

# **‘Growing for good’ Workshops, Feb-Mar 2005**

## **Key take-home messages: An overview from all regions**

In October 2004, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (PCE) published *Growing for good: Intensive farming, sustainability and New Zealand’s environment*. The report examines the environmental sustainability of more intensive farming in New Zealand. A series of workshops was subsequently run by the New Zealand Landcare Trust in February and March 2005 to seek feedback on the key messages and conceptual ideas in the report.

The discussion groups at each of the eight workshops drew the following key take-home messages from seven broad themes. For notes on the methodology used at the workshops, see page 4 below.

### **Team New Zealand**

This theme attracted the greatest number of key take-home messages overall compared to other themes.

#### *Education and Communication*

These points were very strong across all of the regions:

- Urban people lack information or awareness about the importance of farming in New Zealand, and the issues that farmers are grappling with
- Consumers need to be educated about the costs of producing the food they eat
- Better communication is required between urban and rural communities.

#### *Working Together*

These points were very strong across all of the regions:

- All sectors of society (consumers, industry leaders, farmers, plus local and central government) need to work together to address the economic and social drivers that are shaping farming in New Zealand
- Sustainable farming is a rural and urban responsibility, “This is OUR issue”.

#### *Questions of Strategy*

Key issues that need to be considered when considering the direction of farming in New Zealand include:

- New Zealand needs to be pro-active and set its own direction both domestically and internationally
- Current government policies for progress towards sustainability are lacking, inconsistent or sending mixed messages
- New Zealand needs a commonly defined and shared vision of sustainability, coupled with a clearly defined strategy which includes triple bottom line analysis
- Public good versus private good: who benefits and who pays?
- A balance between education and regulation is required.

#### *Leadership*

- There was no consensus about the need for a pan-sector organisation. Doubt was expressed by some groups about the worth of creating yet another organisation. Other groups thought that an independent organisation would have real value
- Stronger leadership is needed from *all* levels (consumers, industry leaders, farmers, plus local and central government)

- Direction from the grass roots level is critical. Integrated Catchment Management approaches were identified by some groups as a key vehicle for action
- Central and local government need to support communities by providing funding and implementing effective policies.

## **Understanding the Impact of Economic and Social Drivers**

This theme attracted the second greatest number of key take-home messages. The key argument was that farming in New Zealand is part of a greater whole, and that farmers are forced to respond to economic and social drivers beyond their control.

### *Key Economic Drivers*

- Farmers are forced to 'run faster to stand still' – they have to produce more for less through the international commodities market. This is a fundamental driver for most farmers
- The food industry (e.g. supermarkets) insist on low prices
- Increasing compliance and business costs
- Increasing land prices.

### *Key Social Drivers*

- Urban political pressures drive many decisions that affect rural people (e.g. national policies)
- Urban-based consumers demand an affordable, secure food supply.

### *Drivers: Incentives to Change*

- Farmers need to be able to farm profitably to farm sustainably. Addressing environmental problems can incur costs to farmers, and consumers must be prepared to pay more for food so that farmers can farm profitably and mitigate environmental impacts
- Market signals (e.g. offering a premium price for 'environmentally sensitive' products) will motivate farmers to change very quickly. There needs to be stronger links between farming practices and markets
- The farming industry as a whole needs to focus on increasing profitability, not productivity.

## **Effects of Intensification on Natural Capital**

Differences between the regions were most evident in comments about the effects of intensification on natural capital. However differences were more evident in the general group discussions, rather than in the key take-home messages. Comments about water were more frequent in Canterbury, and comments about nitrogen were more frequent in Waikato. Land use change was identified as a key driver in Marlborough, and in Northland it was suggested that intensification may be less of an issue in this region.

- Farmers want to farm sustainably. Many are aware of environmental problems and want to solve them
- Farmers need good information about the impacts of farming, plus potential solutions/measures for change. Farmers need on farm, paddock-level indicators and a monitoring framework to understand what is happening, how it is happening, and why.

## **Performance of Research on Delivering Needs**

- Funding into research on soils needs to increase significantly, coupled with better coordination of research initiatives. This point was very strong across all regions
- Researchers need to demonstrate the economic implications (benefits and costs) of any changes suggested by researchers
- Effective dialogue between farming communities and researchers is required about the focus and direction of research

- Research programmes must be coupled with effective, well-funded extension programmes to aid the translation of research findings into action on the ground
- Farmers are concerned that the information they receive from fertiliser companies is biased towards selling product. Independent research that is free of commercial interests needs to be conducted on the impacts of fertiliser.

### **Understanding Redesign**

- The concept of 'redesign' is too dramatic. Break changes into small steps. This point was strong across all regions
- Redesign needs to address *whole farm* systems, not just one aspect. This point was shared across most regions
- Suggestions for redesign need to address implications for day to day management techniques, plus financial benefits and costs
- Farmers need *practical* management tools, incentives, and good information based on sound research to change their farming practices.

### **Education Models for Farmers**

- There is a need for well funded, coordinated education programmes for farmers. This point was strong across all regions
- Farmers are dealing with information overload. They are also receiving mixed messages from different sources of information
- Education is a more effective vehicle for change than regulation
- Effective education tools include monitor farms, 'good news' stories, and championing best practice. Messages must be locally specific.

### **The Importance of Farming to New Zealand's Wealth**

This theme attracted fewer key take-home messages than all the other themes. There were no strong commonly shared themes overall. Some key comments included:

- The risk of losing a market is relative to the value of the market
- A variety of opinions exists within the agricultural/farming industry about the risk of losing markets
- Risk need to be identified at all levels (local/national/global levels)
- Quality production reduces the risk of losing markets.

## **Methodology**

### **Why and how the data was collected**

A key purpose of these workshops was to seek feedback on the key messages and conceptual ideas in the report. After the Commissioner's presentation, workshop participants were organised into small discussion groups to obtain feedback on the key messages. From a list of seven overall themes in the report, groups were nominated two to discuss, and given a list of questions for each.

Helped by a facilitator, the groups identified five 'key take-home messages' at the end of each discussion. This required the group to identify the most important issues.

Feedback was never intended to be systematic by insisting that groups respond to a 'compulsory' set of questions or respond exhaustively to all themes. The questions were simply to stimulate discussion, so groups and facilitators worked together differently.

Some were systematic, while other discussions were more fluid. Some groups discussed a different theme altogether, or talked about issues not raised by the questions. Differences of opinion were also encouraged. No attempt was made to achieve consensus if this occurred.

Facilitators recorded the group discussions as completely as possible. After each workshop, group discussion notes were transcribed into electronic format and, wherever possible, facilitators were asked to check their notes for accuracy and to make comments explicit.

At the end of each workshop participants were asked to fill out an evaluation sheet. The results have been analysed and are presented on page 5. In addition to this, participants' evaluation sheet comments have been included in each of the eight regional reports.

### **Analysis of key take-home messages**

No attempt was made to 'count' the different kinds of responses or to interpret or discuss the comments to any depth because:

- to 'count' the same responses to a particular question, all groups would have had to have been asked the same questions in the same way
- how facilitators recorded the discussions varied. Often they recorded just two or three words, enough to indicate the basic content of the discussion, but not necessarily enough to indicate its true meaning. Interpreting these comments brings into question the validity of those interpretations.

Given these limitations, the data is left to 'speak for itself', and a meta-analysis is attempted whereby:

1. Group discussion comments are sorted into each of the seven broad themes
2. Comments are made on the overall number of responses per theme that the messages attracted
3. Strong consistencies across and between different regions are identified and summarised.

This approach makes the validity and reliability of the analysis more certain.