

# How might government better understand farmer perspectives?

ALBERT HANSON | KELLOGG 41 | NOVEMBER 2020



**KELLOGG**  
RURAL LEADERSHIP  
PROGRAMME



I wish to thank the Kellogg Programme Investing Partners for their continued support.

*I dedicate this report to my grandfather Albert Leo Hanson, who loved his family, was an outstanding educationalist, and never stopped learning.*

He aha te mea nui o te ao. He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata

What is the most important thing in the world? It is people, it is people, it is people.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**The New Zealand public service is and must continue to innovate to ensure that it understands the citizens that it serves.**

**It could also be doing a more robust job of understanding public perspectives, including those of farmers and rural communities.**

Through my research, I have sought to understand how government institutions internationally and locally are innovating and experimenting to better understand these perspectives. The value and promise of these innovations is already being demonstrated.

I have also sought to understand farmer perspectives myself, and what matters to them. Through a range of semi-formal interviews, I captured a variety of themes. Views of government, the realities of farming, Māori agribusiness, communication and engagement and community and the importance of people were expressed.

It is this range of research and insight that has informed my recommendations: three proposed solutions that seek to disrupt the status quo of government engagement with the rural sector.

**vRural NZ, Rural EQ and Rural Recruit** have all been inspired by the people I have spoken to and ideas explored internationally. My aim has been to

not only describe their benefits, but how the benefits could operate in a New Zealand context.

I recommend that government and the rural sector:

- Prototype **vRural NZ** through the Digital Government Partnership Innovation Fund. This would be led by a government department, who would undertake the role of accountable authority to trial this idea on an issue of relevance and importance to the rural sector;
- Pilot **Rural EQ** to trial and test what could work under a more full-scale delivery model. This pilot would distinguish what planning, resourcing and co-investment would be required to realise its potential.
- Commence **Rural Recruit** through planning and engagement with tertiary institutions, to sell why this proposed solution is needed. This would include identifying which issues facing the rural sector would benefit from Rural Recruit and which agencies graduates would be best placed to join.

Despite the rate of change and challenges facing society, both globally and domestically, there are opportunities to improve the way we collaborate and tackle complex problems.

My recommendations can form the foundation of solutions that address these challenges. They also challenge the public service to innovate and experiment with ideas in the complex environment in which we operate.

If we expect others to change their behaviour, first, we must consider changing our own.

**"When you see something that is not right, you must say something. You must do something."**

**JOHN LEWIS**  
(FEBRUARY 21, 1940 – JULY 17, 2020)





# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**What a privilege it has been to not only take part in this programme, but also to have been entrusted with the voice of the farmers interviewed during my research.**

**Every person I interviewed spoke to me with honesty, integrity and respect and was so willing to share their own insight and personal story for this kaupapa.**

To every farmer, and everyone else I spoke to as part of this research including members of the rural sector and my colleagues, I say thank you.

Thank you to everyone involved in 'Kellogg 41' (the 41st cohort of the Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme) and the Rural Leaders organisation for their camaraderie and commitment to the rural sector. The challenges facing us are many and complex, however there are opportunities everywhere, and I feel strongly that Kellogg 41 will play a role in tackling both.

Thank you to Britt Davies from Studio Acht for working her magic and making this report look presentable.

Lastly, thank you to the States of Change organisation. States of Change's mission is to build the capability and culture of governments to practically deal with the complex

problems they face, and to strengthen the community of practice around public innovation.

I undertook a States of Change programme in 2019 and have used what I learn to understand different perspectives and share my ideas.

➤ *More information on States of Change can be found here:*  
<https://states-of-change.org/about>

# INTRODUCTION

**Increasingly, governments are being asked to take a more human and customer centred approach in the way that they engage citizens.**

**In response, governments are innovating in how they rise to this challenge.**

In order to develop solutions that are fit for purpose, it is of huge importance that governments understand the realities, challenges and opportunities facing the public it serves. This is true for every industry and sector within society.

Farmers are no different.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, farming has been a part of our identity, culture, history and whakapapa for centuries. Who are we, if not a nation of farmers?

As our economy has grown; thanks to the exports of agricultural products, the complexity of farming and regulation of its activities has increased.

Engaging with farmers, businesses and other government officials through my research, I have learned that the complexity of farming life cannot be understated.

Farmers are facing issues and challenges in multiple areas of their businesses and rural communities: a

changing climate and environment, increasing compliance and regulation, increasingly discerning consumers and disruption from technology are just some of the headwinds they face.

Alongside this myriad of complex challenges, society is changing at pace. Arbib and Seba (2020) state that we are on the cusp of the fastest, deepest, most consequential transformation of human civilisation in history.

It is no surprise, therefore, to see that farmer confidence is down. Rabobank's *Rural Confidence Survey* (Waning sentiment among sheep and beef farmers pushes rural confidence further into negative territory 2020) released in September 2020 found net farmer confidence has slipped to -32 percent, down from -26 percent previously.

Therefore it is critical that as an institution, government asks itself how it can better understand the perspectives of farmers. This will enable it to more effectively partner with the rural sector and design policy that will meet the outcomes that both government and the sector need and desire.

There are exciting opportunities for government in New Zealand to do just that. The aim of my research has been to understand farmer perspectives myself, consider how government might better understand those perspectives, and develop ideas and solutions that address my question.

Having worked at the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) for the past five years, I have had the privilege of working alongside many amazing, intelligent and hardworking people who serve New Zealand.

However, we can do better. We can approach problems differently. I am excited about the opportunity to do just that.

My goal is to explain why and how.

**"...we are on the cusp of the fastest, deepest, most consequential transformation of human civilisation in history."**

ARBIB AND SEBA (2020)

# AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this research report is to answer the following question:

How might government better understand farmer perspectives?

## Why am I asking this question?

**Because, as Bowmast (2018) simply puts it, it is easier to design for a customer that you understand.**

Using design practice as a guiding principle, I have phrased my question to ask how we as government can do a better job of understanding our 'customer'. For this report, the customer or end user is the farmer. I want to find out how we can improve our results by putting the farmer at the centre of the design of our mahi.

I had an assumption going into this research that government could do a better job of understanding farmer perspectives. No matter how high performing a government department or business is, there is always room for improvement.

If there is one thing that my experience in the last five years at MPI has taught me, it is that my colleagues (and those that I have met in other agencies) are extremely hard working and

professional in their approach.

For example, MPI has over 100,000 monthly interactions with customers. Our Ease of Business programme is dedicated to improving the customer experience for thousands of food businesses (MPI, 2019).

I have learnt how important these people are to the success of New Zealand.

Conversely, I have also begun to understand how important it is to our success that we understand those that we regulate.

He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata deeply resonates with me for this very reason.

Through the Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme (Kellogg) we as a cohort we have asked in our discussions, how can we create empathy at scale?

The aim of this research for me has been to ask how can we, as government, better understand the public that we serve? If thousands

of public servants have a better understanding of the people they are employed to serve, 'room for improvement' becomes clearly achievable.

It is my objective in this report to share the voices that I have heard throughout the research process for the benefit of my colleagues and the rural sector.

It has not been my aim or objective to criticise government institutions, detail problems or risks and then leave those problems and risks unaddressed. That would not do myself, my employer, or the public that we serve any justice.

Therefore, I have been committed to identifying some solutions and ideas that government and the sector can partner on, to the benefit of farmers.

