Farm^{IQ} Programme Quarterly Progress report, April to June 2014

The Farm^{IQ} programme prepared to take its farm management system to a wider farmer group during this quarter, to June 2014, while market research for Silver Fern Farm's premium products gained momentum.

Feedback from market research, in New Zealand and overseas, has been mostly positive. Useful insight has been gained into the value of telling the grass-fed story in various markets.

There's been strong interest in a range of branded retail lamb packs being offered to online shoppers in Shanghai. This is a significant move away from what has previously been a commodity business and tests a new channel in an important market. It has been identified that authenticity of produce is a key concern for the target consumers.

Feedback on the fourth product release of the Farm^{IQ} System, which was released in mid April, was positive. Users and other parties are forthcoming with further ideas for features and developments. The role of the Technical Development Group was reviewed and it was decided to use specific reference groups for future testing and feedback.

Meanwhile, work continued on the next version, scheduled for release in early August. This delivers the remaining core functions to provide a workable system for farmers.

Developments include:
- Create a feed budget
- Capture, record and compare rainfall information
- Enter pre- and post-grazing pasture covers
- Pasture covers report
- Help function.

This version also included organisation of the System into five Packs, designed to suit the way that farmers use the System. These include a Starter Pack, Packs focused on animal-related features and one Pack focused on land features. This will be very helpful for marketing purposes as well.

Discussions continued with a range of other organisations about opportunities for system integration or creating capability for sharing of farm, supplier or processor data.

Farm^{IQ} has been helping develop data standards for the pastoral sector, to facilitate sharing of information between systems. This includes new animal, land and financial data interchange standards.

A contract for supply of sheep EID tags for the coming season has been completed. These will again be offered to participating farmers to help test paddock-to-plate information systems.

As part of the Farm^{IQ} meat yield prediction programme, Silver Fern Farms has installed X-Ray grading on all six of its lamb plants. These are all operating satisfactorily to predict the fore, middle and hind primal weights for each carcass.

The next step is developing predictions of retail cut yields, both to better value the carcass for farmer feedback and payment, and to determine the best way to cut the carcass to maximise market value.

While CT scanning would deliver the detail needed, there is no way to currently apply CT scanning for lamb carcasses on high-speed conveyors. Therefore Silver Fern Farms are working with Scott Technology on DEXA X-Ray to predict meat, fat and bone proportions of each part of the carcass and with Auckland University on carcass modelling systems for improved predictions using X-Ray, carcass weights, key dimensions and animal data such as breed, sex and age.

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