

GOOD FOR YOU! GOOD FOR NEW ZEALAND

We know they're a sustainable seafood but now Bill Brownlee is proving Greenshell mussels can also be good for the land.

After long suspecting there was more in discarded mussel shells than a waste product, the semi-retired Havelock sheep and beef farmer has launched a new operation to convert them into high-quality fertiliser.

"It started in the '60s when my father first let Tom Reeves, a Havelock seafood processor, discard scallop and mussel shells on the family property," he said.

"When we took over the property in 1970 we continued it on.

"I just thought that at some stage they might be worth something - it was just a punt that we took."

For nearly 40 years local mussel processors have discarded shells on the Brownlee property.

As the industry grew, so too did the pile of shells which has become a 13 metre high landmark along the road from Havelock to Blenheim.

"One or two said we were silly for taking them," Bill said.

"But we were still farming full time so I just called it my retirement fund."

That changed a couple of years ago when Bill's son returned to the region and took over the farming duties, leaving plenty of time for Bill to get serious with his shells.

He bought a pulverising machine from Cape Campbell lime works and invested in new sheds and equipment.

"I was convinced in my own mind it was going to work so we

just went and did it," he said.

"When we first started we were exploring different ideas and were only crushing poultry grit.

"That process created left over agricultural lime-powder that we used on our own property and really noticed the difference.

"Then a few people got if off us and reckoned it was good stuff."

Bill estimates that over the past year he has crushed a few thousand tonnes of mussel shell - just enough to put a dent in the pile - which has been sold to local farmers and a fertilizer manufacturer.

Hopai Bay farmer Mike Gerard said he was very happy with the results he had seen from 180 tonnes of powder spread on his property in the past year.

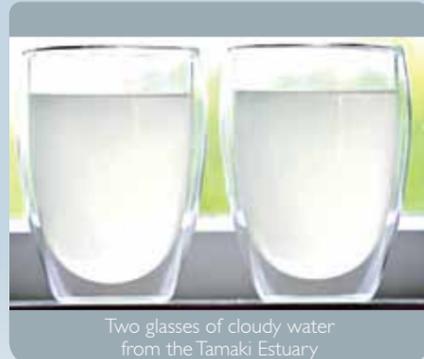
"A lot of New Zealand is short of calcium carbonate and most farmers have to apply lime at some stage to lower the acidity of their soil," he said.

"If you what to grow grass and have healthy animals, you have to have a healthy pH of at least 5.5 and the Marlborough Sounds are traditionally 5 and under.

"From the test results we've had back on it, we've seen that it's equally as good as lime. The calcium carbonate content is good. Plus there are extra nutrients and trace elements, which help to feed soil and plants and in turn the animals."

As well as being a locally sourced alternative to traditional lime sources, Mark said it was an innovative recycling initiative that he hoped the local farming and aquaculture industries would support. ■

Reviving the Gulf



Two glasses of cloudy water from the Tamaki Estuary



a small Greenshell mussel from Browns Island is added to the class on the right



Once it adjusted and opened its shell



it cleared the water in less than 15 minutes.

The benefits of Greenshell mussels in the marine environment are clear to a conservation group working to restore ecosystems and natural biodiversity in the Hauraki Gulf.

That's why the Mussel Reef Restoration Trust are working with North Island mussel farmers and processors in a bid to revive the wild mussel beds that were once an iconic feature - and a source of life - in local coastal waters.

"Mussel reefs used to be a very significant part of the Hauraki Gulf and firth of Thames," said trust Chairman John Laurence.

"They covered about 500km² of sea floor and it is estimated they used to filter all the water of the Firth of Thames in a day.

"As well as their large filtering capacity, they are also important to the marine environment by creating habitat and supporting the food chain.

"But because of commercial mussel dredging, poaching and water quality issues, they have effectively become extinct except in a few very small areas.

"We'll never be able to restore the Gulf to its former glory... but there are areas where we can start to restore the beds. We've put down the first lot of seed mussels in December 2013, which not only survived but are now growing and attracting other life like fish.

"We have had very recent reports that mussel spat has been sticking to the reefs already.

"It's fantastic news and hopefully an indication that our seeding efforts will be the start of self-sustaining mussel reefs."

The first seeding drop involved seven tonnes of mussels donated by North Island Mussel Ltd (NIML) who also provided the barge and labour to distribute them.

General Manager Steve Wells said NIML wanted to be involved because they shared common values with the Trust.

"We will consider supporting projects that protect and enhance the quality, biodiversity and ecology of the waters around the Hauraki Gulf," Mr Wells said.

"The Trust is working for a great cause and we were glad to be able to contribute to their efforts.

"We're looking at another opportunity at the moment to continue this work and will be looking to donate more mussels again in the future."

John said the Trust had had a positive response from industry with several growers and processors

signalling their support for the project.

"We've been talking to mussel growers and processors and all of them, without exception have been extremely keen to offer advice, assistance or practical facilities and those growers want to bring in other growers.

"Every grower that we've spoken to has been 100 per cent supportive and keen to see it succeed.

"Quite a few growers are conservationists themselves who have tried to restore the beds over the years.

"We're looking for advice, past

experiences and resources they can share that can help us upscale the areas that we are restoring.

"Our mission is not just to improve water quality, but benthic condition of the gulf generally.

"We see it as a very simple process: if we can get the benthic region, primarily mussel beds back, that will form a great base for improving the eco system in the Gulf generally."

To learn more about the project or to get involved go to www.reviveourgulf.org.nz ■



QUOTA WANTED

GLM9 SHARES

Contact Dion Iorns on:

03 528 2870

dion.iorns@talley.co.nz