For my involvement in Kellogg to be of maximum value to MPI, I need to clearly articulate the farmer voices that I have heard, and then demonstrate how we can learn from them and apply simple

solutions accordingly.

The audience for this report is not only my government colleagues, but also for farmers and the wider rural sector, to ask ourselves how we can better understand each other. To put ourselves in each other's shoes, to better understand the impact of both our decisions and how we engage with one another.

The findings from my interviews will be no surprise to the wider farmer audience. I want the public service to get to a place where it is no surprise for us either.

As an eternal optimist, I see so many opportunities for government and the rural sector to innovate, collaborate and better understand each other to reach the outcome that we both seek: a thriving New Zealand rural sector.



# METHODOLOGY

**When I began Kellogg and this research in January 2020, my aim was to gather a range of qualitative data through the form of in-depth interviews with farmers.**

**Most importantly, these interviews were going to be held on-farm, so that I could understand the perspectives of farmers in their environment, where they are most comfortable.**

My rationale for this was informed by empathy interviews I had completed in the previous few years at MPI. Increasingly, colleagues and I had seen the value of taking a more farmer centric approach in relation to farmer engagement.

This was inspired in part by the way design businesses and design practitioners approach customers. Bowmast (2018) states that if you want to understand the customer you are selling to, you need to 'put yourself at the centre of everything the customer does.' 'This includes field research, to understand who your customer is, how they think and what they do.

By getting out and into the field, my experience has been that you pick up so many unexpected insights through ethnography and observation.

After getting out in the field, I intended to then compare and contrast the insights gained from these interviews to more desktop-based research insights, such as the insights explored in this report's literature review. What inspiration could I gain from overseas or other institutions that are innovating in this space? How might this compare to what I had heard on the ground?

COVID-19 then changed the game. As international and domestic travel ceased for all New Zealand citizens, my hopes of getting out on-farm were eliminated.

Instead, I conducted a number of farmer interviews (ten) via phone and video calls. I have kept their identity anonymous for one simple reason. In this instance, it is not who they are, but what they say, that is of the upmost importance to my findings and this kaupapa.

Despite the nature of and number of interviews being impacted upon by the COVID-19 pandemic, I was still able to gain rich insight from the people that I spoke to.

It also inspired me to consider how innovation, technology and different forms of communication can inform government engagement with the public that it serves. This is discussed in my proposed solutions and recommendations.

I acknowledge that this is a small sample size to inform an evidence base. But, I feel strongly about the validity and weight that is held by this qualitative data. My approach aims to bring that data to life.

Lastly, I would ask you as the reader to observe and consider not only what my research findings are, but also how I have conducted it. I have sought to challenge the status quo approach of traditional government engagement through this rare opportunity of participating in Kellogg. I have highlighted some challenging perspectives, but with a mandate to ask the question of how we as government can innovate to improve our approach.



# LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews previous mahi in this area to help me seek inspiration for what has been tried and tested both before and elsewhere.

## Definition of government

Firstly, it is important to clarify that when I say 'government', I mean central government public service departments and agencies, such as MPI or the Ministry for the Environment (MfE). Often, many of the staff of these government departments are based centrally in Wellington, New Zealand.

This definition of government is opposed to local or regional council entities, or conversely the Government of the day who are voted in every general election.

## Government engagement and innovation

One thing that became apparent early on is that anything related to 'government better understanding its citizens' is often referred to as innovation. Therefore, I sought to understand what government innovation is and how and why it is important.

Government innovation can mean many things to different people. Apolitical (*What is government innovation? 2019*) states that government innovation may mean 'turning a new idea into a

policy or process, but it can also mean building and improving upon solutions that already exist.'

Comparatively, The Australia New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG, 2020) states that public innovation can 'involve the use of technology and changes in processes, organisations, services, policy approaches, democratic engagement and institutions. The key premise is that generating and implementing new ideas provides the basis for improvements in the public sector.'

Similarly, in a 2012 paper by New Zealand advisory services firm Grant Thornton defined innovation as the 'process of improving, adapting or developing a product, system or service to deliver better results and create value for people.' (*Innovation in Government: Getting our mojo back*).

You may ask: why the specific interest in innovation as opposed to understanding the status quo? Because globally, the need has never been greater, and the status quo will not survive disruption.

The think tank RethinkX states that during the 2020s, key technologies will converge to completely disrupt the five foundational sectors that underpin the global economy, and with them every major industry in the world today (Arbib and Seba, 2020). Importantly, food is one of these sectors, alongside information, energy, transportation and materials.

Airbib and Seba (2020) predict that 'the prevailing production system will shift away from a model of centralized extraction...to a model of localised creation. Product design and development will be performed collaboratively over information networks while physical production and distribution will be fulfilled locally.'

Additionally, in the here and now, social and public issues are already becoming increasingly complex. The world's greatest challenges, such as climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, have heightened expectations of and demands on governments around the world.

To me this suggests that, amongst this upcoming and current disruption, the need for innovation is indeed great.

And there is a perception that governments are struggling to stand up to the task.

Increasingly, there is a sense that globally, governments are not doing as well as they ought to solve our biggest policy problems (Noveck and Glover 2019).

Noveck and Glover (2019) state that according to survey data, fewer than 41 per cent of Australian citizens are satisfied with the way democracy works, a precipitous decline from 86 per cent in 2007.

Similarly, In New Zealand, people have asked how we might improve our engagement with citizens and how our policy process can be enhanced. Hett (2020) states that a 'key piece missing in policy design is connecting with those most affected.'

The disconnect is 'between Wellington and Kaitia, between front line staff and boardrooms, between experts and citizens; it is between those making the decisions, and those affected by them' (Hett, 2020).



To me, my research has raised the question, is it how we are structured or organised that means government agencies aren't sufficiently engaging the public?

Laloux (2015) describes a history of organisation paradigms and uses colours to describe the successive stages of management evolution. Most government organisations are described as 'amber': amber organisations have 'highly formal roles within a hierarchical pyramid, with top down command and control, where the future is a repetition of the past.'

Laloux challenges organisations to consider how they can evolve to promote innovation, empowerment and self-management amongst their employees.

Similarly, Eppel et al. (2018) call for a "complexity-informed" approach to policy that encompasses adaptive and collaborative approaches and responds to the needs and dynamics of different communities.

They argue that New Zealand's current approach to policy and service design, delivery and evaluation has been 'too fragmented and not built on an understanding of the complex social systems they must work in.'

This contrasts with the evidence I have found of government departments innovating. In fact, I have learnt that the New Zealand government is responding.

Auckland Co-Design Lab, a unique collaboration between central and local government in South Auckland, supported Eppel et al's mahi. They state that in addition to new ideas, 'the process of listening, learning and trying things together contributed to significantly enhanced connections, relationships and trust across the service system' (Auckland Co-design Lab and the Southern Initiative, 2019).

In Central Government, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) has a programme named the Policy Project. The Policy Project is about building a high performing policy system that supports and enables good government decision making (DPMC, *The Policy Project*, 2020).

Wellington council organisation Creative HQ 'works with central, local and international government agencies to transform services for citizens.' Their services include 'co-design, government innovation, fast and efficient policy design, and remote working workshops' (CreativeHQ, *Government Services*, 2020).

Creative HQ is also supporting government agencies with a NZ Innovation Barometer, which will provide public service Senior Leaders with 'interactive data highlighting their agency's strengths and areas for improvement' (2020). It will also provide recommendations to lift agencies' innovative ability.

