Northland 'Growing for good' Workshop, 22 March 2005

Key Take-home Messages

This section lists the key take-home messages from the Northland workshop only.

The Importance of Farming to New Zealand's Wealth
- Risk: relative, can't afford to ignore
- Diversification: why? Lose market

Effects of Intensification on Natural Capital
- More monitoring must be done
- Intensification is regional – may be less in Northland
- Pressure e.g. subdivision on high quality land leads to intensified use on remaining land and production on more marginal land.

Understanding the Impact of Economic and Social Drivers

Drivers – Economic
- Economics are still big drivers and tend to dictate decisions. Can we afford long-term views?
- Main drivers – cost (production, compliance land). Social factors (urban drift, corporate farms)
- It is still an issue of supply and demand – demand for land increases costs
- External forces have a greater influence than indicated – e.g. policy, markets, biosecurity, and national policy
- Will higher returns lead to improvements or further degradation?
- Economic and social cost of sustainability vs return
- Globalisation and consumer demands – we are a small cog in a large wheel.

Drivers – Social
- No take-home message

Incentives To Change
- Motive – keep things sustainable rather than purely economic or interest groups. Get this right first
- Resources to help action on the ground
- Driven from landowners conviction rather than force
- Incentives needed to help change or regulations (disincentives to bring the change)
- Inspire people to improve environmental practice. Do not throw changes at them and expect to take hold
- Solutions promoted to be practicable
- Land user driven: talk from like to like. Farmer presents to farmer
- Drivers for change – market requirements, 'feel good'/awareness by farmers, tax signals, national involvement/rather than individual sector
- We need to know when we make change that what we are going to do is better than where we currently are.

Performance of Research on Delivering Needs
- More research must be done
- Better coordination of research/assistance

- Loss of knowledge base i.e. where have all the scientists gone?
- Funding signals need to change
- Independent research collated to combine economic and environmental outcomes
- Research – get the facts to underpin cultural change.

Understanding Redesign
- Needs total system approach
- Soil loss/water quality/nutrient values a starting point
- Sustainable production not sustainability vs. production.

Education Models for Farmers
- Farmers resist imposed change but embrace evolutionary change
- Farmers' information and learning and innovation is commercially loaded – listening too closely to the 'wrong' people
- Need more open education (cultural attitudes need to change). Need better extension to farmers. Fearful of the unknown. Need to be aware.

Team New Zealand

Education and Communication
- Education – problems, solutions, opportunities to land owners, urbanites, youth, politicians
- Education – environmental awareness of all members of society – city and country – look at impacts of our own activities.

Working Together
- Acceptance by urban population and central government of importance of agricultural and horticultural industries to NZ's economy
- Working together is essential – local, national, regional, industry
- Long term with support from (and framework) national/regional/local levels e.g. catchment groups.

Question of Strategy
- Work to be a real clean green NZ. No more green wash!
- How do we prioritise spending on sustainability/environmental improvement?
- Perceived good vs. actual good.

Leadership
- Lobby group = across sectors.

Northland Small Group Discussion Notes

This section lists all points of discussion recorded from the Northland workshop small group discussions. The questions used to prompt small group discussion are listed under each of the seven key themes.

The Importance of Farming to New Zealand's Wealth

The PCE talks about the risks of losing important overseas markets if issues like the environmental impact of farming become important to those markets.

1. How much risk do you think there really is? (high, medium, low)
2. What kinds of things do you think would make that risk higher?
3. How immediate do you think that risk is?
4. Do you think farmers and the farming industry have a good understanding of this risk and the impact it might have on their farm income?
5. What are some of the ways farmers and the farming industry can improve their understanding about the risk of losing important overseas markets?

General

- We must also think of our land like a 'kauri' – we plant it now but don't see the results for 100 years
- We trade on Clean Green to gain Premiums
- We need indicators and measurements to prove/disprove, also monitors – environments
- Do we react to overseas or be proactive?

How much risk do you think there really is? (high, medium, low)

- Risk: Depends on market
- Medium → high and increasing
- For NZ there are two - produce quality could be instant, perception is slower
- Overseas markets: short term – possibly
- Depends on what markets as to the risk
- There is a spectrum for risk which is based on quality and intensiveness.

What kinds of things do you think would make that risk higher?

- Should we continue to promote increased productivity when it causes problems and may not get more money?
- Politically driven
- Consumer driven
- Awareness and unawareness
- Drivers → change and risk management
- Economic – main one
- Beef industry – QA programme – failed.

Do farmers and the farming industry have a good understanding of this risk and the impact it might have on their farm income?

