

Trial Farmer Booklet

Learn more about our
farmers and what they
have achieved

- FARM BUSINESS OBJECTIVES
- MAIN OUTCOMES
- MOST EFFECTIVE LEARNING CHANNELS
- ON-FARM CHANGES



**RED
MEAT
PROFIT
PARTNERSHIP**

The aim of the Red Meat Profit Partnership is to drive sustainable productivity improvements in the sheep and beef sector to deliver higher on-farm profitability.

RMPP is a red meat sector and government collaboration under the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) Primary Growth Partnership. RMPP draws together nine industry partners that are investing in the programme alongside MPI.

The partners are Alliance, ANZ, ANZCO, Beef + Lamb New Zealand, Blue Sky Meats, Greenlea Premier Meats, Progressive Meats Limited, Rabobank, Silver Fern Farms and MPI.

This partnership is unique in the red meat sector and demonstrates the resolve within the industry to deliver on key themes from the Red Meat Sector Strategy released in 2011.

We have created this booklet to highlight the Extension Project within RMPP. This key project aims to increase farmer uptake of new ideas and technology to lift profitability. The gap in profitability between the top performing farmers and the rest is large – hence the exciting opportunity for farmers to make more money by closing this gap.

The challenge in the sector is to find ways to engage with farmers that results in profitable adoption of these new ideas and technologies. As a result, a number of trials



were run over 2015/2016 to evaluate a range of extension approaches with farmers and meat processors. Through this we have gained a better understanding of which approaches are most effective in supporting practice change.

The next step is to use our findings to progressively roll out RMPP extension activities to all farmers who want to participate.

This booklet showcases a number of the farmers who have been involved in the trial and what changes they have been able to make through being a part of this research.

The results of the trials will continue to be shared with farmers over the coming months. You can visit our website for more information about the Extension Project and other projects we are currently working on.

Thank you to all of the farmers, meat processors and rural professionals who have participated in this project. The findings from this trial will help shape the future of extension for our sheep and beef sector.

Malcolm Bailey

Chairman, Red Meat Profit Partnership

Putting knowledge

into action

The purpose of this booklet is to provide farmers with an overview of the results that have been occurring on-farm as part of the Extension Project together with who helped them achieve these results and lessons learned.

Supported by our meat processor partners, over seventy farm businesses and a range of rural professionals have been participating in the Extension Project. The impact of different extension approaches have been evaluated throughout the project through interviews with participating farm businesses together with feedback from the rural professionals involved. The results from this ongoing evaluation are incredibly useful as they are helping provide a clear picture of what effective extension looks like. This will help inform how we create a system to better support our sheep and beef farmers to optimise their own farm businesses.

The information summarised in this booklet draws on the evaluation data collected from the farm businesses involved to date and, while many of the farmers have given permission for their names to be used, some farmers have preferred to remain anonymous.

Brief overview of what we have found so far

The results show that farmers involved in the Project who are seeing the most positive outcomes on-farm have a range of actions in common. These farmers are:

- Bouncing ideas off other farmers
- Looking for ideas from other farmers

- Minimising the risks of change by talking with others
- Getting advice that directly relates to their business
- Working with people who listen to them
- Doing the basics well

So what is different?

The red meat sector has achieved significant gains over the past 30 years yet there is still an opportunity to convert this to higher profitability. In order to achieve good results, we need to make sure there is:

- Access to appropriate information, activities and support
- An environment surrounding the farm business that provides farmers with confidence to act (rather than an environment that “pushes” a farmer to change)
- Information that is customised to the farm business and that has been tested with other farmers
- Rural professionals who are matched both to the farmer’s business needs and style of working
- Engagement and collaboration of all partners involved

These lessons have been captured in the extension system model as presented on page 95.

Northland Bull Finisher

Main objective:

To grow fodder beet and utilise it in a cost effective way to finish bulls.

Farm system:

Finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Northland



Farm type: Small farm of 200 effective hectares (302 total)



Stock numbers: 540 beef cattle

Main outcomes

- Discovered that fodder beet was not a viable option for fattening bulls in his property. This has led this farmer to trialling two other practices to determine which of those will be most productive in his operation.
- Has built a much stronger relationship with his meat processor and is using improved weighing technology to make more accurate and tailored farm management decisions.

Most effective learning channels

- The wider access to independent experts enabling more robust trials and therefore increasing confidence that trial results will be accurate and useful for both the farmer and the wider industry.
- Being able to work more closely with his meat processor to access information and move towards more of a win/win relationship rather than an 'adversarial' one.

On-farm change

- Stopped trial of fodder beet due to problems with insects and weeds which appear to be Northland-specific issues.
- Started new trial looking at set-stocking versus rotational grazing.
- Started another new trial looking at direct drilling Italian rye grass into the kikuyu.
- With new scales and crusher he is getting more information on animals and is now doing much more targeted drenching.

"My meat processor is always sending emails on where I can get free advice etc. which is a good channel for helping to keep me connected as it is very easy to just get bogged down in the day-to-day business of running the farm."

Kim and Chris Leigh-Mackenzie

Our main objective:

To improve our whole farm business by putting systems in place to finish stock more efficiently, improving the bottom line and repay debt. The concrete aim is to finish 1,000 bulls annually.

Farm system:

Finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Northland



Farm type: Easy to medium hill country 847 hectares (650 effective)



Stock numbers: 1,633 beef stock

Our main outcomes

- We have accomplished significant upgrades to our livestock weighing systems and data recording to make more accurate farm management decisions.
- We have increased the subdivision of our paddocks which allows us to be more efficient when shifting mobs of bulls. This gives us more time to work on the business rather than constantly being busy completing day to day tasks.
- Are managing \$100,000 debt repayment per annum after tax.

Our most effective learning channels

- Working with independent advisers who have helped to more accurately plan subdivision.

- Our meat processor has helped with great communication and rapid payment. Through RMPP they have been quick to reimburse expenses and our new weigh systems have provided a more seamless connection for matching kill data from the meat company with our on-farm data.

"We are very keen on making sure we look after the land and protect the bush and native birds. Changes we make on farm have to be economic and sustainable. We are pleased at the shape our farm is taking. With the improvement of subdivision we have been fencing off non productive areas, natural waterways and wetlands whilst improving both profit and production."

Kim and Chris Leigh-Mackenzie

Northland pilot farmers Chris and Kim Leigh-Mackenzie have reduced debt and boosted farm production thanks to expert advice and help with farm improvements – and they're enjoying life more as well.

Insufficient cashflow had previously limited their ability to make changes on their 847ha (650ha winter effective) hill country farm, near Arapohue, south east of Dargaville, but they've made huge strides since becoming RMPP pilot farmers.

With access to expert advice from farm consultant Bob Thompson as well as Greg Clark from Greenlea Premier Meats and other experts such as system designer Tom Chisholm from Agdesign and their vet, they've been able to speed up improvements on the farm. They've accelerated an upgrade of their bull beef operation, moving from sticks and string fencing to a techno fencing system, making the bulls easier to manage and reducing stress.

"Chris and Kim had started fencing, but the pilot has just given them a huge shot in the arm. It's been a great encouragement to them," says Thompson.

"They've battled with some pretty difficult yard situations so I helped with scales and getting their yard sorted out. This is an amazing young couple that started with buggie all and grafted their way through some extremely challenging situations."

Greg Clark says he regards his role as a connector - either to information or the right people. He held initial meetings with Chris and Kim to discuss their aspirations and how he could facilitate making this happen.

"Without the pilot Chris and Kim possibly would have had a more staged approach like, 'this season we will look at getting the farm mapped and then we will look at putting the infrastructure in place', whereas now it is just like, 'let's map it, let's get it done, let's push ahead'," Clark says.

"They got some very specific farm consultancy advice which blossomed the whole, 'let's get it done rather than let's do bits', approach. The 10 year plan become a five year plan."

The Leigh-Mackenzies have worked hard on the farm since they bought it as equity managers with four other equity partners in 2008, taking on a big mortgage for the rundown property and knowing there was plenty of work needed.

"My attitude is just get out of bed and do it," says Chris. "When we got here I sprayed gorse and in one year we did 125,000 litres of gorse spray. No excuses, just get in and get it done. Gorse never sleeps."

Eight years later, much of the gorse has gone and kilometres of polywire electric fences have been put up to create an intensive bull beef operation. Production has increased every year with current production of 220,000kg of carcass weight a year, well on the way to a targeted 300,000kg.

"We think that's achievable, we've still got a lot more weeds to spray and we'd like to grow another one to two tonnes per ha of grass as well. We would be lucky if we grew more than 6 tonnes of dry matter per ha at the moment" Chris says.



Over the past 12 months they've made huge strides and have managed to pay off \$100,000 of debt plus a \$45,000 tax bill.

A new weighing system using EID tagging, put in as part of the pilot, has enabled them to make farming decisions based on accurate data while on farm, giving them greater confidence.

"Every animal's tag gets read every time it comes through the yards. We know every bull's life history – where it was purchased, its entire life's weight gain profile, drench history, any treatments and even where it has been on the farm and its weight gain profile relative to the block it was grown on," says Chris.

"We can now download the carcass weights of the individual animals from Greenlea. We can work out yields and work out which areas of the farm are better performing."

They've also increased the rate of subdivision of the farm, allowing more efficient stock management and better utilisation of pasture. The farm has been mapped by drone, an improvement over old farm photographs when planning subdivision.

New systems have freed up time for Chris and Kim so they can focus more on improving their farm and less on just the day-to-day running of it. They are in a much happier space and feel they are moving forwards.

"The pilot has taken a non-sustainable system and converted it into a sustainable system," says Bob Thompson.

David and Janine Kidd

Our main objective:

To use cropping and pasture renewal to more efficiently and consistently produce bulls and steers to market specification that leads to a measurable increase in farm profitability. Part of this includes building a closer and mutually beneficial working relationship with our meat processor.

Farm system:

Finisher.

Our main outcomes

- The main outcome of the pilot for us has been the start of a journey to create a top-performing farm. The combination of data to establish facts to work from, a farm consultant to interpret the data then create a plan, and a mentor to help operationalise the plan, has given me confidence to plan bold changes for the next 24 months.
- I believe that if I wasn't involved in the pilot I would have been on a journey of about 5 to 10 years to achieve the level of farm performance I want. However, now I am confident that within two years I will be well on the way to hitting some of the performance targets I desire.

Our most effective learning channels

- One-to-one interaction with farm consultant and local experienced farming mentor.

Basic Stats



Location: Northland



Farm type: Flat to rolling, 490 effective hectares



Stock numbers: 1,350 beef animals

On-farm changes

- Gathering farm data including pasture and crop growth rates to quantify what is being achieved, in order to benchmark against better performing properties.
- Identifying novel crops that improve animal growth rates in traditionally slower times of the year.
- Working with a farm consultant to interpret data and create a fact-based plan.
- Meeting with a local farm mentor.
- Implementing a major change in farm system to reflect the one that is best suited to the property – from breeding and finishing to solely finishing.

"I have around four to five years farming experience and he [mentor] had around 18 years so together we have around 22 years. Using this we can throw ideas around and make better decisions."

David and Janine Kidd

Four years ago, when David Kidd took over the management of bare land overlooking the Kaipara Harbour, he knew he had work to do.

Having leased two blocks of adjacent land – 455ha and 100ha – within six months, David, and his employer McEwan-Kidd partnership, began an intensive development programme which included sub-division, installing a water system and implementing fertiliser and pasture renewal programmes.

They also set up a cattle-only stock policy on the flat to rolling land, running Angus breeding cows, beef bulls, trading heifers and steers – amounting to 5000-6000 stock units.

David says the intention was to have the bulls finished before their second winter and the trading steers and heifers finished the following spring. But with so many classes of cattle-coupled with unpredictable seasons – the system was not working, with trading cattle taking too long to finish.

Something had to give, says David, and that “something” was their 150 breeding cows. These were recently sold to make room for more profitable finishing stock.

David came to this decision after rethinking the whole farm business through processor, Greenlea Premier Meats’ involvement in the Red Meat Profit Partnership Programme (RMPP).

David, who was the 2014 Young Farmer of the Year, says he joined the programme because it was an opportunity to be part of a unique processor-run extension model, and to work closer with Greenlea Premier Meats as part of the supply chain.

The programme brings together a range of farmers who share their knowledge, ideas and experiences, as well as facilitating opportunities to use farm consultants and other agribusiness professionals.

For David, hearing other farmer experiences – and having a farm consultant cast a fresh-set of eyes over their business – has been behind the decision to streamline the whole operation.

“We had made some massive changes within two weeks of him being here,” says David.

One of these changes was selling their breeding cows and they will sell their finished heifers within the next few months. From next year, their focus will be solely on finishing Friesian beef bulls and Angus and Angus cross steers.

With the intention of finishing around 600 cattle every year, David has bought 150 Friesian and Friesian cross bull calves and will buy 200 Angus steers from David’s parents who farm nearby. The balance of cattle has typically been sourced from weaner fairs, but this will change as David seeks to build relationships with commercial breeders.

While preferring Angus cross weaners, David admits they have had all-sorts coming off the truck. He would like to be in a position to only buy weaners over 250kgLW and ideally, buy directly from the breeder.

Two months ago, the business invested in Gallagher electronic weighing and sensor equipment after David saw it being demonstrated at a Greenlea Premier Meats’ RMPP day.



While they had always used scales, they did no more than flash-up a figure as stock moved across them. The new electronic set stores data that can be downloaded and analysed. This will allow David to see which forages are driving the best animal growth rates and most importantly, for finishers, identifying which genetics perform best in their system.

David had always known that some lines perform better than others, but the electronic scales quantify this through objective data.

“In the long-term, we hope to have relationships with commercial breeders and the price- which is in line with market prices- then becomes irrelevant. It’s an ideal relationship.”

Only having had the scales for two months, David admits he is not using the data to its full potential, but believes the information it generates will help further streamline their operation.

In line with building the farm’s infrastructure, David has been running an aggressive pasture renewal policy. He has been renewing at least 10% of their total area through summer and winter crops, such as rape and maize, and sowing high quality forages such as plantain and chicory.

Having carried out so much development since buying their land, David is now striving to streamline their farm business and Greenlea Premier Meats and the RMPP programme is helping him do just that.