All of these examples demonstrate to me that innovation practice is becoming embedded in the New Zealand public service.

But what about when it comes to working with our Treaty of Waitangi partners?

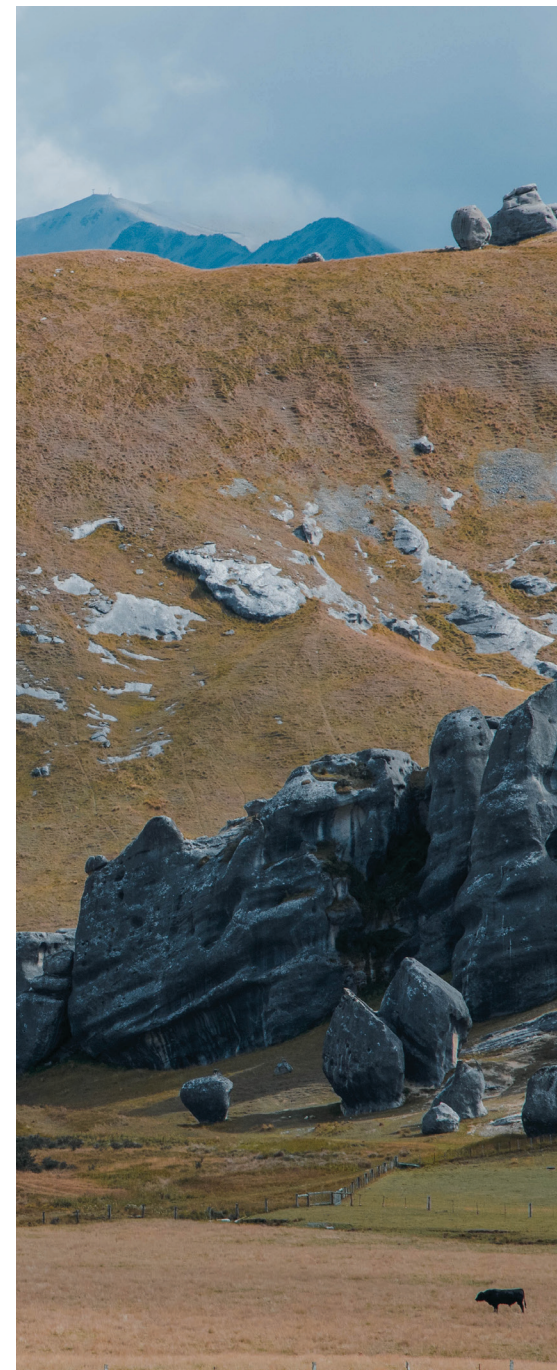
More recently, the Public Service Act 2020 (PSA 2020) has passed into law and will be administered by Te Kawa Mataaho (the Public Service Commission, formerly the States Services Commission).

PSA 2020 section 14 explicitly recognises the role of the public service to support the Crown in its relationships with Māori under Te Tiriti o Waitangi/ The Treaty of Waitangi (PSA Act 2020 Factsheets, 2020).

To this end, the new Act includes provisions that put explicit responsibilities on:

Public service leaders for developing and maintaining the capability of the Public Service to engage with Māori and to understand Māori perspectives.

The Public Service Commissioner, when developing and implementing the newly required leadership strategy, to recognise the aims, aspirations and employment requirements of Māori, and the need for greater involvement of Māori in the public service.





This commitment builds on previous government initiatives exploring collaborative efforts with Māori. In June 2006 six iwi and Māori authorities were engaged by Te Puni Kokiri to participate in a trial to develop an understanding of 'co-production' (joint development of policy and service delivery to realise shared strategic outcomes) in a Māori context (Mckenzie et al, 2008).

However, this study clearly states how challenging undertaking co-production was in practice rather than in theory.

And, when it comes to management of natural resources such as water (wai) and land (whenua), it becomes even more complex. Duncan et al (2018) assert that 'the dominance of Pakeha agriculture within New Zealand's political economy has had profound implications for Māori.'

**"Hence, the social, cultural, economic and political stakes are high for both Māori and farmers to find a way to cooperatively access, care for, and manage freshwater."**

This is indicative of how difficult it is to shift complex systems, particularly for Māori.

Similarly, whether the enabling PSA 2020 legislation allows government departments to change from 'amber' to orange, green or teal as described by Laloux (2015), or more innovative as Eppel et al (2018) demand, remains to be seen.

In parallel, governments globally are challenging themselves and innovating to disrupt their citizen engagement model.

In Taiwan, vTaiwan is an open consultation process that 'brings Taiwan citizens and government together in online and off-line spaces, to deliberate and reach rough consensus on national issues, and to craft national digital legislation' (Hsiao et al. 2018).

The 'v' stands for voice, vision, vote and virtual. It uses digital solutions to bring together a range of citizen and stakeholder views across both the public and private sector. The vTaiwan process consists of four successive stages: proposal, opinion, reflection and legislation.

The transitions between stages are decided by consensus from the vTaiwan community. The methodology of the participant-oriented agenda and rolling correction substantially engages citizens and public servants (Hsiao et al. 2018).

In the United Kingdom, a '7E Policy Package model that integrates information about behaviours and behaviour change' is available to provide a 'balanced mix of coercive

and non-coercive policy measures' (Parminter 2019).

A separate Cabinet Office initiative, the United Kingdom Policy Lab, was set up in 2014 as part of the Civil Service Reform plan to make policy making more open (UK Policy Lab, *About Policy Lab* 2020). It brings people-centred design approaches to policy-making.

Additionally, One Team Government is a movement for public sector reform based on practical action in the United Kingdom. It has a set of principles that guide its mahi. It commits that it 'will

experiment with design, and put user-focused service design thinking into everything we do, learning from and with each other (One Team Gov, *Our principles*, 2020)

States of Change is an entity that works with governments internationally to strengthen the community of practice around public innovation. They state that there are many perspectives that government needs to understand when it comes to innovation (Quaggiotto et al., 2018). These perspectives are described as three pairs of principles in Figure 1 below:

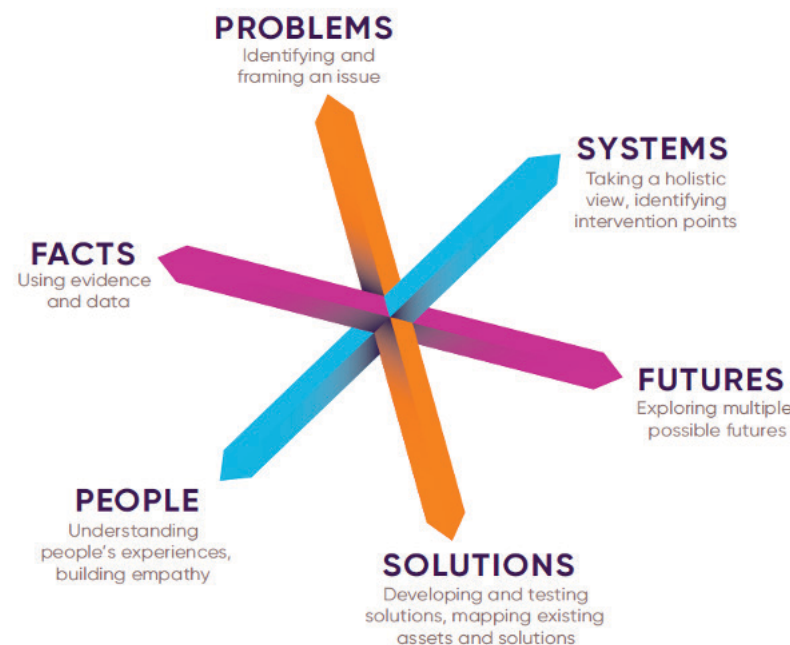


Figure 1: Six principles for exploring the unobvious, States of Change.

