



**KELLOGG**  
RURAL LEADERSHIP  
PROGRAMME



How can rural professionals be more effective in this time of transformational change?

Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme  
Course 40 2019

Adam Duker

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



#### Disclaimer

In submitting this report, the Kellogg Scholar has agreed to the publication of this material in its submitted form.

This report is a product of the learning journey taken by participants during the Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme, with the purpose of incorporating and developing tools and skills around research, critical analysis, network generation, synthesis and applying recommendations to a topic of their choice. The report also provides the background for a presentation made to colleagues and industry on the topic in the final phase of the Programme.

Scholars are encouraged to present their report findings in a style and structure that ensures accessibility and uptake by their target audience. It is not intended as a formal academic report as only some scholars have had the required background and learning to meet this standard.

This publication has been produced by the scholar in good faith on the basis of information available at the date of publication, without any independent verification. On occasions, data, information, and sources may be hidden or protected to ensure confidentiality and that individuals and organisations cannot be identified.

Readers are responsible for assessing the relevance and accuracy of the content of this publication & the Programme or the scholar cannot be liable for any costs incurred or arising by reason of any person using or relying solely on the information in this publication.

This report is copyright but dissemination of this research is encouraged, providing the Programme and author are clearly acknowledged.

Scholar contact details may be obtained through the New Zealand Rural Leadership Trust for media, speaking and research purposes.

## Executive Summary

Farmers are faced with many challenges. The external pressures of public perception, regulation and compliance have become stronger in recent years, and concerningly are likely to get more so. A farm is not just a business, it is a way of life for many people and supports many families.

Rural professionals help farmers achieve their aspirations and provide guidance on the operational boundaries of the farming business. Operational boundaries however shift under the influence of external pressures. Rural professionals have a role during this time of change and uncertainty to help farmers establish the best possible position on their farm, and within their community.

This project investigated the opportunities for rural professionals to be more effective to help farmers under pressure. Research was completed through a literature review and completion of twelve interviews. Those interviewed were from three representative groups – farmers, rural professionals, and extension programme managers. Research identified considerations for the rural professional as an individual and identified considerations for rural professional organisations. To be effective both the individual and the organisation must play their part. Common themes from the research were:

Rural professional individual:

- Drivers of decision making must be understood
- The first point of contact is critical
- Technical competency remains important
- Trust must be earned, and empathy demonstrated

Rural professional organisation:

- Empower learning through coaching
- Finding the right metrics to measure and report is critical
- Value the time it takes to build enduring relationships
- Technology is a double-edged sword
- Avoid “one stop” and “cold calling” programmes
- There is a need to increase capacity, and will be achieved with the right industry culture

Extension theory to achieve change remains sound, having identified the importance of relationships and influencing from a position of trust. Change is often a journey and multiple stages within a change process need to be captured and reported for one to gain a true appreciation of the extent of change occurring in the primary sector.

Having evaluated the research, the following recommendations have been made:

Rural professional individual - the “change enabler”:

1. Follow the VALUE approach for first meetings
2. Build your networks and understand everyone has a network you can influence
3. Ensure your logic is grounded
4. Develop your coaching skills to empower farmers to seek knowledge

Rural professional organisation – the “change empowerer”:

1. Follow the coach approach
2. Continue with the sound extension model

3. Take data seriously
4. Develop aspirational programmes
5. Operate at a community level with a global focus

Rural professionals are able to help farmers to meet the many challenges currently facing the primary sector. This will be achieved through enabling activity with programmes which empower farmers to lead their own change. Technical competency of rural professionals will remain valued by farmers, but their ability to elevate a farmers own thinking will be the difference between being constantly challenged or continually empowered. There are always areas of improvement, but what remains core to any role is the importance of maintaining enduring relationships built on trust and respect.

I hope this report will provide rural professionals and the organisations they work for comfort in the fundamental principles of being an effective change agent. Farmers currently face significant pressure. Rural professionals have a role to help farmers maintain a future focus. This role will be more effective when the recommendations of this report are embedded into everyday practice.

# 1. Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge everyone who has provided me support to complete the Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme.