Philip and Pauline Gaudin

Main objective:

To determine how efficient beef cattle are in our sheep-beef breeding operation and look at ways to improve this efficiency. This will then provide benefits to us and our processor.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Waikato



Farm type: **650 effective hectares** (850 total hectares) - 500 hectares hard hill country, 150 hectares is cultivatable



Stock numbers: **Around 3,700** sheep and 500 beef cattle

Main outcomes

- We now electronically record our calf weights via Tru-Test scales and reader making it easier to collect and analyse this data.
- We looked at using FarmIQ as a way to store and use the collected data but found it was not suitable for our needs.

On-farm change

- The use of EID weighing and efficient data collection.

“The Pilot has provided the impetus to bring these plans into action earlier.”

Most effective learning channels

- We both like small group discussions with about five to ten people so it is not too big. This gives us more of a chance to raise points for discussion.
- The Tru-Test support team meets our needs.

Main objective:

To provide direction to achieve a 15% increase in productivity. However, he is not interested in pushing for that last 10% to 15% productivity if it affects his quality of life. The pilot will also help provide direction on the future direction of the farm and succession planning.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Waikato



Farm type: 350 effective hectares (325 hectares effective) - 180 hectares flat, 120 steep hill country, 50 hectares of rolling hill country



Stock numbers: Around 2,700 sheep, 120 beef cattle, and 180 dairy grazers

Main outcomes

- This farmer now has Farmax and has found it to be very useful for collecting data and projecting what might happen. He likes Farmax as it aids in making rational decisions.
- He is now tracing a line of lambs through to age five to test the level of their fertility and make informed stock decisions about whether to cull the five-year old ewes and sell or keep hoggets.

Most effective learning channels

- This farmer really enjoys the pilot discussion group as he finds it an effective channel for talking about farming issues with similar-minded people. He also appreciates going to workshops if they are on a topic he is interested in, such as genetics.

On-farm changes

- Selling animals straight off-farm rather than shifting from one farm to another (helped from Farmax insights).
- EID tagging a line of lambs from birth to 5 years which would help in deciding which ewes to cull based on lambs born.
- Reduced number of dairy grazers.

"I think the group is a really effective way to exchange ideas and as none of us are too big for our boots we can work through problems with farmers who offer constructive comments."

Waikato Benchmarker

Main objective:

To provide a farm programme that identifies how the farm is performing which can be benchmarked against other farms.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Waikato



Farm type: 750 effective hectares
- all rolling hill country



Stock numbers: Around 2,700
sheep and 1,000 beef cattle

Main outcomes

- These farmers have introduced Farmax onto their farm to capture data including stock weights, grass growth and financial targets. So far they are happy with the system.
- They now have a Health and Safety Plan in place as a result of attending a workshop run through the pilot programme.

Most effective learning channels

- These farmers prefer small group discussions as this gives the opportunity to ask questions of a group and receive a range of opinions on a subject.
- They also found the workshop on Health and Safety was a very effective way to gain a lot of necessary information and found the folder very useful.

"We saw it (the pilot programme) as an opportunity to help or learn from others involved in the programme and also the possibility to pass on knowledge and put back into the industry."

Waikato Bull Handler

Main objective:

To determine which sires result in the best calves to rear under particular conditions.

Farm system:

Finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Waikato



Farm type: **185 effective hectares** (207 total hectares) - 80 hectares flat, 105 hectares rolling hill country



Stock numbers: **Around 30 sheep** and **650 beef cattle**

Main outcomes

- These farmers are now measuring their bulls' temperament to see if there is a pattern that shows bulls from a particular sire are consistently 'unsettled' or 'wild'.
- They have moved to spring born calves to finish on a shorter cycle and will receive the results of this change this year.

Most effective learning channels

- They enjoyed the pilot group discussions organised by their meat processor and also found that visiting the meat processing plant was very useful for learning about how much is involved in processing an animal. This insight into processing resulted in them having a deeper respect for the role their meat company plays.

On-farm changes

- These farmers are experimenting with different ways of handling bulls and seeing if there is a relationship with acidity levels in meat.
- DNA testing bull calves which could mean they could demand a premium for producing more relaxed and easier to manage stock.

"The group discussion at our meat processors was really good and you are also not around people who are doing the same project but they are like-minded so they are looking for better results and better outcomes."

Waikato Cattle Feeder

Main objective:

To determine the best approach to ensure continuous year long supply of animals, ultimately leading to higher profits.

Farm system:

Finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Waikato



Farm type: 210 effective hectares of rolling to steep hill country



Stock numbers: Around 33 beef cattle, 140 dairy grazers, and 200 dairy cows

Main outcomes

- They have found for the animals fed on the feed pad with onions that they needed to add hay or straw to the animals' diet to maintain weight after the onions were removed.
- They are using scales to weigh the animals and are using this data to help decide the best times to buy and sell.

Most effective learning channels

- These farmers found the advice from the specialists to be the most helpful learning channels especially after they had taken time to understand the conditions on their farm.

On-farm changes

- Addition of different fibre to cattle's diet.
- Trialled buying in cattle earlier and grazing them on chicory on the back of using the extra data they were receiving.

"We now have scales to weigh the animals and are using this data to help inform our decisions about the best times to buy and sell."

Kim and Evelyn Robinson

Our main objective:

To maximise income given climate conditions in the area and also to provide a deeper knowledge of the industry and enhance the relationship with the meat processor.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Waikato



Farm type: 3,450 effective hectares (3,524 total hectares) - 600 hectares flat, 2,300 hectares medium rolling hill country, 550 hectares medium to steep hill country



Stock numbers: Around 16,500 sheep and 5,200 beef cattle

Our main outcomes

- We are now using fodder beet as animal feed which has improved our animal's health and weight. We have been assessing them by observation and are pleased with how they are progressing.
- We have changed our ram breeder to improve fertility. Initial stud flock results are good so we are optimistic for next year.

Our most effective learning channels

- We find talking to independent experts and being involved in farmer discussion groups to be very effective learning channels as we value knowledge and feel that each channel offers us valuable information.

On-farm changes

- Grown fodder beet on three paddocks as a trial and using it to fatten stock.
- Put our small stud flock to new ram which had very good lambing percentage.
- Introduced teasers to bring lambing dates forward.
- Fencing off waters, catchments and wetlands to help improve farm's sustainability.

"We want to learn a bit more, learn about the industry a bit more deeply perhaps. We have a good relationship with the meat processor now, going forward, we hope to improve that."

Vicki and Leveson Gower

Our main objective:

To develop an overall Business Development Plan to sustainably and progressively increase profitability and achieve long term goals.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Our main outcomes

- In conjunction with a farm consultant we reviewed our own goals and objectives starting with the end in mind.
- Starting with the end in mind, we then looked at our entire farm stocking policy and have completely changed this based on our objectives and goals and environmental considerations.
- We have reviewed all our farm systems and have implemented a comprehensive cloud-based Farm Management system, updated all our stock handling and financial systems.

Our most effective learning channels

- Being part of a larger group and having access to industry specialists without having to spend a lot of time sourcing and finding the best in their fields.
- Working closer with our main Processor Greenlea has been instrumental.
- We have found working with the right farm consultant invaluable.
- We like the online podcasts and found these were an effective way to gain knowledge and insight into relevant topics.

Basic Stats



Location: King Country



Farm type: 816 effective hectares (1,416 total hectares) – 381 hectares undulating, 325 hectares rolling, 110 hectares steep



Stock numbers: Around 1,000 sheep, 750 beef cattle and up to 930 dairy grazers

On-farm change

- The development of a professional team working with us .
- Farm Information Systems developed - cloud-based Farm Management system – FarmIQ, Farmax for all our stock planning, Xero and Figured for all Financial Data.
- Complete change of our stocking policy, with the establishment of clear plans around stocking policies and pasture management systems.
- Stock handling systems and weighing systems have all been upgraded.
- Further subdivision and water on the Dairy Grazing and Trading Block.

“We had used experts prior to the pilot, but not to the same extent. We will continue to have them involved as an integral part of our team as we believe they give confidence which allows us to move forward a lot more quickly than we previously would have. “

Vicki and Leveson Gower

Introducing IT systems into Leveson and Vicki Gower's farm operation has led to an overhaul of the whole business and created more opportunities for off-farm activities.

The past year has seen some major changes for the King Country couple, as they re-evaluated every aspect of their 1416ha (800ha effective) sheep and beef business, Stockland Trading Ltd, and sought to put systems in place that would allow the farm to operate in their absence.

After many years of farming – and with a busy 11 year-old-son – Vicki and Leveson were at a stage when they would like to be able to physically leave the farm and pursue outside business and recreational interests while still running a successful farm operation.

Vicki, who is a chartered accountant, was keen to integrate a cloud-based farm management system into their business and jumped at the opportunity to do this through their processor, Greenlea Premier Meats involvement in the Red Meat Profit Partnership (RMPP) programme.

The timing could not have been better, with Greenlea approaching Leveson to be part of its RMPP programme at a time the couple were looking at the best way to systemise their farm.

Although Vicki has a strong background in management and accounting software, it was the support offered through RMPP that really appealed.

Focused on using IT-based farm management systems to improve farm analysis and drive greater production, they have adopted both

FarmIQ and Farmax software packages.

These are being used in conjunction with an accountancy package, a farm consultant and farm environment plan.

Most importantly, these management tools and systems are part of a business development model that Vicki is developing for the farm.

Having spent 20 years helping retail businesses use a simple four-stage model to develop and grow, Vicki saw potential in adapting that model for their own – and potentially other – family-farming businesses.

She explains that it's about starting with an end goal or objective and using the four points to develop a strategy that will help achieve that end goal, which for them is the ability to ensure the farm remains fully functioning in their absence. They also wanted to focus on producing a better product for their customers, which is growing high quality red meat to meet the market specifications of Greenlea Meats.

Vicki says when examining their business, it became clear that they needed to simplify their whole operation. The couple had been running a complex livestock policy, which including running breeding, finishing and trading stock along with dairy support.

It took two to three months to determine what their future stocking policy would be, and this is where the suite of software tools was so useful. It meant the couple were making decisions based on objective data and information.



They made the decision to reduce ewe numbers and sell their breeding cows, which wasn't easy as the family had run a breeding herd for 53 years.

They have built a more efficient and environmentally friendly, cell-based bull finishing system and this has made day-to-day management more streamlined. The new stocking policy came into effect on May 1 and Vicki says it is now a simple system which Leveson runs with the help of a 16-year-old worker.

"In a way it's like paint by numbers."

Evan and Roseanne Parkes

Our main objective:

To provide information to help develop the Farmax analysis tool so the farm management team can confidently use it to make better decisions to grow the business.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: King Country



Farm type: 945 effective hectares (1,235 hectares in total) - 633 hectares steep hill country, 180 hectares rolling hill country and 152 hectares river flats



Stock numbers: Around 5,000 sheep, 250 jersey bulls, and 460 grazers

Our main outcomes

- We have removed the Californian thistle from our river flats by a summer and winter grassing programme.
- We have been able to run more ewes per hectare for lambing through spray and N use.
- We looked at using Farmax but it was too expensive to implement and justify.

Our most effective learning channels

- We both find the discussion group to be very effective for help and ideas. It was feedback from the group when they visited our farm that prompted us to re-grass our river flats.
- We also liked the Health and Safety workshop which was very helpful for getting our Health and Safety plan underway.

On-farm changes

- Cropped the flats to remove weeds and increase farm performance.
- Put annual spring nitrogen on the pasture to underpin ewe performance.

“In familiar small like minded groups you are more likely to query and revisit issues currently being discussed and from previous gatherings.”

Robert Linton & Linda Ellison

Main objective:

After a dry summer we commonly experience poor autumn growth rates in our cattle. We have tested for potential barriers to growth and we are testing strategies to improve daily liveweight gain in our weaner bulls. Better growth rates through this period will flow on to heavier bulls going into the next spring which will give us more options for marketing when traditionally both store and slaughter prices are better in the pre-Christmas period.

Farm system:

Finisher.

A full year evaluation is yet to be completed for Robert and Linda so no additional information is available.

Basic Stats



Location: Bay of Plenty



Farm type: Rolling to hilly country with light volcanic soils – they run an all grass system



Stock numbers: Around 460 yearling bulls, 440 bull calves (that they rear) and buy in another 25 weaners and 20 ewes with lambs at foot

Sam Clark

Main objective:

To obtain guidance and clear recommendations on how to deliver management goals of increasing farm performance.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Hawke's Bay



Farm type: 1,250 effective hectares – 320 hectares flat to rolling, 340 hectares steep faces, 425 hectares rolling hill country, and 165 hectares cropping



Stock numbers: Around 5,000 sheep, 550 beef cattle, and 1,400 deer

Main outcomes

- Discovered the importance of herbage testing and proper crop management to ensure lambs are getting the gains we would expect.

Most effective learning channels

- Independent experts have been the most effective tool for identifying areas for improvement on the farm.
- Working one-on-one with the pilot facilitator to carry out trials has also been valuable.

On-farm changes

- Improved grazing management by increasing mobs sizes and rotationally grazing.

- Reduced total number of capital stock to get more involved in trading.
- Introduced a terminal sire to lift lamb performance and get them off-farm earlier.
- Started a special lamb program which is splitting ewes into three equal mobs and lambing all year around.

“The animal nutritionist who came to talk with our group on a farm visit explained about some of the pasture being too rich in fibre so that the lambs were not able to get some of the other nutrients required to grow at 400g a day. This made total sense and confirmed to me the importance of testing our pasture.”

Jim and Christine Spall

Our main objective:

To build a more profitable farm through the use of a cropping system that suits the farm.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Hawke's Bay



Farm type: 377 effective hectares (480 hectares in total) - all flat to easy rolling



Stock numbers: 2,025 ewes, 577 hoggets, 475 cattle

Our main outcomes

- Started developing a farm model to evaluate the impact of increasing the area of the farm that is planted in herbs (chicory, plantain, red/white clover).

"If we can prove that our farm is more profitable because of our areas of chicory and plantain, then I feel that would benefit others as well."

Our most effective learning channels

- The help of a Farmax advisor to develop the model has been the most useful channel of the pilot so far.

Christine and Jim Spall

Forage herbs are proving their worth in dryland farm systems but what proportion of the farm area is best utilised in these specialist crops?

Hawke's Bay farmers Jim and Christine Spall, through Progressive Meats' involvement in the Red Meat Partnership Programme (RMPP), are aiming to answer this question by determining what impact increasing the area they have in plantain, chicory and clover crops will have on their sheep and beef breeding and finishing system.

The work they are doing through the programme is building on a forage project they were involved with through Massey University.