These principles 'offer various perspectives on an issue, and help to identify knowledge gaps, challenge assumptions and generate richer understanding in order to make better informed decisions' (Quaggiotto et al., 2018).

My view is that as government, we are good at understanding systems, but need to work more on understanding people. Similarly, we take pride in our evidence base and knowing the facts, but don't often enough consider futures. Lastly, we work hard to understand the problem, but don't test or iterate solutions. This is a huge area of opportunity for government.

These domestic and international examples of government innovation suggest that, whilst there are those state governments that aren't doing enough, they are in fact innovating and changing the way that they work.

It may just be that this innovation isn't organised or strategic, or well aligned with other governmental or societal priorities.

Across the globe, there is a view that public sector innovation continues to be organised 'haphazardly', with disparate short-term initiatives (Puttick, Baeck and Colligan 2014).

This shows that there is room for improvement in terms of how governments arrange and structure themselves to embed innovation into their work programme, and to allow

innovative approaches to become business as usual.

### Understanding farmers

Next, I looked at where government and academics had investigated understanding of farmer behaviour, with farmers as a specific segment of society.

Duncan et al (2018) state how through their research and engagement with a range of stakeholders, that policy makers, researchers and practitioners need to 'listen carefully to understand and see someone else's perspective.'

Similarly, Duncan (2014) looks closely at farmers perspectives on water quality, and argues that:

'acknowledging and recognising how farmers frame the water quality problem is an important starting point for working with them in the implementation of these new policies and rules and the achievement of good and best management practice.'

In addition to providing information, Parminter and Kitto (2020) suggest that there needs to be opportunities for farmers to consider and reflect on the information that they have already been given, in carefully facilitated discussions. They need to be provided opportunities to apply what they know to scenarios relevant to their individual farm systems and farming contexts.

Long (2018) claims that an improved understanding of basic human

psychology will assist those working in the farm advisory sector to help farm businesses to achieve their goals more effectively. 'There is no one 'right' recipe, 'right' delivery style or 'right' formula for every farm business. We live by 'rules of thumb' and make decisions by 'gut feel. There is logic behind 'irrational' decisions.'

This improved understanding compares to the value of applying an institutional logics perspective to farming life and culture. Knook and Turner (2020) applied this approach, which enabled them to consider how farmers' practices, beliefs and values together constitute the culture of farming.

Inman et al. (2018) go further, stating that a shift in farmer identities, beliefs and norms is required to embed mitigation behaviour. They argue that when it comes to policy implementation, simply offering 'financial incentives or imposing regulatory penalties is unlikely to achieve the desired results.'

Consistently, the literature is asking government institutions to gain a deeper understanding of farmers.

To achieve this requires meaningful engagement and collaboration with the farming sector.

The sector is already showing good signs of adopting co-innovation practice. A project looking to improve profit and environmental performance of dairy farm systems in New Zealand

**"Financial incentives or imposing regulatory penalties is unlikely to achieve the desired results."**

LONG (2018)



has demonstrated the benefits of including end users from the start, who were flexible to adapt to feedback and a changing context (Pinxterhuis et al 2018).

In Queensland, Australia, cane growers have collaborated and organised to improve their environmental performance. By investing in management practice, and understanding how behaviour change with a solid evidence base, the growers have successfully brought in government support for their initiative (Pickering, JA. *Project Cane Changer*, 2019).

By employing behaviour change strategies, behavioural science has helped to create practice change. Pickering et al (2019) found that Cane Changer contributed to a 316% increase in Smartcane Best-Management-Practice accreditation rates across the region.

These examples show that there are signs, both in government and in the New Zealand rural sector, that a focus on understanding the farmer perspective is beneficial. This suggests that by building a farmer centric approach, both government and the rural sector are improving the way their respective work programmes are being delivered.

In contrast, I learnt there is absolutely a mandate and demand for government to improve its approach, and to become a more 'humanised bureaucracy built on trust' (Hett 2020).

This may be true in theory and academia, but is this the case in practice?





# FINDINGS

To find out, I applied what I had learnt regarding putting the end user at the centre of my research approach, but also what felt right 'in my gut': So, I asked farmers about what they thought.

**I will use this section to share what farmers and others thought about the government's ability to understand their perspectives.**

My findings are broken into themes, which highlight the key findings from my interviews.

My aim for this kaupapa is to share their voice and perspective, match their insight against what I learned in the literature review, and then ultimately articulate proposed solutions and recommendations for both the government and the rural sector to consider.

## View of government

Farmers I spoke to held strong, succinct views about the way government makes decisions.

**"There is a real lack of understanding and appreciation (in government) of how the primary sector functions."**

**"Seems to be a real struggle for them (government) to understand the challenges that they (farmers) are facing."**

**"There needs to be farmers involved in decisions –it needs to be well known that you are working with farmers when you do those things."**

Related to this, the people I spoke to queried the level of farm system and rural community understanding and awareness in government:

**"Government having that understanding of the progress we are making is really important for motivating farmers to keep doing better."**

**"I can't imagine there would be many people sitting in Wellington with ag degrees. You have got individuals and groups of people making decisions about farming who don't have the expertise."**

**"We know that there are some rural people in government departments, we also know that there are people who don't know one end of a sheep from another."**

**"There has been a decline, and quite a steep one, in policy development's understanding of agriculture."**

## View of government

Farmers I spoke to held strong, succinct views about the way government makes decisions.

Non-farmers that I spoke to also had a view

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**"We (public servants) don't get out of Wellington nearly enough."**

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**"Public servants need that level of engagement at the start. We need more farmers along to induction. And we need to go to more farms."**

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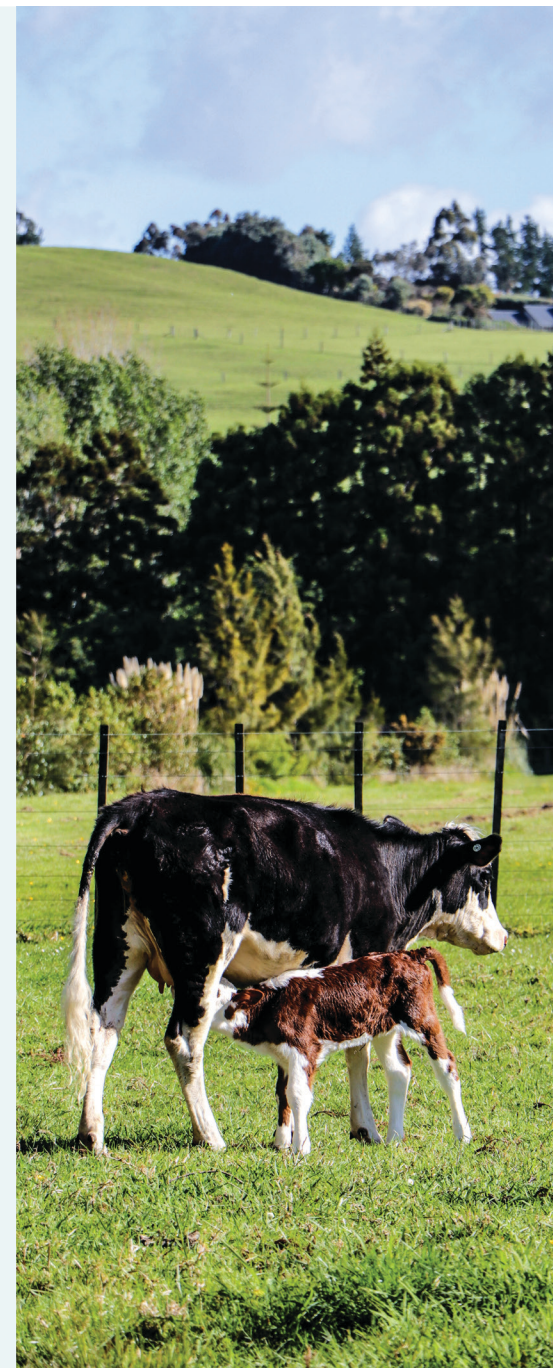
**"Farmers should be able to come to us directly with no fear – officials should be open to ideas."**