Specifically, I would like to thank:

- The Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme Strategic partners – DairyNZ, AGMARDT, FMG, Mackenzie Charitable Foundation, and Beef & Lamb NZ
- The Kellogg programme team of Scott Champion, Lisa Rogers, Anne Hindson, and Patrick Aldwell – thank you for your support, knowledge, and guidance throughout the 6-month programme
- DairyNZ for providing my personal funding for the programme. This investment is not only for the cost of the course, but also for the participation time spent during the course
- To my fellow Kellogg cohort 40 participants – it has been a great journey of discovery, thought provoking discussion, and fun. My time invested has been all the better with your company
- Thank you to those I interviewed through my project. I appreciated the time and valuable insight you were able to provide to my research. The primary sector is well placed with you as leaders within it
- Samantha Tennent – thank you kindly for editing my draft report and your suggestions for improvement. Your wordsmith skills are masterful. Likewise, Simon Sankey – thank you for your report structure suggestions, they were gratefully received
- The last thank you and most heartfelt goes to my wife Jacinda for keeping the family afloat during the time I have devoted to the Kellogg's programme. I thank you for your advice and council when needed – It is you who provides my confidence. To my children – Reuben, Eden, Layla, and Hazel – your leadership journey has already started and I look forward to coaching you through it.

It has been an amazing journey of discovery into my personal leadership, and primary industry leadership. I am proud to now join the esteemed company of Kellogg Rural Leaders alumni.

## Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary.....	3
2. Acknowledgements.....	5
3. Introduction .....	8
4. Project Aim.....	8
5. Research Approach .....	9
6. What is a Rural Professional? .....	10
6.1 Rural Professional attributes .....	11
7. Triggers for change – current pressures .....	11
7.1 Transformational change .....	13
7.2 Effecting change.....	13
8. Extension Theory.....	14
8.1 Utilising the farmer learning model .....	15
9. Realistic timeframes.....	16
9.1 The Transtheoretical model.....	16
9.2 Kubler Ross grief cycle .....	17
9.3 The Bell-Shaped Curve for adoption .....	18
9.4 Extension Theory Summary .....	18
10. Research Discovery – The Rural Professional .....	19
Theme 1: Understand the drivers of decision making .....	19
Theme 2: The first point of contact is critical .....	20
Theme 3: Adding value – technical competency.....	20
Theme 4: Trust and Empathy .....	21
11. Research Discovery – Rural Professional Organisations .....	22
Theme 1: Capacity.....	22
Theme 2: Coach and Empower .....	22
Theme 3: Measuring and Reporting Success .....	22
Theme 4: Value relationships .....	23
Theme 5: Technology is a double-edged sword .....	23
Theme 6: New graduates .....	23
Theme 7: Avoid “one-stop” programmes .....	23
Theme 9: Farmer and Community benefit .....	24
12. Discussion.....	25
12.1 VALUE the first contact .....	25

12.2 Wellbeing and Mental health .....	25
13. Conclusions .....	26
14. Recommendations .....	26
14.1 Individuals – enabling change .....	26
14.2 Organisations – empowering change .....	27
15. The Opportunity - What happens when we get it right? .....	28
16. References .....	29
17. Appendix 1: Research Interviews.....	30
18. Appendix 2: Research Interview Questions .....	31
18.1 Questions asked to farmers .....	31
18.2 Questions asked to rural professionals.....	31
18.3 Questions asked to Company “change managers”- .....	32

## 2. Introduction

Farmers are faced with many challenges. The external pressures of public perception, regulation and compliance have become stronger in recent years. A farm is not just a business, it is a way of life for many people and supports many families.

Farmers were once revered by the nation proudly as people of the land but now public sentiment of farmers is at an all-time low<sup>1</sup>. The change in public perception is driven by multiple influencers, including increased focus on environmental performance, and consumer expectations of product transparency. Modern technology allows negative news to travel quickly as there is an immediate, direct avenue to the public and marketplace.

Farmers are people of the land and their intention is to leave the land in a better state than they received it. Holistically they are guardians of the land – kaitiakitanga. The general public perceive New Zealand farmers as slow adaptors to change, is this true?

Rural professionals help farmers achieve their aspirations and provide guidance on the operational boundaries of the farming business. The pressure on farmers has never been greater than it is now, and it is likely to continue to increase.

