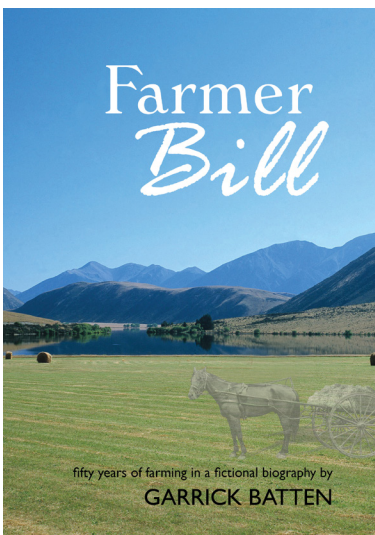




FARMER BILL

TEACHING NOTES



Genre: HISTORIC FICTION

Author: GARRICK BATTEN

Reading level: 13-18

ISBN: soft cover 978-0-473-39931-3

Epub 978-0-473-39932-0 Mobi 978-0-473-39933-7

NZRP: soft cover \$19.99, MeBooks \$3.00, Amazon \$3.85

Theme 1: NZ farming

Theme 2: Farm career

BOOK SUMMARY

FARMER BILL is the fictional autobiography of a typical ordinary pastoral farmer during the 50 or so years before the year 2000. The story is built around “why are you a farmer?” to describe steps on the ladder to farm ownership, interspersed with references to rural life, and farming practices and activities.

PEDAGOGY

New Zealand farmers have always produced food and fibre for domestic use, but more importantly for the major source of export income to buy goods and services we do not produce ourselves. They can compete on world markets through efficient use of sun energy in a temperate climate to grow pasture to feed animals to produce meat, milk and wool. Agriculture is now a permanent part of New Zealand’s natural and changed environment with lessons and issues for both urban and rural people.

During the second half of the 20th century from the end of WWII to the Millennium there were changes in physical, political and market conditions that significantly affected farmers. Mechanisation, new products, new plants and animals, and changing financial fortunes. Technical and management changes on farms, and political and economic changes off them. Direct and indirect conflicts occurred throughout this period.

Urban attitudes toward farmers changed. The sources, causes and consequences of these historical events had national as well as individual economic, social and cultural effects. Developments and events during the story are a particularly suitable resource for an agricultural flavour to fit key learning areas and to supplement other resources for appropriate NCEA levels in History, Geography and Social Studies.

THEMES IN THE BOOK

Chapter 1: Before the Fifties – Planting Seeds

Childhood farm experiences. The Depression, disease and other risks and carryover effects on farming families from the 1930s. WWII effects on schools, rationing, and especially on sheep farms.

Chapter 2: The Early Fifties – First Steps Through Opening Doors

Starting a farm apprenticeship, contrasts of accommodation, limited role of mechanisation on hill country, important effects of Korean wool price boom, early aerial topdressing, rural social life. Farmer hope and success were replacing earlier war and Depression negatives.

Chapter 3: The Mid Fifties – Go South, Young Man

Compulsory Military Training, Tangiwai disaster, relative farming differences and effects between North and South Island hill country, importance of rugby in rural communities.

Chapter 4: The Later Fifties – The Theory of it All

Lincoln College student life and education on limited resources, theoretical and practical farm teaching model, six o'clock hotel closing. Canterbury cropping and mechanisation, Young Farmers Clubs education and social influences.

Chapter 5: The Late Fifties – A Jersey Kiss

Typical Taranaki dairy farm, more unique New Zealand farming systems and rewards.

Chapter 6: The Fifties End - Responsibilities Come From Different Directions

North Canterbury rural society contrasts, high country mustering, farmer politics and influence, A&P Shows. End of horse age with motor bikes, importance of women's role in farming.

Chapter 7: Early Sixties – New Wife, New Farm

Farm and social life for women, overseas influences on farms, advantages and disadvantages of isolated rural life.

Chapter 8: Later Sixties – Doing the Gumboot Tango

Sharemilking, new and different routines, social structures, life and urban facilities. Spring stress, mutual community support, TV, weather influences on farming seasons, animal and people diseases, market and

political cycles and farming successes.

Chapter 9: Through the Seventies – Spending Other People’s Money

Urban-rural dynamics changing, different weather, physical and economic actions influences on farm results. Contrasts with UK farming practices and returns, key historic role of UK business and market, EEC membership threat, UK market loss. Conflicts of NZ subsidised hill country development and growing conservationist pressures. New animal genetics and breeding practices.

Chapter 10: Into the Eighties – Farming is More Than Grass and Animals

Contrasts of rural community and family life. Farmer politics, farm costs and subsidies and implications on farms and farmers, Labour government changes, dramatic on-farm consequences.

Chapter 11: The Later Eighties – A Place of One’s Own

Drivers, events and consequences of farm ownership, hopes for capital gain, longer term effects of loss of subsidies, diversification to deer and goats, 1987 sharemarket crash.

Chapter 12: Events in the Eighties – Tightening the Belt

Increased mechanisation, unemployment, illegal activities, ups and downs from farming cycles, drought, storm and physical risks.

Chapter 13: Into the Nineties – More Changes

Role of women in farming, changes in commercial and government services to farmers, depressed net incomes, global political changes. Agriculture losing national political and economic importance, rustling, land use changes to forestry, dairying and kiwifruit. Consequence of farm accidents.

Chapter 14: Century End – Farmers Never Retire

Selling farm and retiring to a lifestyle block, capital gain to balance poor income returns. Options for small farms, pros and cons of horticulture, influences of regulations and bureaucrats. Retirement activities through farmers’ eyes, rural/urban interface.

Chapter 15: Millennium Thoughts

Answering the question of “why are you a farmer?”, reconsidering drivers and rewards from a lifetime, the role of ownership, consequences of income fluctuations, importance of brain power, a place to raise children. Reflection on political and other off-farm changes, differences in urban and rural understanding of farming. The positives and negatives of a farmer’s life, cycles and significant changes.