



Leading change

"I believe that the environment is one of two major factors which will inhibit my ability to farm in the future, the other of course being people. I also believe very strongly that if I can drive things myself from a farming level that I'm less liable to have people coming along and telling me what I'm supposed to do." David Jones, Dairy Farmer, Canterbury.

Taking a lead, working towards whole farm sustainability on your own property and encouraging other farmers to do the same on theirs, is a more positive approach than waiting for regulation to force your hand. This tip sheet is designed to help farmers working with other farmers to change attitudes and practices. Content reflects the experience and opinions of farmers from around New Zealand who are top environmental performers.

Barriers to change: What are people struggling with?

It's naturally easier to come up with reasons to resist change rather than pursue it. However, acknowledging barriers and considering possible counter-arguments or responses can lead to a change of mind-set.

Attitudes

- We need to get a critical mass of farmers who want to change and give priority to environmental impact. This requires a major change in mindset across the sector – a change to the attitude that ‘...what I do won't matter’.

It only takes one person to change and become an inspiration to others. *"I had strong local role models like Gordon Stephenson who is Mr QEII Trust." "People watch what you do...we have to lead by example."*

- Environmental performance can be viewed as a threat to property rights, associated with regulation not choice.

On the other hand, you could by choice, of your own volition, take it on and make a start, change your thinking...don't wait for regulation. *"Lead from the front rather than being prodded from behind." "Be in control of these things yourself." "Ensure your future as a farmer."*

- 'It doesn't matter what I do right, it never seems to be enough.'

Keep up the dialogue with regulators so they can understand what you have been doing and the implications of doing more. Sometimes you can't see change (e.g. when managing water quality threats like bugs, nitrate). Persevere and have confidence in your vision for your farm. It can take time to see change materialise. *"We finished planting that 50 hectares [of plantation trees on steep farm land] out last winter - that's 10 years after we started the programme..."*

Practicalities

- Change is risky. It will cost time and money and compromise production. It's hard to fit into a busy farm programme. 'What's in it for me?' The \$\$ benefits aren't clear. 'It's too touchy-feely.'

Good environmental management is good business. Many practices have positive financial and farm management impacts.

"There are huge advantages in most of the environmental things that we do, they improve the value of the [farm] asset considerably." "If you change your behaviour you can achieve a better farm economic surplus." "Reducing nutrient loss saves \$5 e.g. potentially \$50 per hectare for N."



Working through the issues: farmers, scientists and regional council staff discussing sustainable farming approaches at a NZFEA Trust workshop.

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Information

- ‘Where do I start?’ ‘What is the most important job?’ ‘How do I go about it?’ Access to new thinking/solutions is not widely available. There is a lack of KPIs for environmental performance. It’s difficult to get practical guidelines for different circumstances.

Seek whatever information and assistance (including \$) that is available out there – from other farmers, farm advisors, regional councils, contractors, industry organisations, websites, the NZFEA Trust, QEII, DoC, etc. *“I went to field days over a period of time and got particular value from Farm Forestry field days, went back home and attempted to copy some of what I’d seen.” “Environment Waikato staff...came in with a bunch of assistance to protect the river running through the property.”*

Where there are information gaps are you in a position to help fill them? *“Take a proactive stance to help find and develop solutions...” “A farm consultant approached me to be part of a project to trial different ways of getting rid of it [effluent]...we think we’re probably onto something which if the whole dairy industry adopted then we would reduce our nitrogen and phosphorous losses and bacterial losses quite considerably.”*

Taking the lead to address bad practice: working through the issues

It can be difficult to come up with ‘rules of thumb’ for good practice. Sometimes when discussing the issues it is easier to identify or agree on poor practice first and use this as a stepping stone into discussion about positive, sustainable alternatives. Use the table of farmer-generated issues below as a catalyst. What are the alternatives to these practices? See our other tips sheets for more information.