This project looks at how rural professionals can be more effective to help farmers under pressure.

## 3. Project Aim

This project sought opportunities for rural professionals to be more effective with their support for farmers, during this current time requiring transformational change.

The rural professional role is multi-faceted, covering many primary industry roles. The aim of this project is to address opportunities for all rural professionals to support farmers who are going through a process of change. Through project research it is apparent both the rural professional as an individual and the organisation for which they work must be aligned – this project sought to address opportunities and alignment for both.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/southland-times/southland-top-stories/115640486/how-did-farmers-become-public-enemy-number-one>



## 4. Research Approach

Research of the project was completed through three main avenues:

### 1. Literature review

Themes were identified through literature review. The foundation knowledge I gained primarily through the review of agriculture extension papers revealed the general approach to building effective “change programmes”. Extension delivery is not new, in fact farmer learning models developed through the 1980’s are still just as relevant today.

### 2. Completion of interviews

Interviews were conducted to gain multiple opinions of the role of rural professionals in the current agricultural climate. Opinions were sought on what was working well, and opportunities for improvement. The broad themes of the interview responses have been collated and summarized in two sections of this report 1. Research Discovery – The Rural Professional; and 2. Research Discovery – Where Organisations can help the Rural Professional. Those interviewed fit into three broad categories:

- Farmers (3 interviewed)
- Rural professionals (3 interviewed)
- Rural professional programme managers (5 interviewed)

Unless specified, the opinions of individuals have not been identified. The main themes were collated and reported to represent common themes across interviews. No distinction has been made in reporting whether the opinion was from farmers, rural professionals, or programme managers.

### 3. Personal discovery

The research findings reflect continuous refinement in my own understanding and knowledge throughout the six-month learning process of the Kellogg’s Rural Leadership programme. The knowledge gained was from within the programmes course modules, both formally and informally; and outside the scheduled course where insights were frequently gained through my work at DairyNZ.

Conclusions and recommendations in this report are my own, having considered the information and perspectives received from these three research avenues.

## 5. What is a Rural Professional?

A rural professional works within the agricultural sector to support farmers in the theory and practice of farming. Rural professionals help farmers become better farmers.

While the term “rural professional” is a common term within the sector and literature, it is hard to find the definition. Articles that reference rural professionals generically describe them as primary sector specialists who provide a service or expertise.

The New Zealand Institute of Primary Industry Management (NZIPIM)<sup>2</sup> lists several rural professional roles, including; farm management advisors, rural bankers, farm accountants, fertiliser consultants, rural valuers, industry good representatives and other agribusiness service providers. The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) describes a broader definition, where rural professional roles which support “food and fibre producers” have been documented (figure 1).

Throughout this report the term “farmers” has been used as a generic term for all land holders and land users.



Figure 1: Rural professional roles within the primary sector<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> [www.nzipim/career pathways 2019](http://www.nzipim/career_pathways_2019)

<sup>3</sup> MPI Request for Proposal document 2019

Rural professionals work with farmers through change. The desired attributes of a rural professional listed in the “word cloud” infographic below were the terms most often used during interviews completed for the project. The larger and bolder the font of any word depicts the increased importance of that attribute to the role. Trust was the single most common desired attribute to be effective in a rural professional role, this was followed by technical expertise; adding value; empathy; and a focus on relationships.



## 6. Triggers for change – current pressures

Once treated as an isolated piece of land, there is more understanding how a single farm impacts the local catchment and wider environment. This has increased the expectations of a farmer to take care in the activities they perform on their farm. The public is now playing a watchdog role of the industry, using modern technology (i.e smart phones) to photograph any practice which does not meet their expectation. Through this technology anything shared can be distributed globally within a matter of seconds. The general public are now directly informed (and sometimes misinformed) and influenced by what they see and hear within the public channels of social media.

*“We must now farm to reflect the social side of farming – the business needs to add value to the community” Murray Holdaway – Taranaki farmer*

The Global Risks report 2019 produced by the World Economic Forum asks “Is the world sleepwalking into a crisis?” and states global risks are intensifying but there appears to be lack of a collective will to tackle them. This is a global question, however what is the situation in New Zealand?

