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Coasters join Agpac's wrap recycling, Canterbury set to grow

Canterbury contractor Robert McCarthy has assumed a pivotal role in Agpac's Product Stewardship scheme that is recovering silage plastics in the South Island.

McCarthy Contracting Ltd has just completed the first collection of used baleage and silage wrap on the West Coast, and the company is also hard at work building a custom-designed baler to bundle the used plastic.

Agpac has been collecting used baleage and silage wrap since 2005 and operates the largest silage wrap recycling scheme in New Zealand.

Farmers can buy a recycling bin and liner system from Agpac to store their used plastic wraps, which are then collected. There are currently about 600 Agpac bins on farms throughout New Zealand.

Robert McCarthy operates Tai Tapu-based McCarthy Contracting Limited with his brother Grant. They became involved with Agpac's recycling scheme out of a sense of environmental responsibility within the rural sector.

"We've had a relationship with Agpac for quite a number of years. They now have their recycling scheme working successfully in the North Island and we're starting to get it up and running in Canterbury," he says.

"We had to find a way to get people educated. For us it's about trying to make an industry sustainable or we'll end up getting taxed."

The first West Coast run in early August collected silage wrap from Harihari to Greymouth. Collection is yet to take place on farms further north. McCarthy Contracting is storing the plastic for processing.

"Westland Milk Products farmers began recycling their plastic about 18 months ago. They've had the bins and liners and they have been collecting the plastic," says Robert.

"We picked up 10 liners from one farmer, while others only had two or three. We were not able to contact a couple of people by phone before the collection but they heard we were in the district and they waved the truck down to get their plastic picked up.

“We will collect liners on the Coast at least twice a year – it depends on the need and how many people get involved. We hope to end up with at least 40 or 50 farms to start with so we can collect more often.

“We cart a lot of hay and straw to the West Coast with our own trucks so we can ring those farmers in those areas and pick the recycling up at that time. We’re expecting it to fit in well with our business.”

Robert is now looking forward to his first Canterbury collection run, which should take place within the next few weeks.

Agpac has commissioned two recycling balers for use within both the North and South Islands in order to eliminate using contract balers.

The North Island baler is already operating successfully, while the South Island baler is being built by McCarthy Contracting Ltd, in conjunction with Robert McCarthy’s brother-in-law David James.

“We’re building the baler from scratch and it’s almost completed. We’ve designed and built it along the lines of the one in the North Island,” Robert McCarthy says.

“It’s basically more like a compactor. It has a chamber that you open up the lid and put the plastic in. You close the lid and it has a big ram that pushes it through to the chamber and makes the bale and ties it off.”

Robert McCarthy is starting to get a positive response to the scheme from the rural sector.

“If you’d asked me three years ago if it would take off I would have doubted that a scheme like this would work in New Zealand. But a lot of people’s mentality has changed and we’re becoming more aware of the impact of the things we do on farm.”

CAPTION: Driver Craig McNab (left) and Robert McCarthy of McCarthy Contracting with a load of waste silage wrap from the West Coast.

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