- Industry responsibility to educate/inform farmers and users
- Information must targeted

- Information must be presented in forms that are useful and practical
- Manage total system not just individual points
- Generally ignorant/unaware of environmental risk and influence on market.

Effects of Intensification on Natural Capital

Research in New Zealand and overseas has demonstrated that intensification of farming can lead to pollution of surface and ground fresh water. Some farmers have responded by building bridges, fencing off waterways, and riparian planting.

1. Is this enough to fix the problem? If no – what more needs to happen?
2. Can farms in New Zealand survive with less synthetic fertiliser?
3. How does a farmer know that his/her farm is sustainable?
4. What kinds of information does a farmer need to know that his/her farm is sustainable or unsustainable?
5. Is this information readily available to farmers at the moment? Is this enough?
6. How well do we understand the impact of nitrogen on our natural capital?
7. How well do we understand the impact of irrigation on our natural capital?

General Comment

- Is intensification happening? Some industries yes
- Land values are ↑. Has some ↑ in land use been balanced by ↓ in intensification else where?
- ↑ silviculture
- Some farmers already acknowledge better per animal production is more sustainable
- Northland may be different.

What kinds of information does a farmer need to know that his/her farm is sustainable or unsustainable?

- Need information to know if long term trend is ok
- Forge ↑better links between environment outcomes and productivity
- Need good (easy to use, rapid assessment) 'tools' for land owners to be able to objectively measure 'sustainability' in the long term
- Need to know when making change that what you are going to is better than where you currently are
- Documentation essential: systems/putting on value on this.

Nitrogen

- Whilst business supply nitrogen there is economic/environment conflict
- Too short-term focused 'life boat syndrome' - 'how long have we got'?
- Problem? – Why? Clover suppression
- Long term effects - unknown at present. Cellular poison. Eutrophication – Water Quality ↓

Water

- Are too many of farming / food business models incompatible with long term natural capital?
- Economic models do not take social costs into account
- Globalisation/free market → commodities purchased on basis of lowest cost
- Most producers are price takers
- International influence → small size of NZ, overseas subsidies exchange rate
- Farm boundaries not often sensible from environmental management.

Understanding the Impact of Economic and Social Drivers

1. What are the key drivers behind the intensification of farming in New Zealand?
2. Do we have enough understanding of these drivers?
3. Are too many of our farming/food business models incompatible with long-term maintenance of our natural capital?
4. What are some of the ways these drivers can be addressed?
5. What will it take for farmers to become 'price makers', rather than 'price takers'?

What Are The Key Drivers Behind The Intensification Of Farming In New Zealand?

Economics

- Industry control/commodity prices forcing prices down therefore production must go up
- Need to produce more
- Problems of bank ownership - they own the farms and are off shore banks
- System of paying need for more production?
- Farm 'business' vs. family farm. Governance taken away not drinking farm water. Farm corporations have different approach
- ↓ prices due to market influence. International pressures/government policy/interest rates
- Key drivers: bottom line profit
- History - decreasing returns for produce, lower margins, consumer expectations for cheap food and other spending
- Bottom line profit - % to farmer has declined
- Economics influence land use practices more than environmental concerns – e.g. decline of sheep in favour of beef
- Interest rates
- Markets dictates what should happen - e.g. clean stream accord - why should general public contribute.

Land Values

- Land use – farming driven out for housing/rates increase (three mile bush/Glenbervie)
- ↑ land costs - paying town prices - land valued on small block basis
- Urbanisation
- Cost of land/capital/value.

Markets

- ↑ world population therefore ↑ demand/need for food – global basis - international affluence
- ↑ quality required
- Market entry requirements – non-tariff barriers – raising bar on quality levels/↑cost compliance.

Costs of Production

- Compliance
- ↑ Costs - production
- Legislation and compliance costs encourages larger farms – less family farms/higher inputs costs.

Social/Political Drivers

- Urbanisation less land area producing more - ↑ footprint

- ‘State of farmers equity’ (social driver) – maturity of equity. Earlier need to intensify to pay mortgage - later can ‘afford’ to produce less.
- Impact of council regulations more of a driver - permitting land use change
- ‘Greenie’ factor - farmers averse to environment matters. ‘Its ok to be green’
- Generational: Don’t want to change.

Food Industry
- Agriculture/production Industry
- Emotion removed out of system fertiliser industry. Picked on
- Some industries e.g. dairy – taking responsibility
- Advertising – products – fertiliser, chem.
- Fertiliser company policy to budgeting/nutrient/COP (contracting businesses not taking these up)
- Research.

