



Game-changer to open gates

INNOVATION

Farmer, 80, invents electric-tape handle that will last decades

An 80-year-old Northland farmer believes he has invented a game-changing device for electric tape gateways.

Alex Macmillan, of Pipiwai, said his creation could last a lifetime and save farmers plenty of money, frustration and broken gateways along the way.

While appreciative of the efforts of companies that created the current designs of gate tape handles – of which Macmillan has purchased hundreds over the years – he says the products clearly have a limited lifetime and he always wanted a better option.

So a couple of years ago he set about designing a bullet-proof model himself – one made of marine-grade stainless steel to take rusty springs out of the equation once and for all.

“I always felt there had to be a better way to operate gateways that are controlled by electric tapes but rather than whinging about what others had created, I thought I should get into gear and devise a solution myself based on my



Above, Alex Macmillan's Lomacs stainless steel electric tape gate handle is expected to be on sale around the middle of the year.

observations over decades of farming,” Macmillan said.

“Current designs of gate tape handles clearly have a limited life-span and eventually fail for a number of reasons – a point clearly reinforced by the many hundreds of farmers who visited our stand at the Mystery Creek Fielddays last year.

“The reason being, they are exposed to UV light, weather and contamination – such as mud, water and

foreign matter – which get in and degrade the components so they ultimately break.

“I set out to design something that was sturdy, would last for decades and which was much more environmentally friendly given there is no plastic in the mechanism – just marine grade stainless steel.”

Macmillan also devised a way to permanently secure the hinge spring to an opposite post to which the spring handles are traditionally used.

“The Lomacs gate hinge spring and activator is permanently secured to the post and has a swivel design, allowing it to move from side to side, so it essentially eliminates any chance of damage,” he said.

“It also gives consistent spring compression on the tape attachment every time as there is no chance of it stretching beyond the current barrel. The barrel itself is well protected from contamination such as mud, organic matter and water.”

The robust activator which attaches the stainless steel unit to the post can be quickly and easily fixed to the post in a number of ways. And having the unit permanently fixed to

the post removes the risk of someone running over the unit, as happens with the current spring units.

Being electrified from the barrel end, the tape is always live, removing the risk of inquisitive animals chewing it, which is another benefit.

Macmillan unveiled his updated prototype at the Northland Field Days earlier this month. The first units will be available for sale mid-year with the price still to be determined.

“More innovations are in the pipeline, and in time may enhance this invention, but for now I want to focus on doing the Lomacs gateway hinge justice and giving farmers access to a quality product,” Macmillan said.

“The exciting thing is the unit can be applied to sectors outside of farming, the marine industry being just one.” ■

Pipiwai farmer and electric tape gate handle inventor Alex Macmillan won the Beef + Lamb New Zealand 2012 Steak of Origin Challenge with meat from his Hinterwald cattle. Hinterwald are the smallest cattle breed in central Europe which reach up to 350-450kg.

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