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**"These perspectives will give your team greater understanding of the context in which the implementation will happen."**

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**"We need to be a more responsive civil service, understanding ongoing issues and undertaking a continuous learning process."**



## Realities of farming

The complexity of farm systems and businesses came across in all interviews.

**"Every season is different."**

There was a sense of frustration, a feeling that government sees natural resources on the receiving end of its policies, as opposed to the people and communities for whom the impact of such policy is the greatest.

**"There are no easy answers as it (farming) is such a complex beast."**

**"Government needs to ask: what impact does this have on the ground?"**

**"As soon as you take your eye off the ball you are screwed."**

**"There is a sense that government were developing policy that didn't match or land in the realities of farming."**

**"I know for myself, when I add onto or change my system, I don't do that lightly. So, when changes occur, people need a bit of time to get used to it."**

**"You need policy settings that understand how farms are set up. It is a frustration of farmers that sometimes things coming out of Wellington don't have that thinking."**



## Māori agribusiness

Those I spoke to in Māori agribusiness brought a completely different perspective that government needs to understand.

"With Māori, it is the same, but worse. At least for non-Māori they can sell the land and get the heck out of it. For Māori, we can't go anywhere."

"Government needs to have some form of understanding of those views. Māori perspectives are either written off or lost in translation."

"Māori agribusiness is really different to the normal agribusiness."

"The way that the sector and government engage Māori is a barrier. Public servants need to ask themselves:

What do you know about Māori freehold land?  
What do you know about Māori culture?  
What do you know about the Treaty?

If you can't answer those, you're not likely to understand their perspective."



## Communication and engagement

My interviewees challenged government to get 'on-farm'.

**"Stop talking to the regular people that you always talk to. Go to the grassroots. Go and walk in their shoes for a month. Go and understand it. Just listen and try and understand."**

They were of the view that there was an opportunity for government to rethink its engagement model.

**"The ultimate is to hear it see it."**

**"There is a real good change story available in this space. We have improved more, but how do you communicate it."**

**"We would love dearly to host—and say; here is what a farming operation looks like from day to day. This is what we do, this is what the land looks like. The thought of it is quite nerve wracking... but it would just open up the lines of communication."**

**"We are not very good at advocating why it is we do it the way that we do it. It is not just for fun, there are reasons behind it. We need to be better at communicating what we do."**





## People and community

My interviewees were attuned to the importance of people and the challenges that working with people can bring.

**"The hardest part of farming is people management."**

My interviewees discussed the dynamics of rural communities and how important they were.

**"Most of the people we looked to hire were in management but wanted to get out as it was too stressful."**

**"Farmers are more community oriented – because the community really matters to rural people. They all want vibrant rural communities."**

**"We need more people with guts to stand up in their community. The minority are having a bigger voice than the majority."**

**"You have the whole spectrum of human beings with farmers."**

**"The local standing of farmers is still high in the community. But that is not the case outside the community."**

**"The farming community is different to what it used to be – it is now disconnected and quite disjointed."**





# PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

**I have seen a need (literature review); I have heard the need (findings); and now I want to demonstrate some potential solutions.**

**I use the word proposed deliberately, as I want them to be further tested and prototyped by government and the rural sector in an iterative manner. This process would inform any final solutions.**

The hallmark of these proposed solutions is that they are deliberately disruptive, innovative and experimental ideas, inspired by what I have read and heard.

To ANZSOG, innovation is 'implementing new ideas that provide the basis for improvements in the public sector (2020).' I am seeking to tap into this notion.

Below I have detailed some potential solutions and improvements that both the government and rural sector can investigate.

**"With greater insight into rural communities we can make the most of the opportunities available to the rural sector."**

## PROPOSED SOLUTION #1

# vRural NZ

**"There needs to be farmers involved in decisions –it needs to be well known that you are working with farmers when you do those things."**

There is an opportunity for the public service in New Zealand to utilise the farmer voice in a more collaborative and engaging manner.

Public consultation on issues of significance to farmers has recently commanded huge attention from rural communities. MfE's recent Action for Healthy Waterways discussion document received more than 17,000 submissions and the Zero Carbon Bill received more than 15,000 (MfE, *Action for Healthy Waterways*, 2020).

These are environmental policies of significance to our rural communities. Individual farmer and farmer groups all expressed a desire to inform the legislative decision-making process.

However, once these and other government submissions are received and analysed, the capacity and ability for government to receive stakeholder input into the policy design process is limited.

The voice of the community is lacking in the final product or policy.

Leaning into what I have learnt about vTaiwan, I propose a replica in a New Zealand context that addresses issues of importance to the rural sector and better integrates the farmer perspective. Hett states that citizens are experts in their own lives (2020), and this idea will tap into that expertise by bringing the rural voice to the table in a transparent manner.

It also builds upon the principles of innovative approaches seen elsewhere, such as the Auckland co-design lab, whose key goal is 'to create a space for multi-agency teams to collaborate, work alongside citizens and to support and broker innovative ideas and solutions' (Auckland co-design Lab).

The basis of the idea is detailed over the page.

## PROPOSED SOLUTION #1

# vRural NZ

### 2) NEED AND CONTEXT

There is a growing dissatisfaction among both rural and urban communities with the current consultation process.

However, the number of rural community participation in important issues such as freshwater and climate change (both recent legislative consultations received well over 15,000 submissions).

This level of engagement demands a better solution to integrate views across a range of stakeholders (businesses, NGOs and government) to reach consensus to inform policy.

### 3) TRACING IT BACK

'The whole concept of consultation is part of the flawed process to gather perspective. Some of our (government) failings are around behaviour and design.'

### 4) WHY THIS IDEA?

Like vTaiwan drew on other global player efforts, this idea draws from the idea of broadening citizen participation and improving the quality in government decision-making using technology.

### 1) IDEA / OPTION

This idea utilises the vTaiwan model in a New Zealand context. It builds consensus by allowing the voice of the community to come to the fore in the democratic process.

Chosen government agencies will lead rural issues related to them as the accountable and responsible authority.

As demonstrated in Taiwan, this idea will 'allow people inside and outside government to innovate on a shared platform' and allow it to inform the creation of regulations and legislation (Hsiao et al. 2018).

This idea will utilise simple technology available globally to collect and share stakeholder perspectives in an online setting and will facilitate and allow open-ended engagement from large groups of people, including the voices previously unheard in the rural community.