Moving Forward: Economic
- Monetary policy: low understanding of this. Government needs to understand more
- Need $ drivers to encourage this
- Waste too much time on weird ideas (carbon credit/fart tax)
- Costs: confusion between productivity/production. Not paid to produce better quality
- Produce more = pay more
- Increase profitability rather than increase production
- Costs decrease – taxes
- Beyond farm gate – special milks
- Efficiency gains harder in future
- Tax break for environmental practices
- Funding signals: increase production receptive to change but not getting funding for sustainability.

Moving Forward: Social/Education
- Demographics/council planning impacts on land use
- ‘Feel good’ factor is a driver.

Moving Forward: Markets
- Markets: niche.

Do We Have Enough Understanding Of These Drivers?
- Understanding does not mean we can influence or control them. Historical practices not always easy to change.

Performance of Research on Delivering Needs

> “Soil is one area where there are a number of issues which require better understanding if soils are to continue to have the capacity to support farming” *Growing for good* pg 184.

General Comments
- Low priority given to research for soil conservation, particularly planting
- Lack of funding given to any/all areas of on-farm research by government
- Research done by private organisation is aimed at profit not necessarily overall good
- Information must be relevant but also put out to end-users in a form that is relevant and applicable
- Knowledge on practices (research/education) for different type/size block – regard soils as bank

- What impact if fertiliser programme had continued through the '80s, rather than stopping dead for four years – fertiliser increase records quoted are taking it from an 'unnatural base'
- Need to keep up the impeding/funding for land/soils research and make sure the information gets to farmers and can be applied
- Independent research needed not done by commercial firms
- Loss of soil scientists/soil research – loss of research independence/annual funding
- Visual Soil Assessment – soil structure won't cope
- $$ spent on on-farm research ↓ not replaced
- Haven't asked the big questions before we've done the research. And where does the information to base the questions on come from – local vs. international issues
- Information not shared across arenas/systems
- Research funding/investment too short term – competitive
- Independence of advice important.

Comments on Research for Redesign

- Research information needs to focus on farm implications. Farmers resist imposed change but they embrace evolutionary change
- Need to encourage quality not quantity so less intensification would be required
- Farmers resist change therefore how is important – regional needs must be met
- Need to address biosecurity issues
- Which port - need more research to justify/quantify needs. Need to trial it/get it right.
- ↑ of monitor farm programmes – these are driving changes in Northland (beef) farming
- Need to know when making change that what you are going to is better than where you currently are.

Research Areas

- Think also sulphate/pH
- Measurements on real systems not 'baby' systems
- Balancing economic/environment – bridge the gap
- Soil research – how do people know how good their soils are… some kit user-friendly
- Further research/information transfer: soils/nitrogen
- Role of organic production
- Biodynamic principles
- Effluent management – NARF trial.

Understanding Redesign

1. How necessary do you think it is to redesign New Zealand farms?
2. Do some farm types need to be redesigned more than others?
3. What kinds of things make it difficult to redesign a farming system?
4. What kinds of information or assistance would help farmers redesign their farms?
5. Is it necessary for the whole system (refer to diagram below) to be redesigned to achieve sustainable agriculture in New Zealand?
6. What changes are essential to achieve sustainable agriculture?

General Comment

- Do we need to re-design farming?
- Needs to be led from government

- Research information needs to focus on farm implications. Farmers resist imposed change but they embrace evolutionary change
- Need to encourage quality not quantity so less intensification would be required
- Farmers resist change therefore how is important – regional needs must be met
- Need to address biosecurity issues
- Which port
- Need more research to justify/quantify needs
- Need to trial it/get it right
- ↑ of monitor farm programmes – these are driving changes in Northland (beef) farming.

Enabling Redesign: Big Picture

- What opportunities farmers need to help redesign?
- Publications to inform indicators of soil needs
- Bring in more rural professionals
- Use already existing publications to get new knowledge out
- Research needs fact on integral part of agriculture
- Block $$
- Collaborative approach doors open
- Show what you doing, wasting time/money cost more eventually economic (try) incentives
- NRC:
    - educate more – field days, onsite farm days
    - do more
    - proactive with what we know e.g. cowsheds
    - watchdog that should know be well informed and make it happen
    - parent bond Fonterra Beef/Fibre
    - respond local issues
- Total farm nutrient budget needs to happen. . . NRC/parent.

What Makes Redesign Difficult?

- Perception that biodynamics is labour intensive. Don't get to see long-term benefits. Need to show how it can work
- Difficulty to make change where large amounts of capital invested in status quo.

Ideas for Redesign

- Stand off facilities/herd homes. Farmer driven/funded
- Pyrethrum pour-ons for fly control.

Education Models for Farmers: Are They Leading To Change?