For several years, the couple, who farm 377ha (effective) of rolling country near Kereru, have been using this herb mix as a spring feed for their terminal sire ewes and lambs. Driving lamb growth rates of 250-300gms/day, these drought-tolerant forages have proved valuable and now cover 11% of the effective farm area.

With the help of Farmax and farm consultant Graham Ogle, the Spalls are modelling the impact increasing the area in plantain, chicory and clover to 30% and 60% of the total farm area would have on the whole farm system and what management changes would need to be made as a consequence.

The results are quite dramatic, says Jim, whose farm has been part of Progressive Meat's RMPP "Focus on Forages" programme since its inception two years ago.

"There would be significant economic benefits if – what we see on the model – could pan out in reality."

The benefits of increasing the area in these high-octane feeds to 30% would include growing out replacement ewe lambs to heavier weights which would allow them all to be mated. Currently the hogget mating policy is season-dependant. It would also allow more finishing lambs and cull ewes to be sold earlier and at heavier weights, before the summer dry.

"If we can achieve high growth rates through the spring period, we can carry fewer lambs through into autumn and this would have benefits across the whole flock."

While their 1900 Highlander ewes are performing well – with average lambing percentages of 138% – Jim believes that with more herbs in their system, they can afford to run a smaller but higher-performing flock.

With Farmax models showing the potential economic advantages of increasing the area in the specialist herb mix to 30%, the Spalls are aiming to treble the area they have in these specialist crops over the next few years.

The couple have had great success with both the establishment and longevity of the chicory, plantain and red and white clover mixes. They still have stands performing well after five years, but they do try to avoid grazing them over the winter months.

The need to spell these forages over winter means, that with more of them, they will need to consider growing more winter feed crops to make up for the lost ground.



In establishing the chicory, plantain and clover stands, they grow summer rape, followed by an autumn-sown Italian ryegrass and sow the herb and clover mix in spring. Weeds can be a problem in that first year, particularly red root and nodding thistles, and these need to be managed.

Jim says while the chicory and plantain are a valuable feed, the real benefit comes from them being ideal companion plants to clover, which really drives stock performance.

The mix needs to be rotationally-grazed, although Jim admits they tend to graze the stands a lot harder than what is recommended. This makes spelling over winter even more important.

The crops are relatively drought tolerant – important in the Hawke's Bay – and while lucerne would be an alternative forage, an under-lying soil pan means it cannot be grown on most of the Spall's farm.

Pushing the envelope even further by increasing the area in plantain, chicory and clover to 60% would, the models suggest, benefit the Spalls bull-beef operation.

Jim is closely following trial work being carried out at Massey University, which shows that chicory, plantain and clover crops have potential to drive post-weaning growth rates in cattle so they are going into winter weighing an average of 300kgLW. Assuming they maintain steady growth rates over winter and spring, these cattle could be finished by December or January.

The Spalls winter 240 R1 bulls and 111 R2 bulls on an intensive cell-type pasture system alongside 30 breeding cows. At this stage the cattle are not grazing the plantain, chicory and clover, but may well do in the future.

The Spalls will be sharing the progress with other farmers in the programme through a series of workshops.

John MacPhee

Our main objective:

To determine how relevant killing up percentages are, what impacts on them, and the return on investment if looking to increase them.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Hawke's Bay



Farm type: 700 hectares - rolling hill country with some easier flat land



Stock numbers: 3,500 breeding ewes and 120 angus cows

Our main outcomes

- Successfully completed one year of a trial to determine what affects the killing out percentage of lambs. Results so far have confirmed their pre-trial hypothesis, but year two of the trial (this season) will look to shed more light on the topic.

Our most effective learning channels

- Support from our meat company to carry out the trial and communicate results back to us.

"In the past when extension type programs have been offered there have been ideas and theories to improve on-farm performance but there was not the necessary follow up to help farmers put the practice into action. I believe the RMPP pilot is focusing more on much needed implementation support."

Graham and Shaw Mackintosh

Our main objective:

To raise lambing percentage by 25% and have a better idea of how our stock are performing against other farms.

Farm system:

Breeder/ Finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Hawke's Bay



Farm type: 400 effective hectares
- half flat, half steep to medium
hill country



Stock numbers: 2,200 sheep and
around 200 beef cattle

Our main outcomes

- The decision to introduce lucerne into the pasture mix for this year.

Our most effective learning channels

- The ability to discuss and ask questions of the independent experts has enabled us to make clear decisions about how to improve our operation going forward.

"It was a bit of an eye opener that some of the pastures [what we thought was pretty good tucker], although there was plenty there, the nutritional value of it, even plantain at certain times of the year, didn't have a very high proportion of good nutrition."

Our main objective:

To drive an all-round lift in production - by identifying any deficiencies in the operation and developing ways to address them. This will include identifying strategies to deal with drought conditions.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Hawke's Bay



Farm type: 295 effective hectares - most easy to medium hill country (255 hectares), the rest flat



Stock numbers: 3,200 sheep and around 240 beef cattle

Our main outcomes

- Increased cropping, with a particular focus on summer forage.
- Implementation of a herbage testing programme for the farm.

Our most effective learning channels

- The combination of learning channels, having an independent expert give a talk at a farm visit, where the group can discuss the ideas between ourselves as well.
- Support from the meat company to develop a herbage testing package for the group. This was an important push for the group members to actually begin herbage testing after learning about it from an independent expert.

On-farm changes

- More cropping to get lambs off earlier and reduce exposure to drought.
- Monitored three ewe and lamb mobs on different crops. With these results in, more land will be converted to crops.
- Dropped ewe numbers slightly.

"If you're wondering whether it will work, or if you're having issues, those independent guys have usually got the knowledge to say that it's probably not a good idea or we should try this."

Willie and Fee Wilder

Our main objective:

Our main objective is to lift profit to help drive a successful succession plan. Critical to achieving this will be drought proofing our property.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Hawke's Bay



Farm type: Easy rolling to steep, with some flats



Stock numbers: 4,300 Sheep,
350 Beef

Our main outcomes

- Significant progress has been made on the farm succession plan. Before the pilot, bringing up the topic was difficult, but now we have successfully completed the first stage of the plan which involved the parents moving off the farm.

Our most effective learning channels

- Independent experts have provided valuable advice to get the succession plan moving, but also other projects like re-seeding an area of pine tree land that had been cleared.

On-farm changes

- Buying top-performing rams.
- Experimenting with different summer crops.
- Soil testing has been directing funds to paddocks that need the most attention.
- Reseeding pine block.

"I think it would be quite good to have a resource that shows what people are doing so we are able to go somewhere and find it."

Willie and Fee Wilder

Willie and Fee Wilder run a 690ha farm operation in Central Hawke's Bay. The home block is 340ha and they also have a 350ha lease block 20mins away in an area called Oueroa. Altogether they are running 6500 stock units. The opportunity came up to join the RMPP through their meat processor, ANZCO. With everything else that was going on on-farm at the time Willie's first reaction was "do I need anything else going on?" but after meeting with Alan McDermott, ANZCO's agricultural manager, it was a "no brainer".

Starting off as an individual pilot farm, the topics the Wilders wanted to investigate were succession planning, looking at their different soil types, ram genetics, investigating more drought resistant crops and reseeded pine tree blocks after felling. Chris Garland from BakerAg worked alongside the Wilders to look at a succession plan. It took one family meeting with all siblings (an older brother and sister) and all spouses to get those sticky questions out in the open. Willie believes that without Chris present, family members may have been more reserved and conversation would have not flowed like it did. "Dad always had a plan in his head but really there was so much more to it once the investigating started. Sure Mum and Dad miss the farm like hell but must be proud to see both their sons farming."

The next step was to look at the different soil types on the farm and start spending money more wisely on fertiliser. Willie believes that the days of just blanketing the farm in one type of fertiliser are over. "We got every paddock on the home place soil tested - all 80 paddocks. The results were astonishing

as we learnt we had a huge variance. We are now looking at using different brews for different paddocks with lime coming into the equation a lot more. It also means in tighter years we can concentrate on paddocks that need it. Even just having these results has made being a part of the RMPP programme worth it in my opinion."

Six years ago the Wilders changed where they brought their rams from and with persuasion from Alan, went to the top pick of those. The main reason for change was to introduce some facial eczema tolerance. The benefits of this decision were huge in the past year with most of Hawke's Bay being heavily hit with F.E. and the Wilders escaping mostly unharmed with only 12 ewes out of 3200 coming out clinical. Spore counts of 125,000 were recorded on the farm last year as an indication. Investigating new crops to try and combat the dry is still a work in progress but last year they put 10ha of sorghum in after trialing 3ha the year before. Willie was really impressed with its drought tolerance - it kept growing when everything else was brown after baling 15 bales/ha of baleage!

After logging 21ha of pine over the last six years the big question was what to do with the paddocks. Willie was keen to put most of it back into grass but after a not so successful attempt at re-grassing when the first lot of trees were felled, through the pilot programme they got in an expert to give them some good advice.

"The first time we burnt the slash then brought some floor sweeping from the seed merchant and flicked it on with the helicopter.



What we have ended up with is a paddock full of weeds and with a whole lot of different grasses growing in it”.

Between that and the next harvest of trees the Wilders had come on board as pilot farmers. Alan knew of a professional agronomist in Gisborne who had since retired but was a major influence when they were breaking in a lot of the hill country up there. The next time Willie sprayed out the paddocks twice; once in the spring and then in the autumn. Following that he had a burn and then applied a proper crawling grass called Rohan after receiving sound advice. He now has two covered-in faces of new grass with the key being spraying out those weeds and old grasses, having a good burn and getting the right seed on the nice warm ash left behind.

The Wilders have now moved from an individual pilot trial to a discussion group with the rest of the ANZCO pilot farmers. Willie and Fee hosted a discussion group

in mid-January 2017. Although the farm was looking at its worst with the onset of an early drought at the discussion group, it was good to get some expert advice from professionals on some very topical subjects that the group as a whole were working through. Chris Garland from BakerAg talked on leasing land and succession and Richard Hilson from Vet services Hawke's Bay did a ewe body condition scoring demonstration followed by a dissection of a faecal egg count reduction test recently done by the Wilders. Local Farmer Sam Morrah talked on feeding ewes on crop and showed the results he had found using FarmIQ and Paul Muir who is a local agronomist gave a presentation on the pros and cons of different forages.

Willie and Fee have not regretted taking up the opportunity to be involved in this project because, with a push in the right direction and a little bit of professional help the outcome has been hugely significant to their farm business.

Blair Holt

Our main objective:

To help provide strategies to manage dry conditions. This will provide some safety or leeway in particularly dry years and result in greater returns.

Farm system:

Finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Hawke's Bay



Farm type: 270 effective hectares
– all rolling medium hill country
with some summer cropping (12-16 hectares)



Stock numbers: Around 1,500
sheep and 200 beef cattle

Our main outcomes

- Discovered that the grain feeders the farm had hoped to install in every paddock are unsuitable during lambing because most ewes and lambs like to stay in their own area, and therefore don't eat the grain. There is also the risk that some ewes over-eat which has caused some deaths.

"The projects other farmers are running will take time to show results. I expect that in the next half of the pilot there will be more interaction between the farmers because everyone might have some results to share."

Our most effective learning channels

- Independent experts, have had some interesting information. The financial strain (due to drought conditions) has meant the farm cannot make any changes as a result.

Patrick and Lesley O'Rourke and son Andrew

Our main objective:

To get expert advice to tweak our current farm systems to help us get through the inevitable dry summers in a better financial position than we do currently.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Hawke's Bay



Farm type: Rolling, but with two steep gorge regions at the back of the property



Stock numbers: 600 ewes, 150 lambs, 840 beef, 323 deer

Our main outcomes

- Settled on the best farm system for our situation, which helps to shield us from major losses in drought years.
- Winter oats followed by summer rape and turnips (for a two crop rotation to go back to pasture).

Our most effective learning channels

- Independent experts, specifically our Farmax consultant, who has worked with us to develop the best farm system for our situation.

On-farm changes

- Changed stock ratio by rearing less calves and buying more in later after summer creating a more resilient system in times of drought.

- Put in winter crops (oats). Look to triple our cropping overall after doing analysis through Farmax.
- Implemented a herbage testing programme.
- Treating young ewes for leptospirosis which has improved lambing percentage.
- More focus on finishing bulls on time.

"They took us to a paddock that was plantain and clover, and it just looked great. But when it was tested for NDF (Neutral Detergent Fibre) only a couple of days before, it was nowhere near what it looked. It was quite an eye opener, it was the sort of crop that you would think would be absolutely rocket fuel for lambs, and it was actually only half rocket fuel."

Patrick and Lesley O'Rourke and son Andrew

Introducing Farmax and utilising an expert to help guide them through the programme has given the O'Rourke family the confidence to change their system to better fit their conditions.

Paddy and Lesley O'Rourke, along with their son Andrew farm a 532ha property in Rissington, 30kms north west of Napier. They run 6000 Stock Units with bulls, cows, sheep and deer.

The O'Rourke's first became involved in the RMPP pilot through their meat processor, Progressive Meats. They were open to making changes and knew their farm could be improved but were unsure how to go about it.

Key objectives were around wanting to improve the performance of their farm particularly in drought conditions. Paddy and Lesley also wanted to improve the performance and sustainability of their farm as part of succession planning for their son Andrew.

The rolling contour of the property allows for only limited cropping and it is a long narrow farm with two gorges to negotiate. The main challenge was that the current business model at the time was not able to cope with changes in climate. Over a five-year period the good years did not outweigh the losses in the bad ones.

Rebecca McNutt from Progressive Meats connected the O'Rourkes with specialist John Cannon, at a B+LNZ workshop. John

had been a local top farmer and his local knowledge was critical for gaining Paddy's confidence. Farmax was used to model a number of different scenarios to give the farm team the opportunity to see the changes in action and choose the scenarios they wanted to implement on-farm.

The main changes to the system were that there have been tweaks in stocking ratios, particularly around rearing less calves and more crops are being planted in both winter and summer with the aim to triple the overall amount of cropping.

Using Farmax was critical as it gave Paddy the evidence he needed to make a bold decision.

"I'm pretty excited about the next 12 months, knowing where we are at the moment and knowing how we are moving ahead. It's all very well wanting to get ahead but you have got to know how to do it."

John was impressed with how well the farm was performing in good years

"Paddy put a lot of understanding into what was going on in his business because he is a keen farmer and he enjoys it and he understands it. My job is to push him and poke him and prod him along until he eventually gets to the right decision for him."