Change is a constant and farming is continually changing, however people question the pace of change expected on farm. There is clear expectation from the general public to change farming practices to maintain a social license to farm. Is the will of farmers strong enough to respond to this expectation? Is enough being done?

In addition to social pressures, there are regulatory requirements to change farming practices. At the time of writing, within New Zealand there were two government policies proposed that will have significant effect on the requirements of farming: the 2019 Essential Freshwater package<sup>4</sup> and the 2019 Climate Change response (Zero Carbon) amendment Bill<sup>5</sup>.

Figure 3 (below) provides a non-exhaustive list of the multitude of pressures currently facing farmers.

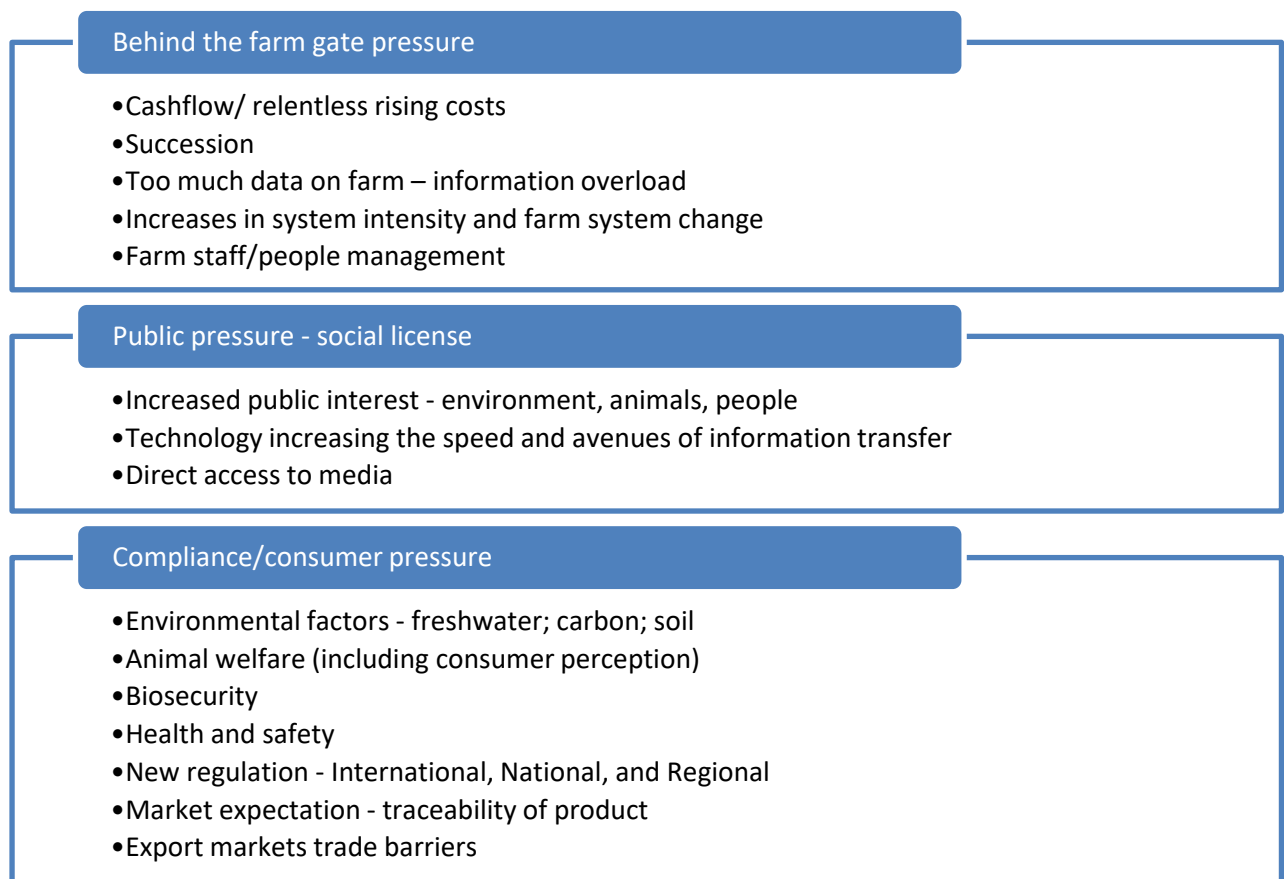


Figure 3: Modern pressures – Triggers for change

<sup>4</sup> Ministry for the Environment and Ministry for Primary Industries. 2018. Essential Freshwater: Healthy Water, Fairly Allocated

<sup>5</sup> Ministry for the Environment. 2019. Climate Change Response (Zero Carbon) Amendment Bill: Summary. Wellington: Ministry for the Environment.

