



PROJECT PART-FUNDED BY THE SUSTAINABLE FARMING FUND

The Sustainable Farming Fund is investing in a project that aims to support around 720 farmers along the first 100 km of the Waikato River to assess their farming systems and identify best practice in the new context.

LOW-IMPACT FARMING IN ACTION

THE ISSUE OR OPPORTUNITY

The agreement between Māori and the Crown for co-management of the Waikato River signalled a new era for management of the River and the catchments feeding into it.

A particular focus for this new regime is improving quality of the water, initially by slowing the rate of decline and ultimately enhancing water quality.

For decades now pastoral farmers have been getting signals that they need to reduce nutrient leaching into waterways, and this latest development adds weight to this.

The key for local farmers is to identify management practices that will achieve the required reductions of leaching and other impacts, while maintaining farm productivity and profitability.

The Sustainable Farming Fund is investing in a project that aims to support the around 720 farmers along the first 100km of the Waikato River to assess their farming systems and identify best practice in the new context.

The farms in this catchment are typically on pumice soils, which are free-draining and easily erode if disturbed.

The project is being led by Headlands Consultancy and delivered with the assistance of DairyNZ, Reporoa VetPlus, Environment Waikato, Red Sky and Waikato University.

They are directly working with 25 dairy farmers in the Reporoa, Broadlands, Atiamuri and Benneydale districts.

Red Sky is providing farm business analysis software, and the project is also using OVERSEER®, nutrient management software that is jointly owned by the Ministry for Primary Industries, the Fertiliser Association and AgResearch.

RESULTS TO DATE – TWO YEARS

This work has shown that matching the stocking rate to the land’s capability is key to a resilient farming system with the lowest environmental impact. In this area this translates to stocking rates of 2.3–2.6 cows per hectare on a 9–10 tonnes pasture harvest average.

The strong performers in the second year of the study are similar to those who featured in the first year – good performers are consistently good.

The leading farmers:

- » are excellent information managers;
- » achieve high milksolids per cow – milksolids production equivalent to 90 percent of body weight;
- » are not overstocked – more than 4.0 tonnes of dry matter of home-grown feed consumed per cow.

The strong performers run simple systems, and are very strategic with their planning. They adjust their system according to milk price and weather patterns well ahead of time.

AT A GLANCE

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| SFF project | 11/016 Preparing for River Co Management: |
| | Low impact farms in action. SFF investment: \$145,100 |
| Other cash contributors | DairyNZ |
| Total project value (including in-kind contributions): \$353 400 | |