## PROPOSED SOLUTION #1

## vRural NZ

vRural NZ will use the four successive stages detailed previously: proposal, opinion, reflection and legislation.

**Proposal:** A proposal will be presented to the accountable authority. This could be any Natural Resource Sector (NRS) agency (e.g. MPI, MfE, Department of Conservation), who will appoint a facilitator who will guide an issue throughout the process.

All submissions from all walks of life will be welcomed through a hackathon (or similar approach) which will inform the conversation.

I propose that rural community groups organise to ensure that they are in a suitable setting (e.g. where reliable internet has been provided for) so that they can engage in the online forum.

**Opinion:** Opinions are then gathered online, with the accountable authority gathering and theming opinions in real time, enabling a more transparent process.

**Reflection:** This allows an 'online-offline in-person consultation with stakeholders' (Hsiao et al. 2018). The facilitator leads this consultation, which is livestreamed, with digital platforms available to all citizens deployed.

The visual in Figure 2 below shows how vTaiwan sets this process up in a meeting room and would be replicated in this idea.

Promotion using channels familiar to rural communities (such as rural media) are used to boost engagement.

**Legislation:** The consensus of vRural NZ informs policies, regulation and legislation.

The above process allows a new level of transparency of the process, as well the data. It 'allows participants to understand the decisions taken through the process' (Hsiao et al. 2018).

vRural NZ will also allow perspectives

to be gathered from a local perspective and in their environment. Currently, the legislative process allows for public input through a formal consultation process (which only allows written submissions), then towards the tail end of the select committee process.

This is held at Parliament in Wellington. The capacity and ability of members of the rural community to express themselves in this select committee environment are severely limited.

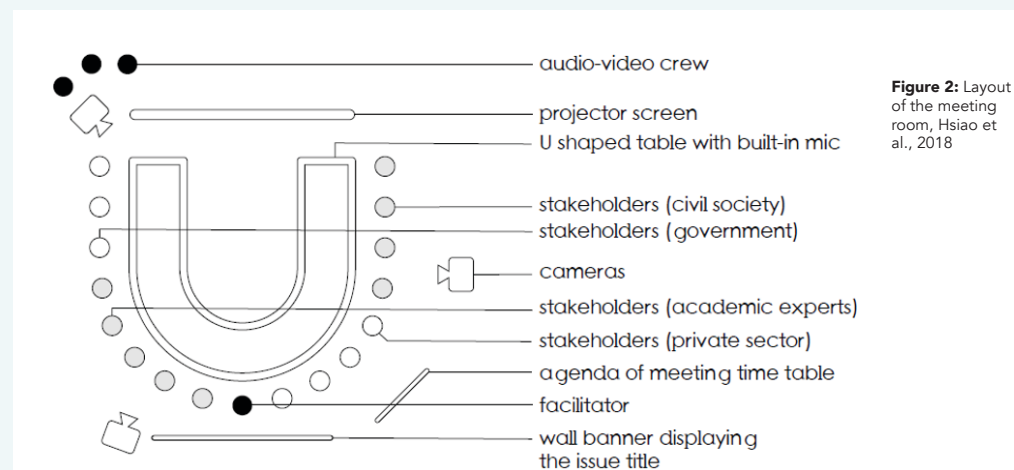
vRural NZ will allow the shift of citizen engagement to shift from being government centric, to community centric.

This reflects the increasing call in society from centralisation to localism. Hett (2020) states that devolving decision-making power to the local level will make community involvement 'more meaningful and effective.'

Similarly, Arbib and Seba (2020) suggest devolving power down to cities and regions, and encouraging self-organisation and flexibility in planning, investing and governance.

My research interviews suggest that one barrier to adoption for vRural NZ could be access to reliable rural internet. Therefore, I recommend that the Crown supports the private sector to role out rural internet solutions, such through investment in infrastructure. This could include looking at line of sight technology for community collectives, and other offerings that the private sector can offer.

However, other factors are at play and need to be acknowledged if this idea is to gain traction. For this idea to succeed, certain success factors are required to realise its potential. These are detailed on the next page.



**Figure 2:** Layout of the meeting room, Hsiao et al., 2018



## PROPOSED SOLUTION #1

# vRural NZ

## Success factors

RethinkX states that governments need to invest to keep up with the pace of societal change. (Arbib and Seba 2020). This idea will require investment in infrastructure such as rural broadband, to remove any risk of non-connection to rural community engagement. The Crown will need to support agribusiness and agtech companies to take the lead on providing technology and internet solutions to rural communities so that they can engage in the process.

Buy-in is required from the accountable authority to take ownership of an issue, and to embrace 'adhocracy' – which is to try a course of action, receive feedback, make changes and review progress (Hsiao et al. 2018).

The realities facing the rural community need to be built into its design. Factors such as what time of day or year that is best to consult farmers ought to be considered. Farmers will need to organise and form collectives to ensure their voice is sufficiently and fairly heard.

Participation from all of the private sector will be crucial, from farming businesses to Non-Governmental Organisations, and will allow a collaborative culture to reach a consensus that meets the needs of the majority.

## vRural NZ

## PROPOSED SOLUTION #2

# Rural EQ

**"Stop talking to the regular people that you always talk to. Go to the grassroots. Go and walk in their shoes for a month. Go and understand it. Just listen and try and understand."**

The interview discussions and insights that informed my findings assert that it is imperative that more is done to enable public servants to gain a deeper understanding of farming and rural life.

My interviewees suggested that public servants need to 'get out more' to gain a better understanding of rural life.

There was also an acknowledgement that farmers need to somehow get a better understanding of how Wellington works. Both sides of this issue made me reflect on my own experience as a public servant.

Phase Two of Kellogg is based in Wellington, and one theme of the week is centred on enabling the cohort to understand the machinery of government, and the multiple leaders and players who operate in that environment.

It struck me (as a public servant) how privileged I was to already have this understanding. In contrast, were it not for Kellogg, the remainder of my cohort would possibly never have got that depth of understanding through the short blast of civic education that we received that week.

There is a duality to this issue. There are two sides, both of whom need to improve their understanding of each other, in order to reach better outcomes.

There is also a deeper social and behavioural change that is required here. It goes beyond just understanding how a farm system or how a farm business operates; or how regulations and legislation is formed.

It requires an understanding of the dynamics that influence human and community decisions and connections.

Subsequently, what is needed is trust, empathy, social and interpersonal skills and emotional awareness to gain this deeper understanding. These are hallmarks of emotional intelligence (or emotional quotient – EQ).

What impact might this decision have on a rural community?

How might I influence or communicate with decision makers in government to ensure that policy outcomes are relevant to my on-farm practice?

Answers to these types of questions from both sides requires practical application of EQ. An idea to address this is detailed on the next page.

## PROPOSED SOLUTION #2

# Rural EQ

### 2) NEED AND CONTEXT

There is sentiment held that public servants and farmers lack understanding of the worlds that each other live in. That suggests there is a risk this lack of understanding informs decision making and unintended consequences.

### 3) TRACING IT BACK

‘We (public servants) don’t get out of Wellington nearly enough’

‘Farmers don’t understand what they are up against in Wellington... There is a lack of insight and understanding.’

‘We would dearly love to host -and say here is what a farming operation looks like from day to day. This is what we do, this is what the land looks like. The thought of it is quite nerve wracking... but it would just open up the lines of communication.’