## 7.1 Transformational change

The accumulation of these pressures is having a significant impact on farming. Farmers now must operate their farm business both “inside and outside the farm gate” – this term refers to the requirement of farmers to produce goods, and also farm to the needs of consumers, and the expectations of the general public.

The combination of all these pressures requires a level of change which is described by people involved in the primary sector as a wicked problem<sup>6</sup> where many people need to change their mindsets and behaviours. When a wicked problem is experienced, transformational change is required.

---

*“Producing nutritious food for a growing population, with less agricultural land, a smaller environmental footprint, climate change, and satisfying a multiplicity of consumer demands, while improving livelihoods for rural communities is a wicked problem” Mat Hocken – Manawatu farmer*

---

## 7.2 Effecting change

With increasing uncertainty and variability rural professionals have an opportunity to influence and help decisions made on farm. This includes motivating farmers to adopt new behaviours, or to support individuals as they make changes. Change is often a journey of continuous improvement often without a specific end point.

What constitutes change? Does change occur only when a practice has been completely adopted or will evidence of movement toward change count? Prochaska, Norcross and DiClemente (1994) suggest six stages of change: precontemplation, contemplation, information gathering, action, adoption and internalization. If we can document movement from one of these stages to another we have produced behavior change.

Understanding the process of change, and then ensuring we can demonstrate when change is occurring is necessary to meet the expectation of individuals, groups, and organisations seeking the change.

The role of rural professionals is not solely to enable the change, but to track and report change at multiple levels and stages. Transformational change can be reported when the complete change process is documented.

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://nzfarmlife.co.nz/foods-wicked-problems/>

## 7. Extension Theory

To achieve on-farm change we must first understand the way farmers receive and view the validity of information.

A change will occur when the new state is viewed as more appealing than the current state.

---

*Motivation is helping them want to do it, and seeing opportunity to make the most of it” Braydon Schroder – Rural Professional Waikato*

---

Farmers receive information and advice from many sources, rural professionals are only one component. They belong to many social networks and do not receive information passively, rather they build support networks for their constructs of reality (Kelly 1955).

Tom Phillips (1985) describes the process for an individual to accept information, it must be “approved” by the individual’s internal support network, which is likely to include family, close friends, social networks, and trusted advisors. Immediate family, specifically both partners and siblings are often the most influential when a decision is to be made.

Figure 4. (Phillips 1985) describes the multiple connections made by an individual during the decision-making process. The “inner circle” is a source of information for the individual, as well as a sense check of new information before it is accepted by the individual.

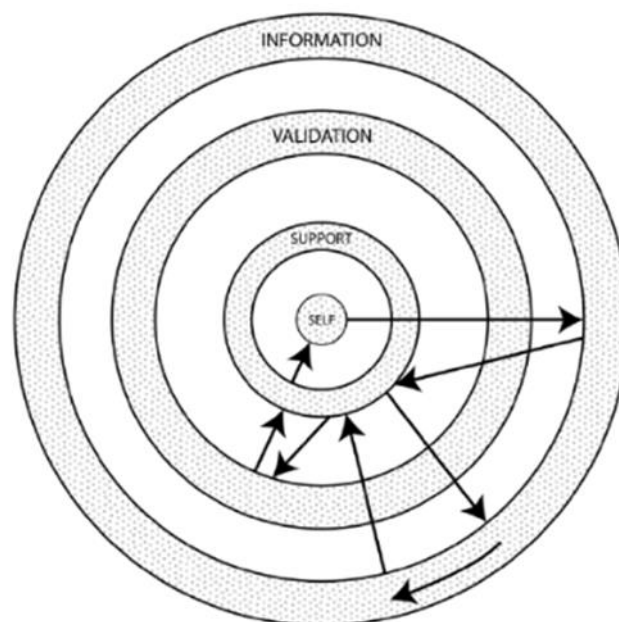


Figure 4: The learner’s social environment and learning pathway (Phillips 1985)

