Gisborne farm bridge sets an excellent standard

By David Porter

A niche in the farm market saw the birth of Katikati-based Bridge It NZ, a company going from strength to strength.

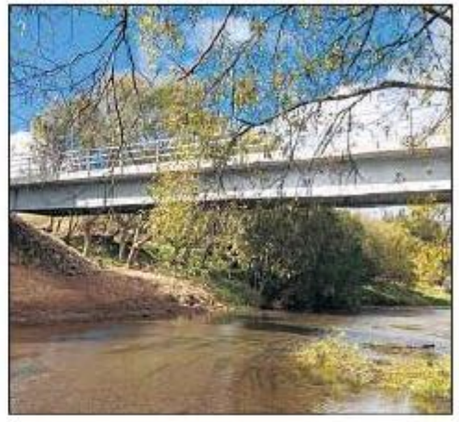
The firm picked up a win at the 2014 Hirepool Construction Excellence Awards this month, and while the company has since branched out into a range of small-to-medium-sized bridges for a variety of uses, the farm sector continues to play a major role, with farms converting to dairy helping to drive the business.

The specialist company won the Hirepool award category for projects with a value of less than $500,000 for a 34m steel and concrete clear-span bridge built over the River Motu at Gisborne.

Built for farmers Mark and Jane Johnson, the bridge is the biggest clear-span bridge built by the company and replaced a swing bridge originally built by Mr Johnson's grandfather to enable sheep to get across when the river was too high to be forded.

Local authorities were also pressuring farmers to protect waterways from stock. "When the farm converted to dairy, the old bridge wouldn't serve the required purposes," said Clark Mazey, Bridge It NZ's operations manager. "It's now a significant bridge that can take substantial loads."

AWARD WINNERS: Clark Mazey (left), Finance Minister Bill English, Hirepool chief executive Brian Stephen and Pat Seuren.



BRIDGED: The 34m single span bridge for the Johnson farm in Gisborne is the biggest built by Katikati company Bridge It NZ.

Bridge It NZ

- Founded 2008
- Owner directors — Pat and Nicky Seuren
- Staff — 12, plus contractors across New Zealand

Tauranga company Tiaki Engineering Consultants provided the design component for Bridge It NZ's projects and managing director Donald Richardson said the shift to dairying had been one of the drivers for the Johnsons' new bridge and others in the farm sector.

"There's a lot of dairy conversion happening. And Fonterra in particular requires that cows don't walk through waterways," he said. The Johnsons also needed to take vehicles across.

"We thought we were just getting a bridge that allowed access, but in fact this has transformed the whole operation of our farm," said Mr Johnson.

Mr Mazey said the 34m steel beams for the Gisborne project were fabricated in Katikati, with Hume supplying the pre-cast concrete elements. The bridge components were pre-fabbed and set up in Katikati, then disassembled and trucked to the site and reassembled, with a 300 tonne crane used to lift the span into place.

Bridge It NZ builds bridges in timber, steel and concrete in a range of sizes, and had seen an upturn in work, said Mr Mazy. "We're now booked through to Christmas."

Judges praised the bridge's design and construction, the way the company worked to minimise environmental impact and the relationships it forged with the local community. The day the bridge was lifted into place, the company hosted more than 100 onlookers, including children from three schools.

The awards were organised by the NZ Contractors' Federation and Roading NZ.