What practices are farmers concerned about?	Why are they bad practice?
Untreated effluent in waterways and silage leachate.	Reduces water quality. Kills wildlife. Allows dangerous bugs to enter water. Wastes a valuable resource – putting effluent on land is a win-win solution.
Cutting down areas of native bush/grazing with cattle.	Devalues a farm asset. Damages the ecosystem.
Draining wetlands that serve a function.	Removes a filtering/denitrification agent and source of biodiversity.
Overgrazing to the extent that topsoil is lost/eroded.	Increases erosion risk. Reduces soil health. Nutrient loss. Increased weed problems. Looks bad.
Livestock damaging waterways or crossing waterways en masse with no crossing/culvert in place.	Reduces water quality, breaks down banks and allows P into the water. Bugs entering water pose a health risk.
Excessive fertiliser use/inappropriate timing/rates so it is lost/wasted/exported (e.g. putting P on hills before winter, putting N on in winter on cold soils).	Allows excess nutrients into water, reducing water quality. Waste of fertiliser = waste of money.
Irresponsible aerial application of sprays (spray drift).	Concern about health and damage e.g. to trees chemicals.
Stock – overstocking/underfeeding; shearing in winter without cover comb; lack of water.	Sparks public and consumer concern for animal welfare.
Wasteful drench use – without monitoring worm burden.	Waste of money. Encourages drench resistance. Excess drench ends up in soils and water.
Disposing of dead stock/rubbish in by roads, creeks, tomos.	Pollutes water.
Stock truck effluent on roads (not emptying stock first on farm). Also relates to placement of effluent facilities.	Is dangerous and poses a health risk.
Landowners (all) not controlling pests.	Has a negative impact beyond your property. Animal health issues (e.g.TB).
Poor cultivation practice where soil is lost/damaged.	Erosion, nutrient loss, damage to structure.

Get inspired by others

Motivations to take a more environmentally sustainable approach to farm management are many and varied. Here are some reasons why leading farmers have chosen to make changes.

“Coming out one morning after an absolute deluge of rainfall and finding that what previously was a mild, gentle stream was now a bloody great deep gully...I knew that something had to be done about that...we saw a disaster and we found people [Bay of Plenty Catchment Board – now Environment BOP] who could help us.” John MacKintosh, Bay of Plenty.

“We put in an effluent pond that was approved at the time but over time things changed and we were required to prove that it...was sealed and we just couldn't do it, it was a logistical nightmare...the real advancement was [when] a local engineering company came up with a design for an Enviro Saucer™ that would fit perfectly with our situation.” Joanne Van Polanen, Canterbury.

“It's probably just been a natural progression. [I've] always been hunting, fishing, camping...always had that idea to add value and am also a member and secretary of the local fish and game.” Martin Bennett, Waikato.

“We had [family] members die of cancer and that makes you start and do some research...I know it might be genetic in some cases but it all goes back largely to the food chain...If you follow the food chain back...you get back to the land and I could see that we were doing things wrong...Artificial input in a lot of cases is carcinogenic...We looked at ways that we could remain productive without having these artificial inputs.” Bruce McGill, Otago.

“I entered a farming competition four or five years ago, thought that I was doing reasonably well environmentally, but the three judges, out of the seven or eight people that entered, they rated me about number six. So I thought that's not very good! I'm quite a competitive person, I want to be the best at whatever I do and so I've turned everything around...adopted most of the practices that they suggested and changed.” Hugh Luoni, Southland.

“We had two, two-hectare blocks of kahikateas...They were fenced off when we bought them but were fenced off because they were actually stand off pads...It wasn't until we were somewhere totally unrelated and someone made an aside comment at a juvenile kahikatea...3 or 4 metres high - saying it was about [10-20] years old...We went back and looked at our block and there were mature kahikateas, nothing underneath...As a result of that we...shut the gate because we realised that these stands of kahikateas are actually disappearing at a rapid rate and those two stands...were going to disappear if we didn't actually let the juveniles start coming through.” Sally Millar, Waikato.

Taking change beyond your farm

Farmers leading farmers will make the most difference to on-farm environmental performance and the long-term sustainability of farming in New Zealand. Here are some ways leading farmers at our workshop intend to take action and which could potentially inspire others. *“Be more proactive in educating local farmers that I have contact with on the benefits in doing these things.” “Help develop solutions...rather than focussing on defending our position and fighting off the regulatory approach.” “Increase contact time with local stream care people to influence them and increase that uptake.” “Get neighbours and friends educated by coming along to field days and other events organised by the BFEA.” “Tell and show the local school children what we're doing on the farm.”*

About the NZFEA Trust and its projects

The New Zealand Farm Environment Award Trust is an independent non-profit organisation which seeks to advance sustainable environmental management of land and other resources on farms. The Trust owns and operates the Ballance Farm Environment Awards (BFEA) and managed the Learning from Leaders project, which helped spread the knowledge gained from the BFEA to a wider audience via practical, farmer-led learning events.

The Ballance Farm Environment Awards recognise farmers and growers who protect and enhance the environment and contribute to their community while running a profitable business. See www.ballance.co.nz/fea.html or email info@bfea.org.nz.

Learning from Leaders: See www.maf.govt.nz/sff/about-projects/search/04-037/index.htm for ideas about sustainable farming from top NZ farmers.

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