Rebecca believes the best approach is a whole of farm assessment with a subject matter specialist who can provide some direction to farmers without telling them what to do.



This entails showing the farmer a number of scenarios for improving farm performance then allowing the farmer to choose which option suits their style of farming best.

The modelling was key to showing Paddy the effect of climate on farm performance. It also gave Paddy confidence in his farming practices in good years. The scenarios enabled the farm team and John to discuss different financially viable options. They had the chance to choose from a range of credible options. The farm team were given direction without being told what to – at the end of the day the choice was theirs.

Paddy and Lesley see independent experts/specialists as extremely valuable for help and advice. They also see the benefit of using Farmax as a tool to model performance

outcomes. By utilizing both an independent expert and also using a decision-making tool, this gave the team the confidence to put their ideas into action.

The RMPP pilot has been the catalyst to turning this farm into one that is more sustainable into the future and John has helped this farm team move to a system that over the long term yields better returns, by making it more resilient in dry periods.

Hawke's Bay Feed Grower

Main objective:

The main area for improvements will come through growing better feed by looking into different specialist crops that may fit into their system. Overall, they just want to get exposed to what other farmers are doing to make improvements in their own operation.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

A full year evaluation is yet to be completed so no additional information is available.

Basic Stats



Location: Hawke's Bay



Farm type: Easy rolling to steep, with some flats



Stock numbers: 4,300 Sheep,
350 Beef

Hawke's Bay Lamb Fattener

Main objective:

The farm is looking to see if they can increase their profits significantly by fattening lambs on a combination of grain and plantain clover mix instead of the current plantain clover mix diet.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Hawke's Bay



Farm type: Half easy rolling country, Half stepper



Stock numbers: 6,180 sheep, and 440 beef

Main outcomes

- Completed one year of their grain feeding trial. They have refined their grain feeding system by introducing nutrition testing for the green feed the lambs are also getting. This will allow them to make a more informed decision about the best supplementary grain to use, whether it be barley (which was used for the first year of the trial) or something else.

Most effective learning channels

- Independent experts - the animal nutritionist was the most valuable input as part of the pilot. Before speaking with her they had not considered nutrition testing the green feed, but now it has become an important piece of the puzzle.

"Farming is changing and if you don't change with it you are going to get left behind. You can see that happening already on some farms, they're just not adapting to the changing environment."

Mark and Pauline Bradley

Our main objective:

To learn from the pilot and see an increase in production.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Hawke's Bay



Farm type: 537 effective hectares
- 112 hectares flat, 420 hill
country, 5 hectares of cropping



Stock numbers: Around 4,350
sheep and 250 beef cattle

Our main outcomes

- Sown eight hectares of lucerne on advice from a lucerne expert brought in by our meat company. The full benefits have not been seen yet due to drought conditions.

Our most effective learning channels

- Independent experts have been the most effective learning channel; they have been the main reason for sowing the quantity of lucerne we have.

"As a result of meeting with other farmers I got the contact information for other farmers in the group. This has been particularly useful for talking with one of the farmers in our group that knows a lot about plantain."

Ian Hopkins and Shelley Dew-Hopkins

Our main objective:

To develop a farm system that consistently produces premium lambs.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Northern Manawatu



Farm type: 670 effective hectares (700 total hectares) - 130 hectares flat, and 540 hectares medium to steep hill country



Stock numbers: 150 beef cows and 200 trading cattle

Our main outcome

- The main outcome this year has been a greater focus on forage crops to improve the feed our stock are getting. We have confirmed that lucerne is a good fit for our system so we will plant a larger area of it next year.

Our most effective learning channel

- We have found the advice from lucerne experts to be particularly useful for our operation.

On-farm changes

- Fenced off waterways on flats to ensure lambs are not lost.
- Looking to put single lambs onto flats to enable quicker growth.
- Looking to grow better feed from specialist crops such as lucerne.
- Change from plantain and chicory for better persistence in our locality

“The resources the experts have been able to bring to the table have been valuable. Their information is backed up with research that we would not be able to do ourselves.”

Manawatu Soil Improver

Main objective:

The farm's main objective is to get independent expert advice on their soils so they can learn how to best manage them to grow grass and crops more efficiently. This in turn will mean they can fatten their lambs and beef more effectively.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher for sheep and finisher for beef.

A full year evaluation is yet to be completed so no additional information is available.

Basic Stats



Location: Manawatu



Farm type: Mostly flat to rolling, with some steep gullies.



Stock numbers: 1,600 sheep, 180 beef

John and Brenda Stewart

Our main objective:

To improve the profitability of the farm with existing staffing levels, while maintaining a chosen lifestyle.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Our main outcomes

- Improved breeding programme on-farm, which includes mating our R2 heifers (using A-I to ensure low birth-weight progeny), and putting a Southdown ram over our hoggets.
- Improved pasture management and soil testing. We have increased our cropping area to improve pasture renewal and to ensure all stock are offered top quality forage at all times of the year, and we have begun soil testing to help target our fertiliser use.
- Introduced a feed budget to improve strategic decisions about stock buying and selling.
- Started farm succession discussions.
- Started benchmarking against other farms.
- Using FarmIQ.

Our most effective learning channels

- The meat company has been very supportive in helping us implement a wide

Basic Stats



Location: Manawatu



Farm type: 690 effective hectares (730 total hectares) - 290 hectares flat to easy rolling, and 400 hectares rolling hill country



Stock numbers: 3000 breeding ewes, 1000 replacement hoggets, All Lambs finished; 450 Dairy Grazers on weight gain contract; 160 Angus breeding cows and replacements; 100 Rs1/ Rs2 Angus Bulls (for hireage to Dairy Industry).

range of changes. The facilitator has had regular meetings with the farm team and, where necessary, has set us up with the right expertise to move forward.

- The expert in feed budgeting was valuable in getting our feed budget up and running. Before meeting with him we did not know where to start when it came to developing a feed budget.

“Now’s the time where all the initial actions that we took to implement change are going to get results; the hoggets have lambed successfully to the Southdown Ram. The target number of heifers are in calf, with others culled early. So we are in that transition period, but the people we have had to help us have been fantastic.”

James and Kate McKay

Our main objective:

Increase our lambing percentage so we are consistently achieving 150%.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Tararua



Farm type: 100 hectares flat to rolling, 270 hectares steep hill



Stock numbers: 2,500 sheep and about 200 beef cattle

A full year evaluation is yet to be completed for James and Kate so no additional information is available.

"I think that talking with experts will allow us to "leapfrog" mistakes", as advisors have seen what other farmers have done and know what works. Their knowledge will allow us to combine the best practices from a range of other systems to optimise success on our farm."

James and Kate McKay

The opportunity to make production and profit gains was what spurred Alfredton farmers, James and Kate McKay, to become involved in the Red Meat Profit Partnership (RMPP).

Encouraged by their ANZCO livestock rep, James and Kate joined the programme in 2015 and have had the opportunity to look at some key aspects of their farming system. This has included sitting down with local BakerAg consultant, Richmond Beetham, who has helped the McKays look at their ultimate goal of mating a 50kg hogget. Increasing weaning weights and looking to diversify their forages has also been a goal for the McKays.

Te Keo is a 400 ha farm located 18 kilometres east of Eketahuna and is a summer safe, breeding and finishing property which was purchased by the McKay family in 1970. James' parents, Murray and Mandy McKay, bought the farm off the family in 1983 and James and Kate took over the property in 2015 after a number of years of careful and thorough succession planning made possible with the foresight and hard work of Murray and Mandy.

One year into the pilot farm programme, James and Kate McKay have seen the benefit in being involved in the RMPP.

"We enjoy being innovative famers and we saw this programme as a great vehicle to continue to be progressive in our methods. The programme will allow us to have access to some expert knowledge we may not have had otherwise.

The access to expert assistance and opportunities to share knowledge and practice with a range of sheep and beef

farmers has been a real benefit. We have always valued and benefited from quality discussion with other farmers as well."

At a recent pilot farm day at Te Keo, the McKays were able to share information and experiences with other local and pilot farmers and from three companies with specific expertise – StockCare, BakerAg and AgriCom. Alan McDermot, Agricultural Manager from ANZCO, also gave a big picture message about what our markets are now expecting from us.

One of the main changes the McKays are making is putting their hands on all of their sheep.

"We are not relying on our eye at the drafting gate. We have a better understanding of our machine (sheep) and when and how much it needs to be fed."

James and Kate have been working with StockCare for the past four years to help accurately predict how their sheep will perform a long way out from lambing which has been great for budgeting. The inclusion of forage crops (Rape) to get lambs off the hills, to give the ewes more space in the summer and look after the tail end better, has been key.

"Break feeding of light ewes this year in August for a month has made a big difference enabling us to set stock multiple ewes at 74 kgs and condition score 3.3. Feed budgeting has helped us ensure we don't keep hold of trade lambs too far into the autumn/ winter. We feel there is still a lot more room for improvement in terms of weaning weight and lambing percentage



and, with the use of our four years of stock monitoring, we can hone in on specific details such as lamb growth rate on mum or our trade lamb seasonal growth rate and sale pattern with real data and make changes.

“We feel most of the low hanging fruit has now been picked so we are turning to mating of our hoggets and the diversification of forages.”

Feedback from the farmers who attended the pilot farm day at Te Keo was overwhelmingly positive.

Bryce and Julie Stephenson, from Bideford in Wairarapa, thought that there were quite a few ideas that they will take back and look to implement in their own farming system.

“There was lots of useful information and the speakers were really good. We are in a discussion group and a lot of that is focussed on-farm which is good, but it was great to have the experts in the room who gave us a lot of extra information.”

Wairarapa Data Recorder

Main objective:

To build a closer relationship with their meat processor and develop clear guidelines on their requirements, along with development of a farm management system that will deliver a premium product on a consistent basis.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Wairarapa



Farm type: 755 effective hectares (145 hectares not effective) - 495 hectares medium hill country, 260 hectares of flats.



Stock numbers: Around 7,500 sheep and 120 beef cattle

Main outcomes

- This farmer has been using FarmIQ to record a range of different measurements that he had not taken before. This has meant reviewing the way the farm accurately records data.
- There have also been pilot spinoffs such as documenting the water supply and paddocks.

"The big change we have made is that we are now recording how we are bringing stock into the yards and things like that."

Most effective learning channels

- This farmer likes small-group discussions for bouncing ideas around and gaining insights and is a member of two groups outside of the pilot.
- He also likes using independent advisors in his farm business and has an independent expert on his board.

Mike and Robyn Warren

Our main objective:

To improve meat quality and demand for the product.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher for sheep and finisher for cattle.

Basic Stats



Location: Wairarapa



Farm type: 1,200 effective hectares – 900 hectares of flats and 300 hectares of hard hill country



Stock numbers: Around 9,300 sheep and 300 beef cattle

Our main outcomes

- We have been using FarmIQ to record a range of different measurements that we had not taken before. As a result of this information I am considering planting different crops in different parts of the farm.
- Using FarmIQ via the pilot has also resulted in us documenting our water supply lines and paddocks.

Our most effective learning channels

- We are part of several discussion groups outside of the pilot and like being part of these as they are a good way to get ideas.
- We also rate the farm visits organised by our discussion groups and are looking at using sub-clover as a result.

“We have information from a lot of different sources but it has never been collated in the one spot before. I think it is going to be a key thing moving forward.”

Mike and Liz McCreary

Our main objective:

To achieve a premium eating experience for consumers on a consistent basis.

Farm system:

Finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Wairarapa



Farm type: **540** effective hectares (620 hectares in total) – all effective hectares flat land



Stock numbers: Around **6,000** sheep and **500** beef cattle

Our main outcomes

- Change to using EID which has meant we are gathering much better lamb data.
- We have developed a strong working relationship with the meat processor through using new technologies such as FarmIQ for improving data collection.

Our most effective learning channels

- We found the podcasts to be very effective and asked a question in one of the conversions on feed.
- We find a small group situation, such as the farmer discussion group I am in outside of the pilot, to be very effective.

On-farm changes

- Will be planting chicory late and plantain early for lamb feed based on information gained through pilot.
- Changing the way I am feeding lambs based on information out of FarmIQ.

“We are trying to achieve the highest eating experience for the consumer on a consistent basis. We have moved from trying to fatten meat for money to really caring about consistent growth. We want to find out what to do to get the best taste. We’re trying to think about the consumer law more rather than just think to the end of the fence.”

Marcus Edge

Our main objective:

To increase the profitability of our business through supplying a premium product into the marketplace.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Wairarapa



Farm type: 295 effective hectares (330 hectares in total) – 295 hectares of flats land (summer dry)



Stock numbers: Around 2,300 sheep and 300 beef cattle

Our main outcomes

- Assessing how on-farm practices such as forage, sex and handling can impact on eating quality of lamb.
- Using FarmIQ to capture on-farm data in order to assess the potential impact on eating quality.

Our most effective learning channels

- We like small group discussions and are a member of a local group outside of the pilot which we find useful for discussing problems and getting good feedback.
- We also like one-on-one in situations when technical expertise is needed.
- Social media and internet

“We have been involved with progeny testing in the past where the focus has been on increasing lamb growth and carcass yield. However, this project is targeting the consumer through eating quality. If we can consistently achieve a good eating experience for the consumer, we can charge a premium for our product.”

Warren and Judy Tocker

Our main objective:

We are a specialist lamb finishing business using cattle and baleage to maintain grass quality in a dry land farming environment. Our objective was to improve on the farm's current physical performance (i.e. Kg of product/Ha) by analysis of stock policies, forages and soil health and fertility.

We wanted to raise lambing percentage by 25% and have a better idea of how our stock is performing against other farms.

Farm system:

Finisher.

Our main outcomes

- The results so far, after discussion and analysis, indicated that the business was performing very well and that business scale needed to be addressed. So we have just recently sold this property and we are now looking for a larger property. Hopefully this will happen Autumn 2017.

Our most effective learning channels

- We liked receiving advice and knowledge from experts and will actively seek them out.
- We also enjoy attending workshops and had attended some B+LNZ events in the past year.

Basic Stats



Location: Wairarapa



Farm type: 85 effective hectares (15 hectares not effective) - 40 hectares light stony ground, 14 hectares easy hill country, 31 hectares of river and alluvial flats. In summer he has around 7 to 10 hectares of cropping



Stock numbers: Around 1,000 sheep and 16 beef cattle

On-farm changes

- Put in clover mixes and changed ratio of how they are planted.
- Putting in chicories to give a longer window through to February of quality feed.
- Using nitrogen to try and maintain vigour of new grasses.
- Purchased beef cattle and using them to help manage pasture quality.