Phillips diagram demonstrates why credible information from an external party is not immediately acknowledged by the individual, as it must first be tested through the internal validation and support channels. Rural professionals must operate with this knowledge and understand how to gain the trust of not only the farmer directly, but the farmer’s inner circle to secure the acceptance of

information. Note: this process is followed regardless of the credibility and significance of the information.

### 8.1 Utilising the farmer learning model

There are opportunities to influence from outside the “inner circle”. Rural professionals can enable change when starting from an “outer position” of a farmer’s decision-making network. Extension practices of today commonly operate through localised farmer groups where information is provided and tested in open forum. These groups operate through respectful open and frank discussions. The concept of ‘communities of practice’ (Lave and Wenger, 1998) has been developed to describe this group knowledge sharing process. Social participation is highly important within such groups. Farmers are known to source information from their peers, which doesn’t always take place in a “work” setting. Conversations which confirm a farmer’s position are often undertaken within the farmers inner circle of trust, and in an environment where they are most comfortable, likely home or a social setting.

Communities of practice ask questions, request information, seek experience and problem solve within a group setting. Collective learning and a shared competence emerge from groups who meet and connect regularly. The network strength relies heavily on the experience and knowledge of members. Once the information has been tested and has passed the “member test”, it is more readily accepted by an individual and turned into action.

## 8. Realistic timeframes

A combination of the following three models need to be considered to understand when a farmer will accept the need to change, and consequently start a journey of change. From here a realistic timeframe can be determined.

### 9.1 The Transtheoretical model

The transtheoretical model describes the stages a decision is made. Decisions are made by weighing up the potential gains and losses resulting from the decision. Janis and Mann (1977) described this weighing up as a decisional “balance sheet”.

As individuals consider change, the weighting of the balance sheet must shift to the positive for action to occur. When an individual is in the Precontemplation stage, the pros in favour of behavior change are outweighed by the relative cons, and preference is to maintain the status quo. Precontemplators are often characterised as resistant, unmotivated, or unready for help. In the Contemplation stage, the pros and cons tend to carry equal weight and the decision is in balance. If the decisional balance is tipped in favor of the change, then individuals move to the preparation stage where a plan is developed, which is then followed with action. The last stage is the maintenance stage, lasting up to 5 years. This stage requires continual empowerment until there is enough confidence for the change to be permanently imbedded and no relapse.



Figure 5: The Spiral Model of Change adapted from the Transtheoretical model<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> <http://hamsnetwork.org/images/spiral.gif>



During programme development we must recognise many individuals are not ready for immediate action: behavior change is a process that unfolds over time. Positive intent can quickly be undone if individuals who are not ready for the change are targeted with programmes that focus directly on the action stage.

## 9.2 Kubler Ross grief cycle

The model was first introduced by psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross to explain the stages of grief experienced by terminally ill patients<sup>8</sup>. The model has since been adapted to understand broad change processes and can be used to understand the process an individual goes through when confronted with something out of their control. The Kubler Ross model does not prescribe a set timeframe for each stage within the process, within a group there will be individuals at differing stages of the cycle which explains the difficulty of “mass” delivery.