### 1) IDEA / OPTION

A farmer / public servant exchange programme. This would involve a public servant and a farmer trading places for a short period of time (e.g. a week). For example, someone from a government department in Wellington would travel to a farm in a rural community for an immersive experience, and someone from a rural community would travel to Wellington to spend time shadowing government officials who work on an area of priority to farmers (e.g. environmental policy).

This would provide an opportunity to enhance understanding by taking a human centred approach.

This idea would give individuals the opportunity to get out of their comfort zone, to a place of discomfort where learning and understanding is able to occur.

This would require co-investment from both the Crown and the rural sector to fund the exchange, and the goodwill of both hosting environments to realise the full benefit.

### 4) WHY THIS IDEA?

It gives life to the notion of farmer-centricity and allows both the government and farmers to walk in each other’s shoes. The benefits are demonstrated below.



## PROPOSED SOLUTION #2

# Rural EQ

### The benefits of this for government include:

- Understanding of issues and farming realities to inform policy development
- Understanding that farms are made up of complex interlocking systems (i.e. biodiversity, water, biosecurity, animal welfare etc all need to be considered together) and all farms are different even within the same farming system.

### The benefits of this for farmers include:

- Understanding of the policy development process and its impact on them.
- Understanding of how to influence and communicate meaningfully with decision makers and demonstrate leadership back in their community.

An added benefit would better relationships between farmers, govt officials and industry, which would hopefully make for more collaborative policy development. It would also help to break down barriers (both perceived and real) that exist between government, industry and communities.

This idea also acknowledges that it is not just government who needs to better understand farmers. Farmers also need to make the effort to understand government. It goes both ways, and this idea provides a mechanism for that understanding to be achieved from both sides. The reciprocal good will from this increased mutual engagement can be capitalised on for positive policy processes and outcomes.

### This idea could operate as follows:

A centrally based (Wellington) employee of MPI and MfE working on a policy issue impacting rural communities would be nominated and selected to take part in Rural EQ. A member of a rural community would trade places with this public servant. Both would trade place for a week.

The public servant would be billeted to a farming family and be immersed in farming life. The farmer would be billeted to a leading government official and would shadow and attend internal and cross-government meetings.

It would allow both participants to listen and ask questions, as well as to inform their audience about the realities of their mahi.

For public servants, this would allow them to test ideas and ask question of the person their policy impacts. For farmers, it would allow them to articulate that impact, and inform better solutions.

This idea could be scaled across multiple regions and across different seasons dependent on the policy or community issue. For this idea to succeed, certain success factors are required to realise its potential. These are detailed on the following page.

## PROPOSED SOLUTION #2

# Rural EQ

## Success factors

Rural sector industry good and levy body organisation support and expertise is necessary. These groups ought to be well connected and informed on the issues facing farmers.

Public service and rural community support and 'buy-in' is also needed. I have heard the appetite for deeper understanding, but this will need to be supported in action.

Co-investment from the Crown and the rural sector to bring balance and commitment to the initiative.

## Rural EQ

## PROPOSED SOLUTION #3

# Rural Recruit

**"We know that there are some rural people in government departments, we also know that there are people who don't know one end of a sheep from another."**

In 2019, there were 240 domestic 'Bachelor' degree graduates in agriculture, horticulture and viticulture areas of study (Tertiary Education Commission, Education Counts, 2020). Out of these 240, 140 graduated from Lincoln University, 95 from Massey University and 5 from Nelson-Marlborough Institute of Technology.

People who attend these universities have not always, but often come from, rural community backgrounds, so are applying their life experience to their academic learning.

This idea targets university graduates who come from rural backgrounds

and /or complete agricultural related degrees. It recognises their learned and lived experiences and utilises this within the public service on a more permanent basis.

This idea targets those such as these 158 key graduates, who are usually recruited by the likes of major agribusiness entities in New Zealand (e.g. banks, processors).

It will prioritise those from Māori and rural backgrounds to utilise their degree and life experience and skill sets in a public service context. The benefit of the public sector capitalising on the cultural capital of its employees cannot be understated here.

An idea to address this issue is detailed on the next page.



## PROPOSED SOLUTION #3

# Rural Recruit

### 2) NEED AND CONTEXT

The public service needs to recruit people with the skills to understand New Zealand's rural sector, including those who are less represented (such as Māori), who come from rural communities and trained in an agriculture related area or institution.

### 3) TRACING IT BACK

"I can't imagine there would be many people sitting in Wellington with Ag degrees. You have got individuals and groups of people making decisions about farming who don't have the expertise."

"There is a sense that government were developing policy that didn't match or land in the realities of farming."

### 1) IDEA / OPTION

This idea will see government departments target and recruit 1-3 graduates from rural community backgrounds and / or with agri-business related degrees each year and get them to work in teams or work programmes of priority in relation to agriculture.

They will be deployed into NRS agency (such as MPI, MfE, Department of Conservation) who deal with rural sector issues every day.

This will allow government staff to learn off these recruits who have both expertise and a degree in an agriculture related field, but also have that innate understanding of the rural sector that the mostly urban public service hasn't had the privilege to grow up in.

### 4) WHY THIS IDEA?

Having people within the public service who real and lived rural sector experience will boost the capability of the organisations that they work for.



## PROPOSED SOLUTION #3

# Rural Recruit

**This idea builds upon the notion that the public service needs to take a more farmer centric approach when developing products or policy.**

Using MPI as an example, this would implore it to recruit someone from Massey University with a degree focussed on food technology, or a Lincoln University graduate with a farm systems related degree.

Similarly, MPI could recruit graduates from rural backgrounds who have studied in urban centres (e.g. University of Otago or Auckland University) and can apply a rural lens to both their degrees and careers.

This allows for a mix of talent to be recruited into the public service. It also recognises the value that we put on graduate expertise, whilst enabling them to spread their knowledge of the rural sector from within the public service, to the benefit of their colleagues. Their contribution to the public sector based on genuine lived experience will also be known, acknowledged and valued by the rural communities from whence they

came. This reciprocal value cannot be understated.

This idea builds upon and complements the current MPI Graduate Programme, which is well regarded both inside and outside the organisation for bringing talented graduates into the public service.

For this idea to succeed, certain success factors are required to realise its potential. These are detailed here:

## Success factors

The public service will need to sell itself on why these graduates are needed, which is to inform policy development and inspire these potential employees to make a difference through their mahi.

The public service will also need to engage with tertiary institutions to understand their strategic priorities, and what barriers or enablers exist for those studying agribusiness related degrees.

Career pathways ought to be clearly articulated to potential employees from these tertiary institutions. This must include how the public service can be communicated as a viable career, especially for agribusiness graduates.

The full range of NRS agencies will need to make the most of this opportunity so that this expertise is deployed across the public service.

## Rural EQ

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**All three of proposed solutions will require further refinement before they can be realised.**

In the spirit of design, I recommend that further refinement should lead to a prototype being developed for each idea.

This would include a co-design process between both government and the rural sector. This will allow testing and further exploration, to allow iteration and build consensus on what a practical application could look like. I have three recommendations linked to my proposed solutions.

## 1) vRural NZ

I recommend that government considers this proposed solution and picks a government agency to undertake the role of accountable authority to trial this idea on an issue of relevance and importance to the rural sector.

This idea, as a technological and digital solution, would require appropriate levels of investment and digital expertise to succeed.