"All changes are made through levels of confidence. The scheme gives you the knowledge and the confidence to apply that knowledge which has been really good."

Hodgen Family

Our main objective:

To see how we can increase the profitability of the farm operation by improving our use of both forage and genetics. The farm team (mum, dad, son and daughter who are all actively engaged in running the farm) are just extending on from what we have already been doing and see the pilot as the mechanism to help focus our plans and gain access to independent technical advice.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Our main outcomes

- We have reviewed sale policies at weaning which has enabled us to put more focus on keeping condition on our ewes and prioritizing young replacement stock. We have done this by regular weight targets for ewe hoggets and two teeths as well as condition scoring mixed age ewes and then diverting more feed into the ewes with lower scores. The scanning rate has increased by 20% overall in the first year and ewes at lambing are at target condition enhancing lamb growth rates.

Our most effective learning channels

- We have found using an independent advisor in a one-to-one situation to be a very effective planning medium. The key to this is having a good advisor who 'buys into' our goals and aims.

Basic Stats



Location: North Canterbury



Farm type: Flat to rolling hills



Stock numbers: 4200 sheep

On-farm changes

- Condition scoring ewes.
- Regular weight targets for hoggets and two-tooths.
- Selling all lambs at weaning (Prime or Store)
- Whole farm soil testing.
- Using ram harnesses.
- Changing our pasture management to include looking at growing specialist crops to meet seasonal feed demand eg. fodder beet

"This programme has been very effective, better than expected, it has surprised me really how good it has been."

Hodgen Family

Small management changes are having a big impact on the Hodgen family's North Canterbury sheep operation.

Despite having been in the grip of drought for the best part of four years, the family of Mike and Jan and their two adult children Dan and Nicky, say their sheep have come out of the drought better than when they went in. This is thanks to some low-cost management changes that have had a profound effect on their whole farm system.

"If we hadn't made those changes the drought would have hurt a lot more," says Dan.

"I didn't expect them to work as well as they did."

The family are benefiting from their processor Alliance's involvement in the Red Meat Profit Partnership programme, which has given participating farmers access to a farm consultant – which in the Hodgen's case, is Canterbury-based Jansen Travis.

Jansen's input has been a game-changer and rather than make wholesale changes on the 575ha operation, he has encouraged the family to simply shift their focus away from finishing lambs in summer to better feeding their 3,500 Kelso Romney ewes. The results have been instant. Within the first year, scanning percentages had lifted by 24% to 151% (in the middle of a drought) and lambing percentages and lamb growth rates have also increased.

More importantly, they are making much more effective and efficient use of their feed resources by partitioning it into priority stock, resulting in improved performance and significant feed savings.

Saving summer feed

Mike says they used to take real pride in finishing all of their lambs to 18kg and while they have always had around 80% of their lambs finished at weaning, it was their determination to finish the balance in their summer dry environment that impacted negatively on the whole farm system.

Jansen calculated that it required 60,660kg DM to finish all of their lambs to 17.5kgCW which at a value of 15-18C /Kg DM, meant it was costing \$10,918 in feed alone.

The lambs were being finished at the expense of ewe condition and this was reflected in scanning and lambing results that were gradually trending downwards

The change of policy to sell all lambs by the middle of December – prime or store – has turned this around. It has allowed limited summer feed resources to be partitioned into growing out ewe lambs and maintaining and lifting ewe body condition.

As the Hodgen's' lamb early in August, they are selling both store lambs and cull ewes on a stronger, early season market and having the ability to grow out ewe lambs gives them the option of mating this class of stock – generating extra income.

Ram harness revelation

The use of ram harnesses has also resulted in some surprising results. They found 93% of the ewes were mated in their first cycle and so could be put straight back onto maintenance feed with a follow-up ram.

"It's phenomenal how much feed we have saved for the price of ram harness and crayon," says Dan.



The ewes will remain marked, and at set-stocking, will be run in their mating dates. This means they are not set-stocking earlier than they need to and management over lambing is much more targeted.

Forages

This year they have, for the first time, grown a 5ha crop of fodder beet and this will be used for wintering ewes for around 70 days from June 1.

Dan says they have budgeted on growing a 15T/ha crop and this will enable them to winter a lot of animals within a small area. This allows them to save and build pastures for lambing.

Under the RMPP programme, the family carried out whole-farm soil tests, identifying the nutrient status of the entire farm in one-hit, rather than on a paddock-by-paddock basis.

Mike says the results were pleasantly surprising and resulted in fertiliser savings to the tune of \$20,000- which more than pays for costs of the tests.

They are now in the final year of the three year RMPP programme, but intend continuing on with their farm advisor and further refining their farm system to maximise stock performance and farm profitability.

Charlie and Katie Croft

Our main objective:

To get a greater percentage of lambs off mum earlier, and away as early store lambs. To improve the performance of the farm through improved agronomy.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Mid Canterbury



Farm type: Terrace rolling hills



Stock numbers: 2,200 ewes, 500 hoggets and 30 rams

Our main outcomes

- Some aspects of the pilot have been delayed because of the impact of the drought, such as measuring grass growth and wintering store lambs.
- The whole farm has been soil tested through the pilot and we are now applying a soluble fertiliser. The drought has meant that soil leeching is much less than we envisaged.

Our most effective learning channels

- A consultant has been assisting with farming advice and we have found learning from him to be very effective as he gives us confidence in our own decision-making.
- We have found the teleconferences to be a valuable learning medium for us in terms of engagement and flexibility.

On-farm changes

- Started using Farmax.
- Planting red clover to help with drought resistance.
- Using a soluble fertiliser due to drought.

"We are all thinking along the same lines (both farmer and independent expert) but he can provide us with information that cements the idea. It gives us confidence in our decisions by backing up with his experiences with other clients."

Charlie and Katie Croft

Even before Charlie and Katie Croft became involved in the pilot farm project they were already looking at ways to change their system to better cope with drought. The Croft's 300 ha farm in Amberley, North Canterbury was in the middle of a drought when they came on board with the pilot and the objective was to create a system that was more resilient to drought conditions. The rolling hill country property has 1900 ewes, 477 hoggets and 45 rams and 25 ha of cropping including maize, oats and barley for baleage. There is a mixture of soil types on the property and it is located on a water table but has no irrigation.

Having access to expert advice through the pilot project has boosted the Croft's confidence to make changes. Their meat processor, Alliance Group, who set up a group of farmers to be a part of the pilot, connected the Crofts with the appropriate expert advice.

Derrick Moot from Lincoln University visited and spoke about lucerne, a fertilizer rep and Wayne Allan, who is a Farm Consultant, also contributed specialist advice. Wayne used Farmax to model a range of drought scenarios which led to a number of changes to their system. These included further development of lucerne, sub-clover and red clover plus a trial of brassicas. A whole farm soil test determined soil health and a change to soluble fertilizer was made. They also reduced ewe numbers and increased the number of lambs finished in winter.

Being able to utilize a farm consultant regularly has helped Charlie and Katie build some resilience and flexibility into their business which should help them recover faster from a drought.

"Wayne gave us confidence in our decisions more than anything. We are all thinking along the same lines but he can just provide us with information that cements the idea... backed up with his experience with other clients."

Wayne sees his role as mentoring Charlie and Katie who he rates as very good farmers and helping them build more confidence.

"Charlie's always seeking something that's better and sometimes it's able to happen and sometimes he's probably in a good position where he is, but he's always seeking something better which is good."

Aside from the practical farm support, Charlie and Katie have felt more connected with other farmers through the pilot which has helped them deal with the harsh realities of farming in a drought. Shona Frengley, who is the facilitator for Alliance Group has been able to invite them along to additional events outside of the pilot group which has been helpful.

"Because they're on my radar they get invited to events that I run and they've both turned up at those and found them really worthwhile."

Combining expert advice with Farmax modelling has led to a powerful case for change giving the Crofts confidence to make some hard decisions

"We believe we are in a much better position than we would have been without the pilot. Being a part of the pilot and the ongoing support from Shona and Wayne is really important and it helps keep us focused on the longer-term outcomes"



McLauchlan family

Our main objective:

To bring the farm up to speed so it is in good shape for the next generation to take over, the strongest focus being on gaining good advice on the best crops to put in as we develop the farm further.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Mid Canterbury



Farm type: 1,160 hectares



Stock numbers: About 3,000 sheep and 1,100 cattle

Our main outcomes

- The farm has sown a plantain/clover mix on 20 hectares this year and plans to increase this by another 20 hectares next year.
- We now weigh our sheep and cattle and are recording the data online (instead of in our head).
- An expert advisor has been instrumental in the changes. We trust his advice and has seen that it works.

Our most effective learning channels

- We find one-on-one meetings with an independent expert the most effective way to learn and discuss ideas; we prefer this to a small group.

On-farm changes

- Growing plantain/red clover mix .
- EID tagging ewe lambs, a sample of lambs for fattening and cattle.
- Drafting every ten days rather than three weeks to keep a better eye on lamb weights.
- Replacing brown top with maize.

“We wouldn’t have done this (replacing brown top with maize) without talking to Tom (expert advisor) and being on these field days as I didn’t know the best way to go about it”.

McLauchlan family

When the McLauchlan family bought their Mid Canterbury farm in 2011 they were starting out with a clean slate.

There was no stock on the 430ha “Glengyle” when they purchased it, so the family initially relied on dairy support and crops to generate an income while they gradually built up sheep and beef numbers. They have since leased a neighbouring 300ha property.

They bought “Glengyle” after selling their mixed cropping farm in North Canterbury to dairy interests. Don McLauchlan says they were keen to move to a sheep and beef area, and get away from irrigation and the intensive management it requires.

Jutting up against the Canterbury foothills near Mt Somers, “Glengyle” sits at between 400m and 480m above sea level. Half the farm is flat and the balance is rolling downs – so it is all cultivable but most importantly it is relatively summer-safe, which was part of the property’s appeal.

The farm is very much a family business and was bought with a view to succession. Don farms alongside his wife Sharon and adult children Ben and Sarah. Ben specialises in the sheep while Sarah takes responsibility for the tractor work and cattle. Both Ben and Sarah have invested in stock.

“Glengyle” is now running 1500 breeding ewes, 50 beef cows, 206 R2 beef cattle, 320 autumn-purchased beef calves and 116 Angus steers for the Five Star feedlot. The family also grazes 1000 lambs every summer for ANZCO Foods. Having built stock numbers, the family is now looking at ways to maximise production while making best use of their resources.

Last year they joined ANZCO Foods in the RMPP programme and through the programme, are taking a critical look at their business to determine where the opportunities lie to increase production.

Having bought in-lamb Romney ewes from capital stock sales, the family know they have sheep with productive potential and these ewes have not disappointed. Last year the replacement-breeding ewes weaned 164% and this year scanned 184%. Even their hoggets scanned a very pleasing 125% this year.

With fertility inherent in this flock, the McLauchlans are now determined to allow the ewes to express their genetic potential through feeding.

Last year they grew 100ha of cash crops, but poor returns saw them change focus and now crops are grown for animal feed and as break crops, as part of a pasture renewal programme.

Crops such as Italian ryegrass, grazing maize, clover and plantain and fodder beet and kale are now being used for growing out and wintering stock.

Don says the grazing maize worked well filling a cattle-feed deficit in autumn and clover and plantain was ideal for finishing lambs.

As part of the RMPP programme, Don, Sarah and Ben visited a number of high performing farms. Having seen how the clover and plantain mix worked for these farmers gave the McLauchlans the confidence to try it on their own farm.

Don says it worked brilliantly for finishing lambs and growing young stock and they



will be doubling the area they have in the specialist forage mix from 20-40ha.

Being part of the RMPP programme has given Ben and Sarah access to new ideas and innovations as well as a support network, including ANZCO staff and farm systems scientist Tom Fraser.

They have recently carried out comprehensive whole-farm soil tests which has given them a picture of the fertility status of the whole property.

Don says while fertility was better than they expected and they are carrying out capital fertiliser applications on smaller areas as they work through crops and renew pastures.

As part of their focus on growing forages to drive stock performance, the family is weighing animals on an upgraded scales and measuring and recording how they perform on different feeds. A new electronic identification wand has also been a useful tool in recording livestock performance. One of the trials they have been carrying out is comparing cattle liveweight gains on fodder beet and kale crops. This year they have

20ha in fodder beet and 30ha in kale, and depending on the outcomes of the trial, they may increase the area in fodder beet by 10ha.

They also have 40ha in green feed oats and Italian ryegrass crops which are used for dairy heifers. These arrive in December as calves and are carried through until they are at the point of calving as R2s.

Coming from a cropping background, the family have a handle on growing crops. They are now turning their attention to fine-tuning their livestock management.

Being part of RMPP has allowed the family to identify and focus on what they are wanting to achieve within their business.

Don says he has never been part of any farming group before and is relishing the opportunity to get new ideas and management strategies.

"I'm getting a lot out of it already".

As he points out, with no history on the property, they are viewing the business as a clean slate and are looking forward to working as a family, to realise its potential.

Canterbury Soil Quality Improver

Main objective:

Interested in making tweaks to their system based on sound advice from technical experts - in order to improve returns in a sustainable fashion.

Farm system:

Breeder for sheep and finisher for beef.

Basic Stats



Location: Canterbury



Farm type: Rolling to steep



Stock numbers: 2,000 sheep and around 500 beef cattle

Main outcomes

- This farmer did not winter so many yearlings this year because of the dry conditions. This meant he had more pasture available for the younger calves, which had taken the stress out of wintering in a drought.
- This farmer wanted to improve the quality of the soil as it is deficient in sulphur. He is working with an independent expert to find a natural solution.
- He has a contract through his meat processor to supply the Japanese market; the scales, reader and tags will help him adhere to the strict criteria.

On-farm changes

- Wintering less cattle.
- Improving soil quality by getting a soil test across the farm.

"I have learnt a lot from these experts. It has given me the confidence that I am on the right track."

Most effective learning channels

- This farmer has really enjoyed having experts to talk through the ideas he had for making small changes to his farm. He has learned a lot from these discussions, which have given him confidence that he is on the right track.

South Canterbury EID User

Main objective:

Being able to use the EID system to identify some sort of road map or guide to producing the meat that the customers are going to buy and can be marketed in a way to produce a point of difference.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Main outcomes

- Implemented a Farm Environment plan that was a requirement of the project.