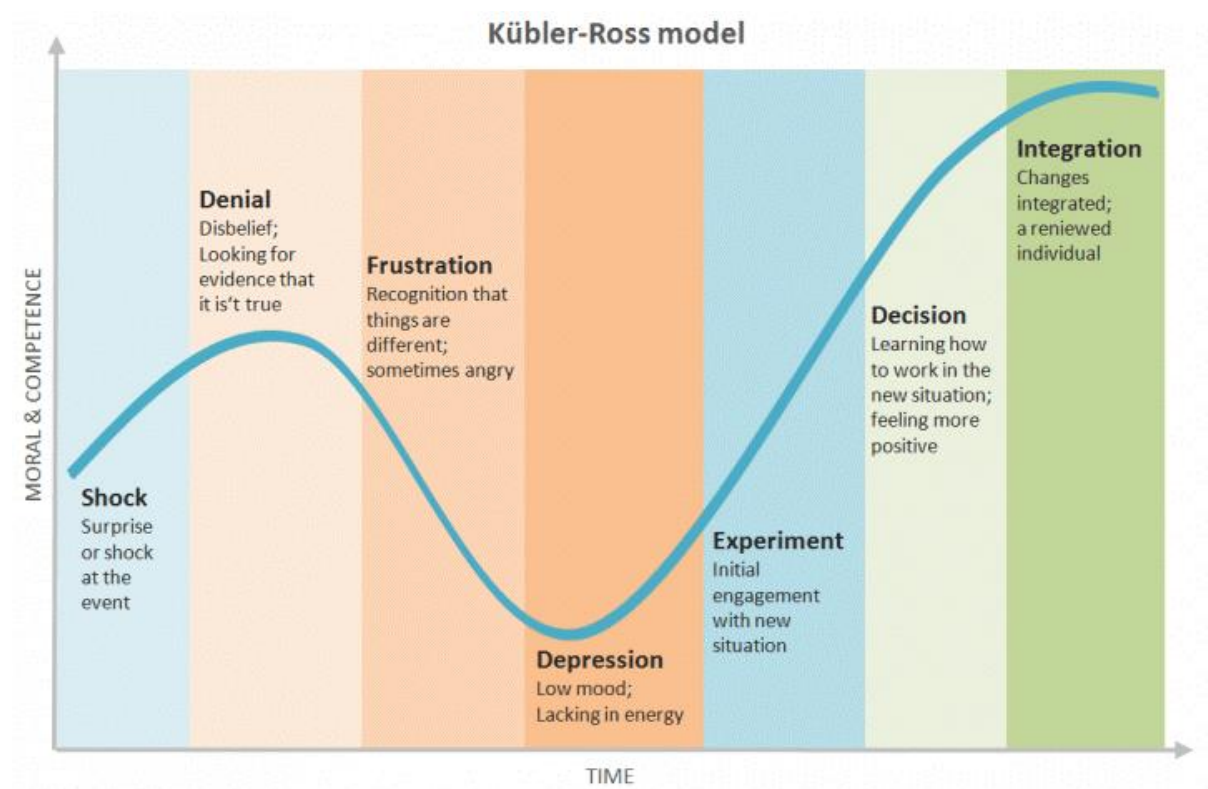


Figure 6: The Kubler Ross grief cycle adapted for organizational change<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C3%BCbler-Ross\\_model](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C3%BCbler-Ross_model)

<sup>9</sup> <https://acmdtt.com/connections-fall-2018-change/>

### 9.3 The Bell-Shaped Curve for adoption

The bell-shaped curve for adoption describes the proportion of a population which will readily accept a new “product” - whether new technology, an opportunity or otherwise.

To understand expected uptake, the bell-shaped curve provides a realistic depiction on the likely uptake across the desired market. Within a population there is reliance of innovators and early adopters to gain satisfaction before others are willing to consider it for themselves. While it may be viewed that an individual is unwilling, it may be that they are waiting for others to demonstrate the benefit first.

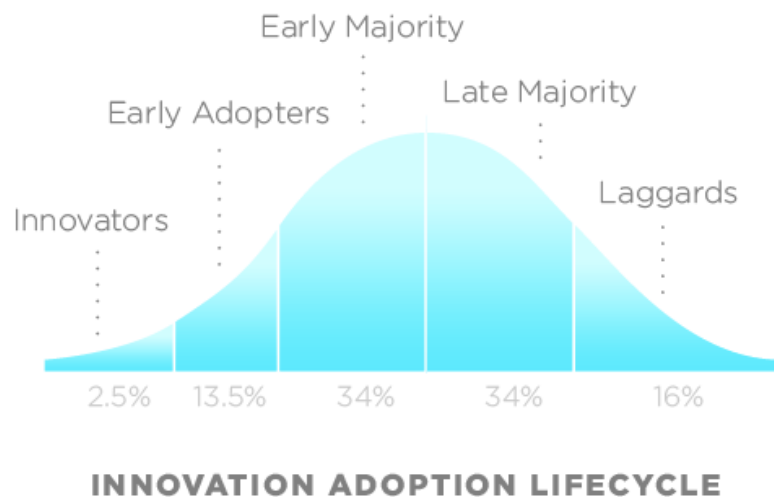


Figure 7: Rogers' Bell Shaped Curve model<sup>10</sup>

### 9.4 Extension Theory Summary

For any change there is a process every individual will go through. All farmers start from different points in the decision-making process, and progress at their own pace.