1. What kinds of farmer extension/education programmes are happening in your area?
2. What is the main purpose of these programmes? (e.g. increasing production, addressing sustainability issues, animal health)
3. What kinds of things are farmers changing as a result of these programmes?
4. What kinds of learning opportunities would help farmers to redesign their farms? (e.g. Monitor farms? Field days? Websites?)
5. What kinds of things encourage farmers to adopt new ideas about sustainable farming practices that will not necessarily increase their income or save them money?

General Comment

- Education – need to get into peoples faces what's happening
- Farmers say: you tell us what we need to do, we'll do it.

Types Of Extension Models

- NBEG – tool kit
- Happening central (Whangarei). Biodynamic group (in recess at moment). Grow safe training (councils)
- Landcare most effective
- Far North District Council – free advice
- NIRC – land disturbance – targeting advice contractors
- Read everything – newspapers, magazines from agribusiness suppliers.

What Is Working With Current Extension Models?

- No response.

What Is Not Working With Current Extension Models?

- No response.

Enabling Change

- Demonstration farms
- Workshops/get together
- How best to bring about behavioural change? Written word is still strongest way to get information but farmers need to see change working on someone else's farm. On farm demonstration – need to look at overseas systems.

Barriers to Change

- Perception that 'this will be all cost no return'.

Moving Forward: Making the Transition from the Production to the Sustainability Era

How important do you think it is to move from the production to the sustainability era?

- Can't keep going same way
- Sustainable: carry on won't run out
- Limit inputs (fertiliser/stock rate)?
- How do we know? Water quality/work getting done.

Are we being strategic enough in our development of our farming systems – pulling together as 'Team NZ'?

Lack of Strategy

- Need a long term sustainability strategy for NZ
- Mixed signals – slm → sustainable production → ?

Questions of Strategy

- How high do we prioritise spending on sustainability?
- Are there off-site/farm benefits to sustainability?
- Who pays?
- Not production vs. sustainability rather sustainable production.

Strategy: Moving Forward

- How do we address these drivers?
- Accept can't change overnight
- (Change) → corporate ownership
- Farmer requests/aspirations
- Regulation/rules
- Reach the influencers
- Solutions: Greater education. Land care groups, reach the kids
- Solutions: regulations, $ – 'hit the pocket'
- Solutions: consistent messages from commercial, research, council
- Solutions: talk to each other, ok to be green (fear factor)
- Fragmentation of land – need to protect soils and better 'classes' of land
- Loss of soil to non-productive use – need better – guidance planning
- Issues are often local: local knowledge important, solutions local
- Driven by communities best – don't want more legislation
- Balance: Important – increase wealth/increase health – environment and personal
- Balance changes = new rules
- Catchment groups – people taking responsibility
    - role models
    - encouragement
    - peer pressure
- One plan not necessarily the way to do.

Working Together

- Agriculture supports all NZ and it should be returned by Central Government not just industry
- This is not to say that industry should not shoulder some of the burden
- Not just research
- Very few rural MPs in parliament
- Recognition needs to be given to Agriculture by all of NZ
- Farmers are stewards of the land – they need better information, skills. Community support and change of attitude – 'stewardship is an attitude'
- 'Farmers can't be sustainable in an unsustainable society' – too much being lumped onto farmers – but don't let them off
- Work together: 'what we think about what we're doing on our land'
- Sustainable farming requires a sustainable society.

Urban Population

- ↓ area of farmland – urban pressure. Educate urban people about why things happen – role for regulators to mediate or regulate
- Do city people think there are any benefits?
- Education wider than just farming community: Who? National level
- More urbanised therefore can lose focus on importance of primary sector → need to promote value of the industry to the country.

Pan Sector Organisation

- Need for pan–sectoral lobby group too fragmented – need to include all NZ, especially general public.

Comments from Northland Evaluation Sheets

This section lists regional-specific comments gathered through workshop evaluation sheets.

Positive

- Really great that this workshop happened and need more forums like this to follow up
- Great lunch. Very good discussion - need for concrete practices, examples
- This report is excellent and certainly needed at a time when the productivity needs of NZ are clashing with needs of the public
- These opportunities are vital for: keeping groups/communities talking and thinking (is a key to better outcomes sustainability)
- Great start, need to continue and drive forward
- Good worthwhile exercise
- Good session, needed badly, provided some insight into ways forward
- Provided a base for further discussion
- Assisted learning
- Raised awareness that some people don't access readily available information
- Good for next steps to address issues
- Learn other people views on sustainability in farming.