Most effective learning channels

- They have not attended any groups, field days, workshops, or heard from any experts. They are located quite far from the rest of the group, and the project has been a low priority for them.

Basic Stats



Location: South Canterbury



Farm type: Rolling to steep



Stock numbers: About 6,100 sheep, and 175 beef

“If they (independent advisors) can see what others are doing in a similar situation and getting a better result, I want to know about it.”

Gareth and Sarah Isbister

Our main objective:

To tighten up our systems by experimenting with different cattle breeds and feed, namely fodder beet, in order to get up to 70% of our beef hitting the top eating quality grade.

Farm system:

Finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: **Otago**



Farm type: **Rolling**



Stock numbers: **About 450 cattle, 650 dairy heifers**

Our main outcomes

- The main outcome from the pilot so far has been our increased use of the farm management software, FarmIQ.

Our most effective learning channels

- Attending the FarmIQ workshops has been a very effective channel for learning the FarmIQ system. We have been able to talk with developers of the system, and ask them specific questions about issues we are having. Each workshop has also focused on a specific area of the FarmIQ program.

On-farm changes

- Drafting cattle two weeks before getting sent to our meat processor and putting them back into draft mobs which had a positive effect on cattle's pH levels.

“Overall there has been some strong knowledge being shared around during the pilot.”

Otago Fodder Beet Grower

Main objective:

They want to be able to see what different pasture options they could be using to fatten their lambs and how it impacts not only the growth rates of the lambs but the eating quality of the meat. Then they can aim to get as many lambs as possible into the top percentage in terms of quality.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Main outcomes

- The main outcome for this farmer has been the successful implementation of fodder beet as feed for wintering cattle. He had tried it in the past with mixed results, but with the help of the pilot he was able to learn a bit more about the management of fodder beet. As a result he learnt from some of the mistakes he made in the past and achieved positive results this time.

Most effective learning channels

- Independent experts have been the most effective tool for identifying areas where this farmer could make improvements with fodder beet. He had tried it in the past with mixed results, but now after learning how to manage the crop better, his results have been positive.

Basic Stats



Location: North Otago



Farm type: Rolling to steep



Stock numbers: About 3,200 sheep, 310 beef, 460 Deer

On-farm changes

- Putting younger stock on fodder beet.
- Finished cattle four months earlier at same weights due to wintering cattle on fodder beet.
- Artificially inseminated some beef cows with high marbling bull. Results won't be known for 18 months.

"If you are thinking of doing something yourself, and you see it somewhere else and it's worked, great, or you might find they've tried it and it hasn't worked so it saves you from going down the same path."

Ross and Jo Hay

Our main objective:

To assess whether different forages and environmental factors make a difference to the eating quality in lambs by recording and linking data from birth right through to kill analysis.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher/ cropping

Our main outcomes

- Due to drought lambs were sold store and no data was able to be collected.
- Implementation of a Health and Safety Plan, and a Land and Environment Plan. We have also continued use of the full FarmIQ system, where we have seen benefits with its ability to monitor animal health and compliance activities.

Our most effective learning channels

- Availability of information from experts via conference phone calls.
- Attending the workshops for Health and Safety, and Land and Environment, have been the most effective channels as it has given us the encouragement required to get these two plans implemented.

Basic Stats



Location: North Otago



Farm type: Rolling



Stock numbers: 2,500 Sheep, 40 Cattle, 40ha crop

"What works for one person might not necessarily work for someone else, but it's still an idea you can take bits from."

Central Otago Efficiency Farmer

Main objective:

To find out what approach will provide the best return per hectare and stock unit. They are not tied to any particular class of stock or type of crop - but have an unrelenting focus on efficiency so any new approach will need to fit into this style of farming.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Central Otago



Farm type: Flat 1,300 hectares



Stock numbers: 5,500 sheep and 280 beef cattle

Main outcomes

- The farm has made a number of changes throughout the pilot which has resulted from the installation of irrigation and purchase of a new set of scales. These changes have included; trialling fodder beet for one year old cattle, a more efficient weighing and drafting process for cattle to improve average kill weights, finishing lambs on a 'high powered' grass mix, changing the ewe breeding program, and applying nitrogen.

Most effective learning channels

- The independent expert they were assigned at the beginning of the pilot has helped to sow the seed for a lot of the ideas they have tried so far.

On-farm changes

- Creating a wintering program for one year old cattle.
- More efficient weighing program.
- Use of nitrogen.
- Grass finishing lambs.
- Changed ewe breeding program.
- Growing barley.

"The communication with our meat processor coordinator has been great. She had provided us with the options and we have just had to say yes or no."

Karl and Rowena McDiarmid

Our main objective:

To look at the genetics of the sheep in our business to see if there are different options that may allow us to increase the number of lambs we can get straight off mum and onto the truck. This is important to us because of the climate and altitude we farm at in Central Otago.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Our main outcomes

- The main outcome from the pilot for us has been bringing together a business advisory group for the farm. The group includes our bank manager, accountant, a farm consultant, a vet, along with the whole farm team. We get together quarterly to discuss the direction of the business and keep the whole farm team advised on where the farm is heading.

Our most effective learning channels

- A combination of learning channels has been most effective. Farm visits have been organised which gives us an opportunity to hear from independent experts, in a practical environment, and then discuss it with other farmers at the event.

Basic Stats



Location: Central Otago



Farm type: Flat to rolling



Stock numbers: About 6,800 sheep, 450R2 Bulls and 500 bull calves

On-farm changes

- Instead of blanket drenching we now drench based on faecal egg counts.
- Developing more of an in-depth fertiliser plan.
- Looking at changing our genetics after hearing an expert.

“Don’t underestimate the importance of digging a hole [to learn about soils]”.

Otago Data Recorder

Main objective:

To continue to tweak their operation based on independent advice and hopefully find a cropping solution that will work best in their environment.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: **Otago**



Farm type: **Rolling to steep**
900 acres of arable and 2,100
hectares of tussock.



Stock numbers: **4,500 sheep and**
around 200 cattle.

Our main outcomes

- This farmer feels that his pilot progress has been constrained heavily due to the drought they are farming through, however he is pleased that the pilot has given him and his wife motivation to try some new approaches. The main change this year has been a move to more rigorous recording of farm data which has led to establishing an office in their home and this farmer experimenting with software to help manage the farm finances.

Our most effective learning channels

- The visits to other farmers (especially top-performing ones) had been very effective for this farming couple who enjoyed learning by seeing what others were doing and having discussion on these topics.

On-farm changes

- Put in 14ha of red clover mix.
- Measuring grass growth by having cages around the farm.
- Soil tested all grass paddocks and since changed what fertiliser they are putting where.
- Put a teaser ram out earlier than usual with the hoggets.

“It’s a thought provoking process, the questions that he [meat processor coordinator] asked us. It was stuff that we are talking about all the time but we never put it down in writing. Having someone come and actually talk to you about your business it really brings it into the front of your mind as a business and not just as a farmer.”

David and Ruth O'Neill

Our main objective:

To become more efficient at farming and work to improve our soils and bank balance.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Otago



Farm type: 389 hectares of rolling to steep



Stock numbers: About 3200 sheep and 100 beef cattle

Our main outcomes

- The main outcomes from the pilot have been improvements to cropping techniques and soil health as a result of expert advice from a soil scientist. We have implemented an improved way of sowing our crops, have increased our cropping area, changed fertiliser suppliers, and completed whole of farm soil testing.

Our most effective learning channels

- The most effective learning channel has been the independent soil expert, who has been responsible for us making a lot of changes during the pilot.

On-farm changes

- Used a 'grub and disk' approach to sow crops rather than direct drill which broke up soil pan.
- Growing more crops and keeping stock on them longer so no supplementary feed is required.
- Now using highly productive mix of grasses to fatten lambs.
- Whole of farm soil tests have allowed them to focus on specific areas when funds are limited.

"I think that every farmer should be bettering themselves in the pilot and we think we will learn off each other. It's the same old story you do the same thing and you will get the same results"

Otago FarmIQ User

Main objective:

To get the FarmIQ system up and running and integrated into their farming system which will allow them to build a better overall information system.

Farm system:

Finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Otago



Farm type: Mostly flat, small amount steep



Stock numbers: About 590 lambs, 1,265 cattle, 700 dairy grazers

Our main outcomes

- The farm has started implementing the FarmIQ system, which has included using it to do a stock reconciliation, mob movements, and paddock history. There are still many areas they have not touched on yet, but they plan to as they continue to learn more about the system's capabilities.

"On one hand you can learn new things, you can find out something new and look to adopt it, but on the other hand it gives you some confidence that what you are doing with your own farm system is either right or wrong. It does help seeing someone else doing the same sort of thing, it gives you a bit of confidence."

Our most effective learning channels

- The FarmIQ workshops provided useful insights into how the system works. They have been valuable because the number of instructors at the meeting has meant there was plenty of opportunity for one-on-one learning.

David and Sarah Smith

Our main objective:

To improve the fertility of the farm through a deeper understanding of our soils, achieve a higher lambing percentage and a 19kg average lamb weight.

Farm system:

Breeder/ Finisher (all lambs) Finisher (bulls).

Basic Stats



Location: Otago



Farm type: Rolling to steep



Stock numbers: 4,500 sheep and about 350 beef cattle

Our main outcomes

- We have focused on improving our soil fertility because we believe this will lead to an improvement in the performance of our lambs and bulls. So far this has involved performing an all-of-farm soil test which led to targeted use of fertiliser.
- We have also been condition scoring ewes and using a ram harness to improve how we manage our pregnant ewes.

Our most effective learning channels

- The most effective learning channel has been the visits to the top-performing farms, coupled with a talk from an independent expert. We liked how this expert asked the right questions of farmers to get them thinking.

On-farm changes

- Did a whole of farm soil test so fertiliser is now targeted to specific paddocks.
- Put ram out earlier and used a harness.
- Put all ewes to terminal sire.
- Split weaning dates.

“We will continue implementing the changes and are expecting to see some results.”

David and Sarah Smith

Increasing profitability in the face of tough market and climatic conditions is no mean feat, but it is what Otago farmers David and Sarah Smith have done this year.

Management changes, made as a result of their involvement in ANZCO Food's Red Meat Profit Partnership programme, has seen the Smiths save about \$57,000 on their fertiliser programme while increasing the volume and value of the meat and wool they produce.

David and Sarah farm 1450ha of rolling to steep hill country near Waikouaiti, North of Dunedin.

Running 4200 ewes, 1150 hoggets and 450 beef bulls, the couple could see potential to increase their productivity and profitability, so becoming part of the RMPP processor programme in March of last year, put them on a path to achieving both of these outcomes.

David explains that while they are part of a group of five ANZCO suppliers farming in Otago and Southland, each had identified areas they wanted to focus on that were specific to their business.

For the Smiths this was improving soil fertility, sheep production (lambing percentages and lambing weights) and lifting bull weights.

Through the RMPP programme, they brought in advisors with expertise in all of these areas and they are seeing results already.

David says soil fertility was the first area they focused on and this meant taking full-farm soil tests to establish a fertility baseline. They took 65 samples at a cost of \$3000, but resulting savings in fertiliser costs amounted to \$50,000-\$60,000.

This, says, David, was because soil fertility was better than they thought and allowed them to be more strategic with their fertiliser applications.

One of the most significant changes the Smiths have made through the RMPP programme is in their sheep policy. Rather than breeding replacements, they are buying in Romdale ewe lambs from three breeders and are putting all the ewes to a terminal sire.

This policy resulted in the average kill date moving forward by one-month last season, and an increase in the average carcase weight of 1kg to 18.6kgCW- this is despite extremely dry conditions.

David estimates that changing sheep breed and policy, and associated gains in performance and wool sales, has added \$60,000 to their bottom line.

This year they used ram harnesses which identifies early and late lambing ewes. This will allow feed resources to be used more efficiently and effectively.

The third area the Smiths have been focusing on is their bull beef. Sourced through ANZCO, the couple buy 450 Friesian bulls every year weighing 350kg-400kg liveweight.

David believes that fine-tuning their feed management will allow them to put an extra 30kg on each animal, at a value of around \$150. To do this they are using electronic identification tags to record weights of animals at regular weigh-ins. This will give David and Sarah an indication of which crops and forages are giving them the greatest weight gain at different times of the year.



For David, being part of the RMPP programme has been a positive experience.

“At this stage it’s been very beneficial. It has opened my mind to lot of different things and there is a lot more to come out of it yet.”

One of the highlights of the programme has been the opportunity to visit top-performing sheep and beef farmers in North Canterbury. Seeing how these farmers operate, especially in drought, was motivational and has given the Smiths’ further impetus to carry-on fine tuning their operation.

To see more from David and Sarah, head to www.rmpp.co.nz/page/extension for a short video on their experience in the pilot programme.

Otago EID Tagger

Main objective:

To get back involved in more weighing of lambs and condition scores for the ewes which will be a lot more valuable with the EID tags that will make tracking all the information a lot better.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Otago



Farm type: Flat to rolling



Stock numbers: About 4,530 sheep, 140 beef, and 560 grazing cattle

Main outcomes

- The main outcome from the pilot so far has been the implementation of the FarmIQ software into this farmer's farming system. He has been learning the system over the past 12 months and is slowly moving more and more information out of his farming diaries into FarmIQ.

Most effective learning channels

- The most effective method of learning has been one-on-one with the FarmIQ rep. This has been more effective than the workshops because all the information is tailored to the exact issues this farmer is having with the software.

On-farm changes

- EID tagging, more regular weighing of lambs.
- More efficiencies due to information all being in one place.

"Without the pilot, I think it would have taken me at least another five years to get to the stage I am at now with FarmIQ. It may have taken longer because I would not have had the motivation of the pilot to make a start."

Otago Data Recorder

Main objective:

The farm's main objective is to make sense of all the recording that they have been doing in the past. They have been doing all the necessary recording on farm that will be required for the pilot but have been unable to make it useful to their operation. With the pilot and the more detailed lamb by lamb kill data they will be able to tie the on farm recording with the outcomes at the meat processors to help drive improved productivity.

Farm system:

Finisher.

Main outcomes

- The main outcome from the pilot has been the implementation of FarmIQ onto all farms across the business. This has led to more efficient data collection and reporting.

Most effective learning channels

- The one-on-one visits by FarmIQ staff to the farms have been an effective way to learn the system. Also helpful is that the information is specifically tailored to their needs as non-typical breeder finisher farming business.