The Digital Government Partnership Innovation Fund is a \$5 million contestable fund that invests in digital and data innovation (New Zealand

Government 2020). This could be one area of investment that government could pursue. The application is a simple Lean Canvas which is shown in Figure 3 below:

<b>Name</b>			<b>Agency</b>			
<b>Sponsor / SRO</b>	<b>Primary Contact</b>	<b>Start Date</b>	<b>End Date</b>	<b>Estimated Budget</b>	<b>Date presented</b>	<b>References</b>
		Feb 2021				
<b>Problem and Impact</b>		<b>Digital pilot/initiative - proposal</b>		<b>Target Outcomes</b>		
<i>Fact of the problem, who is it a problem for, and what is the impact for the individual, organisation and system?</i>		<i>What is the proposed digital pilot/initiative and how will it be executed?</i> <i>Elevator pitch – concise explanation of problem, initiative, and outcomes</i>		<i>What will this initiative achieve i.e. evidence that the problem has been resolved?</i>  <i>Overall outcomes?</i>  <i>Digital public service outcomes?</i> <i>Specific sub-outcomes?</i>		
<b>Business Value</b>	<b>Link to Strategy for a digital public service</b>	<b>Risks</b>		<b>Blockers / Decisions Required</b>		
<i>How does this initiative add value to the business?</i>	<i>E.g. How does it support:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the objectives of the Strategy for a digital public service;</li> <li>the focus areas (incl integrated services; leadership, people, culture; digital foundations; investment; and new ways of working) and,</li> <li>the Data Roadmap.</li> </ul>	<i>What threatens the successful execution of this plan (on time and within budget)?</i>		<i>What prevents this work from moving forward right now?</i>		
<b>Key stakeholders</b>	<b>Partners/cross agency involvement</b>	<b>Related Initiatives</b>		<b>Potential re-use across system</b>		
	<i>Evidence of cross agency involvement. DGLG awareness, support, collaboration</i>	<i>Other initiatives with links to this one</i>		<i>How can this pilot/initiative be re-used across the system?</i>		
<b>Current State / Notes</b>		<b>Outcomes and reporting</b>				
<i>Notes on the current project state and any items requiring escalation / consideration.</i>		<i>How will outcomes be measured? What metrics are used?</i> <i>What reporting will be generated – within agencies, for DGLG, and the system?</i>				

Through this process, government could work with the rural sector to test how this approach could work in a real-life scenario in a New Zealand context.

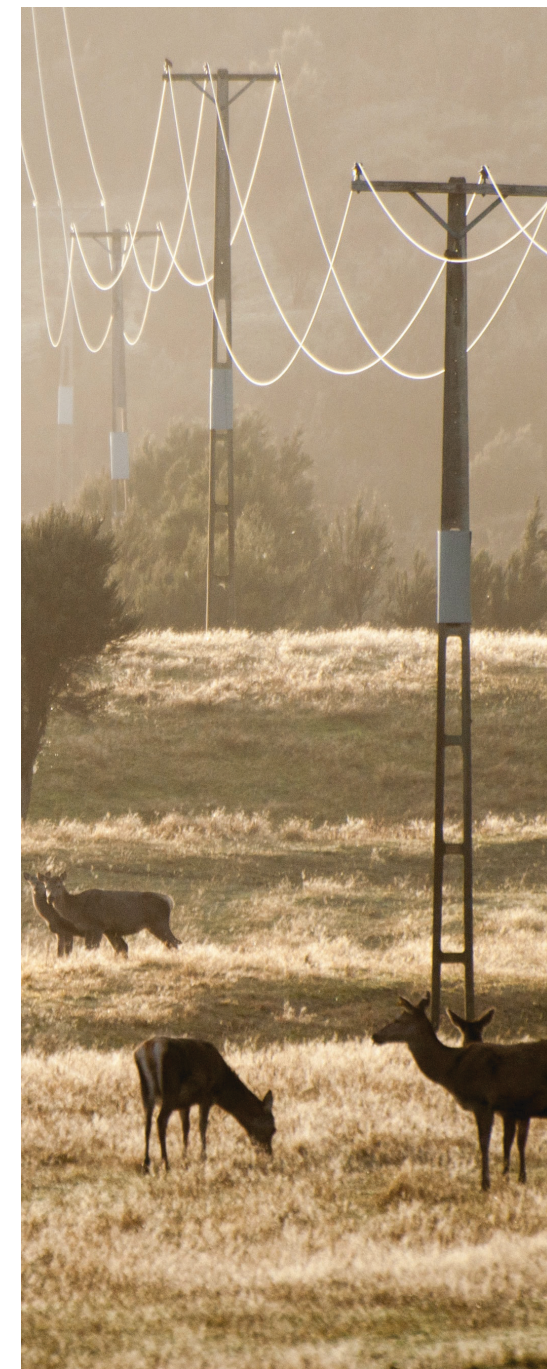


Figure 3: Lean canvas, digital.govt.nz

## 2) Rural EQ

I recommend that a plan is designed and implemented by both government and the rural sector to give life to Rural EQ. This could be delivered initially through a pilot, to trial and test what could work under a more full-scale model.

This plan would include collaboration between government and the rural sector to distinguish when and where this pilot would be best placed to occur, and what resourcing and co-investment would be required to realise its potential.

The implementation of the pilot would inform a 'lessons-learnt' exercise including all involved parties that would inform the more full-scale delivery model.

## 3) Rural Recruit

I recommend that NRS agencies work with the Tertiary Education Commission, the Ministry of Education and the university sector to realise Rural Recruit's potential.

Implementation of this recommendation will require the public service to partner with universities to articulate why this is needed, and how it can support tertiary institutions to identify a pipeline of graduates who meet this proposed solution's criteria.

I recommend that the public service consider which issues, across and within its agencies and departments are best placed to utilise Rural Recruit and develop an approach to trial and embed this idea.

All three proposed solutions will need to be further socialised and discussed amongst the public service and the rural sector to inform prototyping and further testing.

I strongly recommend taking a design-led approach to land a solution that works for everyone.

**"All three proposed solutions will need to be further socialised and discussed amongst the public service and the rural sector to inform prototyping and further testing.**

**I strongly recommend taking a design-led approach to land a solution that works for everyone."**



# CONCLUSION

**There is an opportunity for the public service to put the customer at the centre of everything it does.**

**For agencies such as MPI, the farmer and our rural community is that all important customer.**

By taking a more human centred approach, the public service can improve products and policies and achieve outcomes in a more collaborative and effective manner.

I have learnt and heard through my research that there is absolutely a need for this more human centred approach.

But the rural sector can also, and must, improve to better understand government. By better understanding each other, the rural sector and the public service can better tackle the challenges that they both face.

The challenges facing society (and the food system globally) are occurring at an increasing rate.

To tackle these challenges, institutions, including government, need to innovate and experiment with ideas with citizens to improve its operations and engagement model. Government needs to capitalise on the knowledge and experience of those it serves to best tackle the increasingly complex domestic and global setting.

In *vRural NZ*, *Rural EQ* and *Rural Recruit* I have suggested three proposed solutions that build upon the call for action that I have heard.

They are only ideas. To realise their potential, the public service and the rural sector, along with all other parts of New Zealand society, need to engage and experiment with them to see if they work and have merit.

My goal for this kaupapa is to continue to bring the farmer voice to the fore, to demonstrate what inspires and grounds these ideas, and to disrupt the status quo to enable that voice to be heard.





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