Family Guide to Waste-Free Living*: Something they want; something they need; something to wear; something to read. This means kids get to ponder the one thing they really want, and we can ensure that we are buying items that will get plenty of use.

Before the bombardment of Christmas advertising starts to get a grip on you, take a moment to consider what you want Christmas to be this year for your family and yourself: chances are it will be more about connection than collection.

## Lowering emissions and engaging community

### JOANNA SANTA BARBARA

Kiwis are in the midst of a much-needed, in fact, urgent, conversation about agricultural greenhouse gas emissions. Those concerned about our troubling progress towards a hothouse earth state point out the need to speedily reduce methane and nitrous oxide emissions. Some farmers feel that the burden of emissions reduction is falling unfairly on them. They feel attacked and blamed. They feel their way of life, their very identity is at stake.

Others are getting on with the job of cutting emissions and sequestering carbon, not always in response to the threat of climate change, but because it means a better farm and a better farming life.

Meet Wayne and Tyler Langford, dairy farmers on a very pretty property just outside Takaka, stretching to the foothills of Kahurangi. Wayne and Tyler are an inspiring couple in their mid-thirties. Wayne is a sixth-generation farmer, Tyler has a 'townie' background. They're well-read, thoughtful, financially savvy people, who treasure their farm life. Wayne is also the original YOLO Farmer (You Only Live Once).

He has inspired countless people battling mental health problems through his focus on living every day to the full with the people he loves.

When they began on their pres-

ent farm four years ago, Wayne and Tyler made the decision to adopt once-a-day milking.

This wasn't because it cuts methane emissions (which it can) but in order to achieve a better work-life balance, with Wayne able to spend more time with their three boys. To compensate for the lower milk production, they increased the herd from 250 to 360. This meant increasing farm inputs of grain and palm kernel extract.

They discovered by their own careful observation the agricultural economic theory of the 'marginal cow'.

Greater stock numbers don't always add up to greater profits, because they entail greater expenditure on external inputs.

There is a sweet spot for each farm, beyond which the 'marginal cow' costs more than she brings in. They cut their herd back to 250 cows.

This meant they could greatly reduce their bought-in feed, leading to a dramatic reduction in methane emissions.

In addition, they had become aware of the high biodiversity and climate costs of palm kernel, particularly in relation to tropical rain forest destruction.

Wayne and Tyler continue to experiment with fodder. Fodder beets cause lower methane production in cows, but they also incurred worrying topsoil losses. Now they are trying lucerne, whose exceptionally deep roots



Tyler and Wayne Langford are well-read, thoughtful, financially savvy people, who treasure their farm life.

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make them a superior feed in drought and lock away more soil carbon than most other fodder crops.

Meanwhile, Wayne and Tyler have begun a remarkable process of outreach to the community around them. Under the title 'Farming 2030' they've assembled a group of Golden Bay folk - non-farmers who are developing a relationship with the farm.

"What do you want this farm to look like in 2030 and how can it serve the community better?" they ask their group.

Two group members have

created a permaculture plan for the farm, aligning it ever more closely with natural processes of the land. Others are interested in reforestation, wetland restoration and planting a community heritage orchard on the farm.

All these processes will sequester carbon. Wayne and Tyler believe in 'courageous conversations', and have an admirable willingness to deal with the issues on the borderland of the rural-urban divide.

They also are unusually transparent about their finances with the trusted group members.

Wayne is vice-chair of Federated Farmers Dairy section and often finds himself in Wellington at national level discussions. Tyler holds the Water Quality and Biodiversity portfolios.

Much depends on courageous conversations with people like this, who care deeply about both farming and a climate-safe world.

Joanna Santa Barbara is a retired physician and lecturer in Peace Studies, and currently convenes Zero Carbon Nelson Tasman, and the national group, Our Climate Declaration. She lives in Motueka.