Feedback on Process/Workshop

- Too many questions to discuss during workshops only scraped surface of discussions
- Whenever I offered an alternative the men of the group offered such comments as "I can just imagine what most farmers would think of that." The general consensus was farmers are not open to change
- Provided an opportunity for the farmers (at the coal face) to provide/communicate ideas and opinions. Farmers need to have input into things that can/may effect them.
- So many ideas that are all true that it becomes almost overwhelming
- Not enough farmers present.

Challenges

- How do we get more farmers to participate in workshops like today?
- Showed willingness to change but also huge hurdles to overcome.

Moving Forward

- Include marae and community forums/groups and the media to communicate change and education towards change of attitudes and mindsets. Improve 'buy in' to the process by involving all sectors of the community
- The wide ranging issues confronting NZ in a global sense need more urban/rural communication and input
- It’s a wonderful start. Needs more emphasis on the concept that farming can't become/never will be sustainable, in an unsustainable society. All of NZ society has to walk this road together.
- These principles you have raised in this workshop - guidelines for sustainability - already proven by the Biodynamic i.e. farming and gardening Assn of NZ. Much correspondence/research already exists both in NZ UK, Germany, HRH Prince Charles. There are two dairy farms in Northland and biodiversity 'Rainbow Valley' Warkworth. These methods are not labour intensive, can be adopted gradually if wished. The information is there to be used to change way of thinking. The 'soil' is your bank. Nitrogen is only one component of a balanced biodiversity. Dead soil, no micro-organisms all working together creating a rich diversity of all nutrients. Northland has many different soil

types in very close proximity – needing different strategies of management. Research needed. NZ could be and should be the 'Organic Food Bowl of the World'

- NZ has to diversity and go 'green'. At the moment we are list clean and green. Overseas customers are demanding organic produce, especially Europeans. Because of USA's sanctions, Cuba had to farm without chemical aids. She now leads the world in organics. The nation is poor but well educated and healthy, no junk food outlets. Surely a lesson to be learnt here. Good organic farming in NZ would be sustainable and beneficial both in monetary value and healthy living. Go biodynamic
- A 'Team NZ' approach is needed. Rural people will do their best provided urban areas are prepared to address their pollution (sewage) discharges
- Good points made, well expressed. Now it needs to put into practice, not remain words
- Please take action rather than just more lip service. E.g. money into longer term sustainability, research vs. short term productivity research
- The message needs to go out to those in the primary sector who may not be interested or aware of the report
- I think Geoff Wightman's comment is useful: 'the city doesn't need a sustainable rural area, the rural area needs a sustainable urban area.' The report is a good stimulus. The key is having a vision and strategic plan that meshes nationally and that individuals 'buy into this'
- An excellent document that communicates a vital message in a balanced way. Would like the government to take a much more proactive stance - to disseminate best practice from other countries and to communicate changing consumer attitudes in our export markets. After a slow start, Australia's federal government is starting to do this. Clusters (regionally - basin) of farmers, retailers, local and central government agencies, tertiary institutions etc all linked to funding opportunities such as the SMF or RDF – central government to promote these. To develop and share best practice and ideas. Government to re-establish a well-resourced national soil conservation agency... more useful, relevant research like the Hokianga/Kaipara soil and climate study, produced by multi-agencies (NIWA, Crop and Food etc) financed by Econ Dev Minister
- Following the round of workshops, it would be good if PCE come out with some firm recommendations
- The environmental messages need to be a positive spin to get action take on board
- National study
- Long overdue assessment of situation a stimulus for change. Must be taken through to next level, not left on shelf. Lack of information dissemination and co-operation in current system - must start action at grassroots level as will die if left at national level. Maybe pass baton to Landcare?
- Raised my awareness that there is a need for increased communication between/across the various sectors of the community e.g. Maori, local people, across generations, cultures, agriculture, fisheries, gardeners, forestry, and science
- Need more publicity.

Feedback on Report

- I am always suspicious when the dates of 'selected trends' are all different - has the direction of the trends been predetermined? Why pick on agriculture? What about sustainable cities? Need more research on long-term effects of farming on soils
- Very little emphasis on 'organic farming' as a sustainable system that has proven benefits to run environment
- Why no mention of organic systems as sustainable alternatives?
- A lot of the info is being used against farmers, not enough celebration of what many good practices being used ways to spread the word. Need for documentation so we can prove what we do that is sustainable.

Other

- I would like to feel that the *Growing for good* report changes if needed not becoming a political football with the various parties
- First time I have attended, I have learnt more about Landcare Kaupapa and tautoko their vision and mission 100%. I have learnt a little more about the farming industry and the way they operate, and the minority that are prepared to contribute to healthier land and water ‘Sustainable Production’ ‘National View’