Basic Stats



Location: Otago



Farm type: Flat to rolling



Stock numbers: About 5,000 lambs, 200 beef, and 1,100 dairy heifers

"Being a corporate farm requires me to produce information and reports beyond those required by a standard owner-operator. In the past, this has required multiple and time consuming data entry into different reports. The FarmIQ system allows managers to enter data directly, which has resulted in a reduction in admin staff and lower overheads. It has also improved data accuracy, through farm managers taking responsibility for their own data entry."

Otago Cattle Tester

Main objective:

They want to learn how to produce better grading cattle beef through increased feedback from their meat processor which will tell them the areas where they are missing the top grade and the areas where they are hitting it. They will be able to run different tests and trials throughout the pilot to try and improve the areas they are deficient in.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

A full year evaluation is yet to be completed so no additional information is available.

Basic Stats



Location: **Otago**



Farm type: **Hill country through to flats**



Stock numbers: **About 13,000 sheep, 700 cattle, and 450 dairy grazers**

Richard Plunket

Our main objective:

Comparing the growth rates for yearling bulls on the fodder beet crop versus grass.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Otago



Farm type: Rolling to steep



Stock numbers: 300 sheep, 360 beef, 580 dairy cows

Our main outcomes

- We have completed two years of a trial where we looked at the merits of wintering bulls on fodder beet compared to wintering them on grass. We have had two successful years, and have seen enough from this trial to convince us to winter all bulls on fodder beet from now on.

Our most effective learning channels

- Farm visits have provided useful information, as we have been able to go on a series of visits to large bull fattening operations in Northland, the goal being to try and replicate our farm management systems which require very little labour.

On-farm changes

- Fattening bulls on fodder beet.
- Irrigation plans started.

“In your own mind what you think you are doing is the right way, but there are different ways to skin a cat.”

Otago Ram Tweaker

Main objective:

To focus on the growth rates of the lambs from the beginning. After they get something to aim for in terms of genetics and the eating quality of the lambs they will look at tweaking their rams.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Otago



Farm type: Rolling



Stock numbers: About 1,140 sheep, 305 beef

Main outcomes

- There have been no outcomes so far from the pilot, as they are still waiting on results from the lamb taste testing experiments.

"They (meat processors) are wanting a quality product to come to them, but we're also wanting a good price for it, so it (working closer together) works hand in hand really."

Most effective learning channels

- No channels have been effective throughout the pilots.

On-farm changes

- Ear tagging lambs as part of taste testing experiment.
- Started using FarmIQ but not overly happy with functionality it has provided with what he wanted.

Otago Stock Recorder

Main objective:

To record everything that is happening to their lambs from birth to processor in order for their meat processor to try and develop a system resembling BeefEQ but for lambs.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Otago



Farm type: Rolling to steep



Stock numbers: About 3,300 sheep, 67 cattle

Main outcomes

- The farm has steadily increased the number of lambs for draughting at weaning time from 900 in 2015 to 1100 in 2016.
- The kilo per lamb average has increased by one kilo this year as a result of changes to the stock meaning more feed was available for the lambs.
- The dry conditions meant the fodder beet crop was not as good as he had hoped to feed the ewes but will try again this year.

Most effective learning channels

- This farmer likes discussion groups and also farm visits as he thinks if you visit the right farm and talk with like-minded people you can pick up a lot.

On-farm changes

- Cut down stock numbers to match feed supply by getting rid of ewes and selling bottom 10% of lambs as store at weaning.

“There’s either gonna be money in my pocket, or it’s gonna make my life easier, because if it’s not doing either of them, then really what’s it achieving.”

Matt and Natalie McRae

Our main objective:

The main goal is to investigate and identify what is causing pre-weaning lamb growth rate issues. We will be experimenting with different pasture covers at lambing to see the results. There is interest in pushing the boundaries on the family farm that is yet to perform to its potential.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Our main outcomes

- The main outcome from the farmer's pilot to date was that the overall condition of our ewes have improved, we have reduced the percentage of ewes in the bottom quarter of performers and there is a much more even level of condition across our entire flock.
- Condition scoring and feeding accordingly had led to the flock we had focused on being in better condition, having a 10% higher lambing rate and producing an extra three to four kilograms of meat per twinning ewe. Having these results from investing more in feed has given us extra confidence to buy feed in as the margin to make it profitable is evident.

Basic Stats



Location: Southland



Farm type: Rolling some flat contour



Stock numbers: About 5,300 sheep, 230 grazing dairy heifers

Our most effective learning channels

- Learning in a small group where others ask questions and as it gives us more time to think and engage as well. I prefer this type of learning as I am a reflective thinker who needs more time available in group learning as opposed to one-to-one when there is more pressure to always be coming up with questions and keep the discussion going.
- Practical hands on workshops run by top farmers or independent experts and reinforced by either written material or other independents such as vets.

On-farm changes

- Condition scoring ewes.

"These top farmers always seem willing to help younger farmers – anyone who is willing to learn and open to what they say."

Nathan and Marilyn Parris

Our main objective:

To improve lamb production in terms of kilograms per hectare.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: **Southland**



Farm type: **Mostly flat**



Stock numbers: **3850 ewes, 930 hoggets, 130 R2 beef cattle, 100 dairy beef calves**

Our main outcomes

- We have brought our mean lambing date forward by around 10 days and are up 9% in meat production per hectare.
- Our kill date came forward by a month. We have been able to send 800 lambs 'straight off mum' to take advantage of the higher schedule earlier in the season compared to 400 the previous year, and these extra lambs 'straight off mum' were on average one kilogram heavier.

Our most effective learning channels

- Top-performing local farmers, farm consultant and mentor.

On-farm changes

- Sorted out cobalt deficiency.
- Scanning ewes and using results to preferentially feed.
- Moved to regular feed budgeting.
- Identifying best paddocks and creating a lamb finishing platform.

"We wanted to boost on-farm production and saw this programme as a good avenue to do it."

Nathan and Marilyn Parris

Nathan and Marilyn Parris are 'in clover' for the first time, their lamb weights and ewe body condition scores have lifted and they've made a lot more baleage.

The couple are part of the Red Meat Profit Partnership pilot farm programme with Alliance Group, which is helping them to improve pasture quality and lamb production on their Tuatapere farm in Southland.

As the major prong of their pilot farm project, they were keen to learn from high performing farmers and Alliance Group suggested Peter Horrell, from a neighbouring farm, as a mentor. Nathan wanted high performing farmer, now farm adviser Keith Milne involved and the first visit was made to the Parris' farm in July 2015.

Nathan is off a North Auckland sheep, cattle and deer farm. After university, he worked in the dairy industry for four years followed by 18 months on a mixed cropping farm. Over this time, Marilyn worked as an animal nutrition technician for PGG Wrightson. They then travelled briefly before returning to run Marilyn's parents' 450-hectare block of Waiau River flats and terraces north of Tuatapere for six years. The land is free draining, although it dries off quickly in dry spells, and all sheep are grass wintered.

They have been working to upgrade pastures and fences to gradually increase stock and this season are carrying around 3,700 ewes, 940 hoggets, 130 R2 beef cattle heifers and 200 calves.

Improving lamb growth was a priority. Four years ago, they made a switch from a Coopworth flock to a composite Coopworth-

Texel cross, as they had found the straight Coopworth required too much feeding and they knew a Texel cross would increase lamb carcase yields.

Through an analysis of their kill sheets for 2014, good opportunities were identified to improve lamb growth, both pre and post-weaning, enabling them bring their lamb kill forward so they could finish all their lambs.

Improving pasture quality was identified as the first step. A lack of clover growth was a problem and an advisor's observation followed by herbage testing identified a significant molybdenum deficiency – so Nathan took steps to address that. The couple already knew, from previous Optigrow tests, that the farm was deficient in cobalt but hadn't had much success with repeated use of injectable Vitamin B12. Peter suggested a combination of dusting and spraying cobalt sulphate on pastures instead. Initial testing this year has shown cobalt levels in stock are in the optimum range – and spraying costs are less than injections.

Peter and Keith also worked with Nathan and Marilyn to set up several paddocks specifically to finish lambs, post-weaning. Strategic use of cattle, topping and increasing stocking rates on these preselected paddocks during November kept the grass level down to lessen the competition for light and space, thus encouraging clover growth.

GrassCo has been measuring pasture covers every two weeks during the growing season. Pasture cover information is emailed to Nathan and copied to Peter and Keith – who can then make suggestions if they think any tweaks to the system might be needed.



This will also provide vital data on growth patterns to use for reference purposes in the future.

Twelve months into the programme and Nathan and Marilyn are really seeing results. The overall kg of lamb killed per hectare is ahead by nine percent, with all lambs finished on farm.

Their average kill date was at least a month earlier than in 2014-2015 with a higher average carcase weight. At scanning, the farm had a pasture cover of 2200kg DM/ha and ewes were one body condition score higher than the previous year.

Two tooth's and light ewes scanned 20% and 13% higher respectively than in 2015 and they have sold 600 bales of baleage and have 300 bales on hand - equivalent to 198t DM.

Nathan says the mentors' knowledge and familiarity with local conditions has been key to the improvements they have made on farm, providing a fresh perspective. Their aim now is to continue improvements and lift performance year on year.

Tom and Nicola Wylie

Our main objective:

Is to get the best advice on different cropping options for lamb finishing, to conduct some experiments, measure the results of the different options in dollar terms. And end up with a clear idea of which options are the best for improving our farm's profitability.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Our main outcomes

- Finished an extra 2,000 store lambs as a result of planting a new crop of red clover and chicory mix.

Our most effective learning channels

- Learning from other farmers and from an independent expert (a practical scientist who understands the wider context of farming).

Basic Stats



Location: Southland



Farm type: Gentle rolling



Stock numbers: 3000 ewes, 2500 trading lambs, 600 hinds, 110 velveted stags, 250 beef calves, 500 dairy grazing cows

On-farm changes

- Introduction of new forage mix after trial.

"I think the programme is positive, because if we can make some changes to what we are doing, and help to lead change in the region, to benefit us then it's going to be really good"

Andrea and Chris Bulleid

Our main objective:

To identify areas that will optimise the growth of lambs through to weaning.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Southland



Farm type: Rolling to steep



Stock numbers: About 5,000 sheep, 75 cattle, 350 dairy grazing

Our main outcomes

- Working to maintain ewe condition year round, in particular focusing on the 'bottom' end of the mob.
- Started to more methodically measure dry matter and tailor feeding to class of stock.

Our most effective learning channels

- Learning from independent experts, in this case, a scientist who knew how to relate to farmers in practical terms
- Hearing from and seeing what other top-performing farmers were doing.
- On farm consultant that helps produce solutions to problems

On-farm changes

- More focus on measuring dry matter yields to help with planning
- Condition scoring ewes by hand rather than eye
- Feeding ewes to achieve optimal performance

"90% of information you probably already know or it doesn't apply, but it's that 10% that you don't know or does apply that's important."

Mark and Leanne Heaps

Our main objective:

To lift production and increase profitability by bringing our average kill date forward, finishing 100% of our stock, and increasing our lambing percentage.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: **Southland**



Farm type: **Rolling with gullies**



Stock numbers: **7500 sheep and 20 beef cattle**

Our main outcomes

- In the last season we averaged 19.2 kg lambs up from 17.8 kg in the previous season. In addition to this, we went from selling 600 lambs to the store market previously to finishing all of our lambs in the last season.
- These improvements came about from scanning our ewes, and preferentially feeding them based on the results. We didn't mate our hoggets and instead concentrated on feeding our ewes better.

Our most effective learning channels

- Independent experts and top performing farmers.
- We also rate our meat company highly; they have been receptive to what the farmers in the pilot have wanted, have worked hard to keep the meetings interesting by inviting engaging and informative speakers that, otherwise as individual farmers we would not have

been able to access. It has also been our meat processor that has connected us with the independent experts that have provided the tailored advice.

On-farm changes

- Scanning ewes and separating out triplets, twins and singles so we can preferentially feed them accordingly.
- Improving our drenching regime to a stricter timetabled program.
- Split lamb mobs earlier into different lines to feed them accordingly.

"The independent experts were really helpful. We could trust their information which gave us more confidence to implement our ideas."

Dougal and Natalie Cameron

Our main objective:

To improve the performance of our lambs and fix the soil fertility on the new block we purchased a few years ago.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Southland



Farm type: Rolling to flat



Stock numbers: 2,700 sheep, 225 cattle

Our main outcomes

- We are working through a program of improving soil fertility and we have discovered through investigation that different paddocks require different approaches. This discovery is leading to improved results by focusing remedial work on the specific issue of each individual paddock. This will be a long-term project; however, we have already observed significantly better grass growth in the paddocks they have been working on.

Our most effective learning channels

- Visiting high-performing farmers to see first-hand the successful processes they follow.
- One-to-one sessions where we are questioned and challenged to establish for ourselves what changes we need to make to improve.

On-farm changes

- By digging holes and looking at soils there is now a game plan around pugging issues
- Looking to trial new summer clover crop

“Our meat processor is connecting us with these independent advisors and just because the pilot stops it doesn’t mean our relationships with the advisors cease as well. There will be potential to get back in contact with them and keep driving things along.”

Southland Lamb Grower

Main objective:

To get more lambs out the gate and gain more accuracy around what factors are leading to certain lambs growing faster than others.

Farm system:

Finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Southland



Farm type: Rolling hill country



Stock numbers: Trading farm – 22,000 lambs, 500 cattle and 800 deer

Main outcomes

- The farm increased the number of lambs out the gate from 22,000 to 26,000 at an average weight of 18.3 kg.
- Fodder beet as food for calves was abandoned as an experiment as it was too wet for fodder beet and cattle were in short supply.

Most effective learning channels

- This farmer likes farm visits and field days and thinks these are good learning channels. He is hoping to host a field day at the farm.

“The proof is in the pudding - working with processors via extension means that there will be more accurate facts to look at that will give farmers real evidence of what is working or not working as result of on-farm changes.”

Southland Hogget Mater

Main objective:

To improve the overall performance of lambs by getting them away earlier and at higher average weights.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Southland



Farm type: Rolling to flat



Stock numbers: 3,800 sheep,
380 deer and around 50 cattle

Main outcomes

- A new finishing programme was introduced, using 20 hectares sown with red and white clover and turnip mix for the lambs. The lambs were finished three weeks earlier and weighed an average of 18.3kg.
- FarmIQ has made them focus more on data collection, they find the programme easy to use and are able to trace the sheep back to the paddock using the system.
- This farmer has tried mating hoggets because the pilot lamb finishing programme gave him a window of opportunity.

