



Peter Beatty



Greg Nash

Obituary

It is with much sadness that we record here the tragic loss of two Super Air men, pilot Peter Beatty and loader driver Greg Nash, who were killed on Tuesday 22 November 2005, when their plane went down in the dense Pukenui Forest to the west of Whangarei.

For the past three years, Peter and Greg manned Super Air's Pukekohe-based aerial top-dressing unit, servicing the Franklin, Northern Waikato and Rodney districts, occasionally straying further afield to help out pilots in other areas. Prior to that, the pair had spent 14 years working out of Dargaville. Such was their popularity that even after they'd moved to Pukekohe, some Northland farmers still specifically asked for them to top-dress their property. It was on the way back from one such job that their plane crashed.

Greg and Peter shared a love of flying and their 17-year partnership is testament to how well the two worked together. Peter was an immensely experienced pilot with some 16,000 hours flying time, and Greg was a private pilot in his own right. The two were not only popular with their customers, they were also hugely respected by their colleagues. They will be sorely missed by all.

As is standard practice in these situations, a CAA investigation is being held to determine the cause of the accident. Ballance and Super Air are also holding their own internal investigation. Whatever the outcome, we aim to ensure that such an event does not happen again.



Graeme Martin

New commercial manager

Super Air has appointed Graeme Martin as its new commercial manager. Graeme comes from a farming background, having grown up on a sheep and beef property in the Hawke's Bay. He has significant experience within the wider agriculture sector, having worked as a national sales manager for Nufarm before joining Ballance in 1998. A successful regional sales manager for Ballance, he led a team of nine staff, developing a strong culture of customer focus amongst his team.

Graeme aims to bring this customer orientation to Super Air.

'The role of commercial manager is quite diverse,' said Graeme. 'On the one hand I have the responsibility for looking after aspects such as issues that affect the pilots, and on the other I'm charged with developing services for our customers.'

'One of my prime concerns is health and safety — for our pilots, our support staff and our customers. There is no doubting there are risks associated with agricultural aviation, but we have to work to minimise those. Really, the only acceptable injury rate is zero.'

'The other area I'm keen to address is the relationship between Super Air and its customers. In an industry such as this, where work pressures build up because of the effect of the weather, it's easy to lose sight of the customer. I want to make sure that doesn't happen, that we listen to our customers' needs and keep them informed of developments at Super Air. More than any industry, farming is about partnerships, and I want our partnerships with our customers to be successful and rewarding for all.'

Aerial Spreadmark

Groundspreader have been able to benchmark themselves against a Spreadmark industry standard for some time now, thanks to the efforts of the Fertiliser Quality Council. To date, however, a similar scheme has eluded aerial top-dressing. In the near future, though, that will change, as an Aerial Spreadmark scheme is nearing the end of its development phase.

Having the ability to spread fertiliser evenly and in a controlled manner has important economic and environmental consequences. From an environmental perspective, it's important that fertiliser does not get deposited on vulnerable ecosystems, such as waterways. While it's not a failsafe system, a combination of GPS control and known bout width helps ensure the fertiliser is released only over the target area.

It's also important to spread fertiliser evenly over the land. Uneven spreading results in striping,

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with some areas of the land receiving too much nutrient and others receiving an insufficient supply. There are two consequences of this. Firstly, the under-fertilised areas will fail to grow as well as they should. Secondly, in the over-fertilised areas there is an increased risk of phosphate run-off or nitrate leaching. This is not only detrimental to the environment, but it is also a poor use of the farmer's fertiliser dollar.

The Aerial Spreadmark scheme will offer independent quality assurance to the industry, so that farmers who use a certified operation can have more confidence that the top-dressing benefits them and the environment.

Super Air is pre-empting the arrival of the Aerial Spreadmark scheme by determining the spreading capabilities of its planes now, and will be applying for certification as soon as the scheme is fully operational.

- Check the airstrip you are going to use — make sure it is free of debris, that it has no large holes and that the landing and take-off space is clear of obstacles.
- If you have a GPS farm map, retrieve this in .shp file format and provide it to the pilot on a USB memory stick or 3.5 floppy for him to load into his on-board GPS system.
- Alternatively, draw an easy-to-follow map of the areas you want fertilised. On the same piece of paper, write down the product to be spread and the application rate.
- Ensure fertiliser bins are clear of debris.
- When fertiliser is delivered, keep an eye out for any large lumps. Substandard product will not be spread as the risk of an accident is too great.
- Keep fertiliser covered and dry so that it stays in top-quality condition.
- On the day that top-dressing is scheduled, make sure you or a fully briefed employee are available to meet with the pilot.



Paul Crimp carries out a check on the nose gear of a PT6-powered Fletcher

A day in the workshop

The team of licensed aircraft engineers at Super Air's Hamilton workshop are just as important to successful spreading as any pilot. Led by engineering manager Phil Goudie, the 10-strong team are responsible for all the maintenance on the Super Air fleet.

'Just working on the engines keeps us busy,' says Phil. 'CAA regulations state that the engines and airframes must be checked every 150 flying hours, and a plane can do this in one month during the busy season. It takes a full day to do a service, so when a pilot says he can't fly because of an engine service, he's being serious.'

Engines have to be replaced at regular intervals, too. The life of a Walter engine on a top-dressing plane is around 1800 hours, while a PT6 engine lasts about 4900 hours. At US\$90,000 for a Walter and US\$221,000 for a PT6, new engines are not cheap, so it pays to look after them.

Zero tolerance

Super Air places considerable value on the lives and wellbeing of its staff, and as such has a comprehensive health and safety policy, which dictates acceptable activities and behaviours while at work. For the pilots, this policy covers things such as compulsory maintenance of the plane, number of flying hours in a day, and conditions in which they are permitted to fly.

Sometimes, these health and safety guidelines might not seem to be in the customer's initial interests. For instance, Super Air pilots are not permitted to load their plane with fertiliser that they consider substandard for aerial top-dressing. If there is any risk of the product bridging in the hopper and causing the plane to get into difficulties, they must reject the product. Similarly, if the airstrip has any hazards associated with it, such as a tree or a fence too close to the take-off or landing zone, the pilot must not use it.

The most difficult area to judge may be the acceptability of weather conditions at the time of flying. A gusty cross-wind can cause serious problems for both a fully laden and an empty top-dressing plane; drizzly rain can affect landing distances on airstrips and visibility from the cockpit.

Super Air pilots want to deliver the best service to their customers, but they are not permitted to put their lives at risk in the process. If your pilot explains that he can't fly for a specific safety reason, please understand that he is obeying company policy, and that your job will be rescheduled for the soonest convenient date.

Tips for successful aerial spreading

A few simple steps will ensure that any top-dressing job goes as efficiently and effectively as possible:

- Contact your fertiliser rep for a soil test and fertiliser recommendation.
- Contact Super Air on 0800 787 372 to book in your job at our operations centre. You will be called back by a pilot within 48 hours to confirm your booking and to sort out a likely spreading date.