Most effective learning channels

- He likes farm visits and field days and thinks these are useful learning channels. He has visited several farms through FarmIQ and enjoys talking with other farmers.

“Since our meat processor coordinator has come on board the relationship with them has got better. She is effective at communicating via email, has been out to the farm and gives us notice about events and the podcasts.”

Our main objective:

To help develop a lamb grading system at their meat processors and work out the best combination of genetics and lamb finishing pastures in order to hit the top grade.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: **Southland**



Farm type: **Easy rolling to high hill country**



Stock numbers: **About 57,000 sheep, 6,300 cattle**

Our main outcomes

- The main change the pilot has helped to drive is the improvements in monitoring on the farm. We are now focusing more on animal health, from condition scoring to performance of our two-tooths. We have also started recording using the FarmIQ software.

Our most effective learning channels

- The FarmIQ workshops have been a very useful way to learn the system. Before attending the workshops we had zero knowledge of FarmIQ and now we are comfortable using the system.

On-farm changes

- Body condition scoring both sheep and cattle three times a year and from this information preferentially feeding stock at the lower end.
- Change in staff structure has meant certain staff are responsible for certain areas such as animal health.
- Autopsied all dead lambs from two-tooths and found they were being over-shepherded. Have reduced stocking rate and left them alone which saw lambing percentage increase of 10%.
- Imported high marbling semen. Plan is to muscle scan lambs and establish elite eating quality flock.

"I like the model of meat company-led extension because I think if by the meat company and farmer working together we can add value to both of the business it can only be a good thing."

Barry and Julie Crawford

Our main objective:

We wanted to identify how different forages used for lamb finishing may affect the overall quality of meat produced, including taste and tenderness.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: **Southland**



Farm type: **Flat to rolling**



Stock numbers: **About 4150**
breeding ewes

Our main outcomes

- Changing the pasture species quickly has been a priority, and the continued use of red clover as a specialist lamb finishing area has been successful. The use of Italian ryegrass has produced more feed over the winter period. This was effective as the lambs were on average 1.3kg heavier than last year.
- Breeding ewe numbers have been reduced to make sure they were kept in good condition throughout the year, and also that there was enough cover for lamb finishing. This has been successful as there was an 11% increase in the tailing percentage this year.

Our most effective learning channels

- We find field days and workshops to be effective ways of learning and gathering ideas as we have the opportunity to talk to other farmers. We also like talking to independent experts to gain more knowledge.

“Farmers learn from farmers. However, everybody has to be willing to try new things and this will be hard unless the farmers can see the benefit.”

Roger and Alison Thomas and son Jeremy

Our main objective:

To record more in depth information. With the aim to increase kg's of red meat per hectare produced from our farm.

Farm system:

Breeder/ finisher.

Basic Stats



Location: Southland



Farm type: Gentle rolling to medium hill



Stock numbers: About 2,700 sheep, trading cattle

Our main outcomes

- Focus on ewe condition scores.
- More focus on pasture quality, lamb fattening.
- Increased recording of pasture growth, stock weights and compliance recording.

"Farmers will listen to an expert if he knows what he is talking about. There also needs to be an obvious beneficial outcome for the farmer and the extension should be relevant to farming at the time."

Our most effective learning channels

- We like one to one or small groups as the most effective ways to receive information.
- Farmers like to hear from other farmers about what works in their farming business.
- Evidence based science information communicated, in an easily accessible format.
- Hands on learning workshops are good for testing skills i.e condition scoring ewes.

Awhina Group



In 2016 the Awhina Group was offered the opportunity for a subset of the group members to participate in the RMPP Pilot Farm Extension project. The RMPP group consists of six central north island Maori incorporation sheep and beef farms where stock numbers range from 9000 to 35,000 SU wintered. One of the challenges faced by Maori Trust farms is complex ownership and the resulting need for timely and useful information to be available to all levels of the organisation that can facilitate good decision making. It was decided that the key focus for this group within RMPP would be to develop systems and tools by which farm staff can be better connected to their Boards (and vice versa) to enable more effective communication of key information to allow good operational understanding and decision making. The intention was that this would be useful for not only Maori Trust farms, but also any farm business where decision

making involves more than one person such as corporate or family owned farms. Key areas the group are looking at are measurement and information protocols to develop a benchmarking process of key seasonal indicators that will help inform decision making.

The group activity started with a GAP analysis of their farm accounts which helped identify opportunities specific to each farm. Monthly on-farm workshops have commenced where all levels of personnel associated with the farms are working together to review the questions of the month with participants including farm workers, managers and partners, consultants and trustees and in some cases, farm shareholders. These are done under the guidance of a senior farm systems scientist. Connections and discussions across the levels of those involved with each property are developing as is a network across farms for farm staff.

Key Focus Areas within the group

Members of the group have found they have a lot of opportunities in common but how they address them varies based on the stage of development, challenges and resources available to each property. Some of the opportunities being addressed include:

- Making use of EID to track ewe replacements through their lifetime and assess early indicators of lifetime performance.
- Adoption of hands-on body condition scoring of ewes at strategic times of year.
- Changing ewe mating date to better match spring pasture growth.
- Identifying the opportunity for improving lamb survival and pre-weaning growth rate through moving mating date back to better feed ewes in late pregnancy.

- Review of stock policies to optimise feed utilisation on farm
- Review of breeds and genetics for both cattle and sheep
- The open sharing of production and financial benchmarking data within the group to help identify opportunities to improve performance outcomes.
- The introduction of operational resources (animal handling systems) and information tools (Farm IQ) that gather accurate data and store and analyse information to assist on farm decision making and reporting.

One of the key outcomes to date is the development of a network of support for group members that the group would like to extend to other Maori Incorporations.

Farms

Te Pa Station

Basic Stats



Location: Ruapehu District



Farm type: Flat to steep hill country. 4021ha effective out of 6100ha



Stock numbers: 20,000 ewes, 5,000 hoggets, 1100 in-calf cows and heifers, 1400 other cattle



Pukepoto Farm Trust

Basic Stats



Location: King Country



Farm type: Hill country sheep and beef farm



Stock numbers: Ewes 6200, hoggets 1400. In-calf beef cows and heifers 400, 100 r2yo steers, 300 r1yo steers and heifers

Wharenui Station

Basic Stats



Location: Bay of Plenty



Farm type: 1088 effective ha, mixed cultivatable and steep hill



Stock numbers: 4100 ewes, 1400 hoggets, 670 r2 bulls

Tarawera Station

Basic Stats



Location: Hawkes Bay



Farm type: Predominantly medium to steep hill country, effective area 2865 ha



Stock numbers: 16,000 Ewes, 480 hoggets, 967 in-calf cows and heifers, 750 yearling cattle

Tautara Matawhaura Farm Trust

Basic Stats



Location: Bay of Plenty



Farm type: Hill country sheep, beef and dairy heifer grazing farm, 1550 effective ha



Stock numbers: 4200 ewes, 950 hoggets, 100 beef cows, 900 r-1 dairy heifers

Pumice soils developer

Basic Stats



Location: Central Plateau



Farm type: Flat to rolling, effective area 2135ha



Stock numbers: Ewes 7300, hoggets 2000, 380 in-calf cows, 70 r2 heifers, 70 r1 heifers, 50 r1 steers

Extension System Model

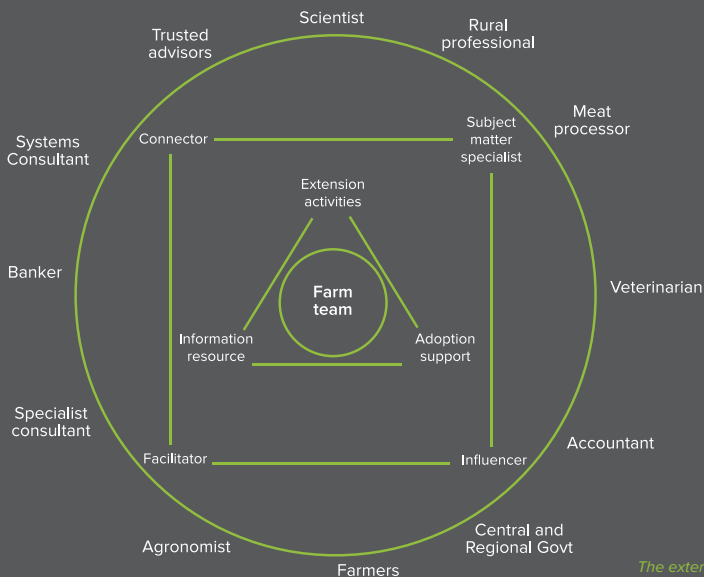


Figure 1 –
The extension system model

The model which has at its centre the farm team, highlights four things that are important for effective extension programmes. These are:

- **Well-developed information resources.** These are the physical and digital means of providing information on subjects to farmers. These can range from the more traditional written fact sheets to an interactive website.
- **Effectively facilitated extension activities.** Extension activities are the activities undertaken to provide opportunities for farm businesses to learn about a subject. Examples include field days, workshops, courses, and seminars.
- **Adoption support.** This is a means of providing follow-up from extension activities and information resources to help practice change to occur. Adoption support can take the form of mentoring, webinars, one-to-one consulting, accountability through a group of farming peers, or coaching.

- **Recognition of different roles in the extension system.** The four roles identified are connector, facilitator, subject matter expert and influencer/mentor. Connector is the role that brings farmer groups together, and/or helps identify the most appropriate subject matter expert for a group or individual. A facilitator is important for helping identify the topics to focus on (group and individual) and helps run extension activities. Facilitators also are integral to adoption support, helping to identify what is needed to help farmers make changes in farm. Subject matter specialists deliver information into different parts of the extension system. Influencers (or mentors) have a particular role in adoption support space to help build confidence when making changes on-farm. These roles are in the process of being more clearly defined as it has become clear that they can be blurred and under-recognised.

Extension examples

All meat processors have approached the extension pilot project differently. This has meant that a range of different extension methods have been trialled. Below are some examples of different ways the extension system model has worked over the past 18 months.

Young farmers group

Alliance Group set up a young farmers group, made up of five farm businesses located in Southland. Regular workshops have been held with group covering a range of topics. The information resource that really helped engage this group was providing killing sheet analysis. This benchmarked each business in terms of their lamb production performance against a larger group of farms and that of an respected high performing farmer. For some this was a significant reality check and at odds with their perception of how they were doing.

Providing support in the form of locally respected high performing farmers enabled some farm businesses to determine how they could increase their lamb production from a practical perspective. For example, one farm business changed the way they managed pastures with support from a neighbouring mentor farmer and farm adviser. Regular pasture measurement, tactical changes to pasture management, pasture testing to identify molybdenum deficiency and emphasizing better all year-round ewe condition have transformed lamb growth rates and productivity.

Farm tour

ANZCO Foods ran a farm tour with one of their farm groups. The idea was to get the group outside of their immediate regions

to visit a range of high performing farm businesses. The topics covered were a mix of reinforcing earlier workshops, and introducing some new areas for reflection. The farm businesses visited, along with experts, talked about feed planning (crops and pastures) and stock management (emphasising body condition scoring). Those who attended had follow up “homework” where they were asked to reflect on key points that had stood out for them, and write down what decisions might need to be made including key steps and resources that might be needed. This ensured that the trip was not just an extension activity providing some information resources, but also helped participants identify any next steps for their business. ANZCO could then follow this up with later workshops to help farm businesses with areas they identified they wanted to work on.

At the end of the trip, one participant said feed budgeting would be a great topic to follow on for a workshop, but highlighted the need for a session on this that included the chance to work on computers. Some extra laptops were sourced for this workshop so that each workshop participant could follow along on their own computer. One of the biggest successes of the feed budgeting workshop turned out to be exactly that; having the group be able to play around on the computers in the feed budget programme with their own figures and information that was relevant to their property. Having the

computers to work on engaged the group a lot more. This highlights the adoption support processes that are needed alongside extension activities and information.

Connector role

Greenlea Premier Meats have worked in the role of connector in their extension pilots, with the aim of putting farmers in touch with appropriate consultants and other industry professionals and providing follow-up and support as needed. An example of this support includes running an annual workshop for farmers to get together and hear what has been happening on-farms, hear from experts and interact with the Greenlea team. The workshops have been informative and well received. The speakers who presented and the opportunity to mix with peers allows for collaboration and sharing with farmers. Greenlea have found that by identifying the role they have in the extension system they are able to provide farmers with effective assistance and access to learning pathways.

Eating Quality

A key focus for Silver Fern Farms has been extending farmers' understanding of on-farm management practices and the effects on beef eating quality. To start their extension project, Silver Fern Farms approached six Prime Beef pilot farmers to work with. These farmers were provided with in-depth information on kill sheet data, in light of eating quality, to determine some of the critical factors influencing the meat quality they had produced. The pilot farmers were also selected as they had a farm system that was set up for winter finishing on fodder-beet. Learnings from their experiences with this system could subsequently be extended to other Prime Beef farmers.

Silver Fern Farms then involved researchers from Texas Tech University, Abacus Bio's

genetics expertise and others so that together with the pilot farmers, they could develop a farmer focused beef eating quality field guide.

An aim was to produce information that was practical and useable on-farm but linked to the research on beef eating quality.

A brief overview of the project, from a farm systems perspective, is provided by pilot farmer Ceri Lewis of Mt Linton Station on YouTube:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tquqj-H-Gac.

Silver Fern Farms moved into the next stage of their extension programme, getting the information out to suppliers. Extension activities have been focused on workshops and discussion groups, large and small, across New Zealand. The workshops are backed up with resources, like the video and field guide, as well as technical support from the company to help farmers implement changes in their business. Some 500 farmers have been involved in these workshops and discussion groups.

Involving livestock representatives, through a train the trainer extension learning process, has helped target extension activities to those who see an opportunity to modify their farm systems to better fit to the eating quality expectations of consumers. Additionally it has helped these key knowledge-brokers to be better able to support farmers through their practice change so they can improve beef eating quality.

Results to date can be clearly measured through a lift in rates of beef that quality through the Beef EQ Grading System, especially through the winter period which prior to this extension programme was a period of low Eating Quality supply.

Nationally a 6% lift in farmers achieving EQ Master Grades has been seen over the winter period (September and October) in 2016 when compared to 2015 levels.

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.




Any references to commercial products within this booklet relate only to the projects or trials described. No endorsement of any product should be implied. All information was correct at the time of going to print.

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