To demonstrate change is happening, there must be an understanding when a change has occurred and success evaluated at all stages in the change process. Evaluating change only at the action point in the process will not deliver due credit for the actual change – a shift in behaviour. To demonstrate transformational change programmes need to report on the multiple processes of change, not just the action stage. For such reporting to occur the programme needs to be established up front with reportable metrics for evaluation and reporting.

When formulating extension programmes it is critical to understand who will move straight away (early adopters), who require time, support, and empowerment, and who will not activate change voluntarily. Accordingly, when regulation is necessary, this should be targeted only to lift the laggards.

<sup>10</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technology\\_adoption\\_life\\_cycle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technology_adoption_life_cycle)

## 9. Research Discovery – The Rural Professional

Interviews completed through this project identified opportunities for rural professionals to be more effective in their role. The following is a summary of the main themes which emerged:

### Theme 1: Understand the drivers of decision making

It was felt that advice currently was tailored too pointedly on improving profit, without considering emotive drivers of farm business decision making. An interview response provided the following example: Would a farmer be open to harvesting extra feed which is proven to increase profit? Generally, the answer would be “yes”, however would the answer change if it required an extra 1 hour of the farmers time per week, which would otherwise be spent with their young family? It depends on the individual and is likely to change as priorities shift with the dynamics of their family and business.

The interview process asked all farmers interviewed “why they farm” answered included:



Figure 8: Reasons why farmers farm

In addition, interview responses noted how family farming business often have a conflicting consideration as the same finances and resources are shared between the business and supporting their family. One example is to consider a situation where the tractor hours are high and replacement is advised, though at the same time the farmer is weighing up investing in their kids' education, by enrolling them in boarding school. What takes priority? The cost does not always extend to both, and it is a family decision where the investment is to be made.

## Theme 2: The first point of contact is critical

---

*“They don’t care what you know until they know that you care” Chris Garland –  
Baker Ag director*

---

Interviews highlighted the importance for rural professionals to make a good first impression. If the first point of contact is right the relationship starts on the right foot. To achieve this the following suggestions were made:

1. Listen first: practise active listening (as opposed to just hearing) to gain understanding of what is behind the farmers words. The importance of what the farmer is saying should not be ignored, as often cues offered an opportunity to connect with the farmers values. Picking up the signals (stress as an example) will shift the direction of the discussion to one more relevant to the farmer at that point in time.
2. Be prepared and on time: ensure the background information is prepared and accurate. Be clear on your purpose, ensure clarity of what you want to achieve during the visit. Timeliness was highly regarded as an indication of respect. Arriving early or late was not encouraged.
3. Take time to build trust: invest in the relationship. Ensure the clarity is aligned with the farmers purpose. Understand the current situation on farm and the background. Understand where the farmer wants to take the business, and from this it can be determined what is required to get there.
4. Deliver on your promise: do what you said you would do. Admit if you are not sure of something and make it your action to resolve.
5. Follow up: check in to ensure any recommendations are going to plan. When not going to plan, the follow-up allows early identification and an opportunity to resolve.

## Theme 3: Adding value – technical competency

The rural professional was viewed as the translator of information, translating often complex and ambiguous information into concise detail of what it means directly for the individual farmer. Technical competency is a foundation skill for any rural professional, the following suggestions were offered by interviewees:

Keep up to date: rural professionals need to remain up to date in the broader sector, to provide objective information to the farmer. This can be achieved through reading of current media, continued association with professional networks, and ensuring continued opportunity for personal and professional development.

Contextualise the information: provide information which best fits the farmers requirements giving consideration specific to the effect on their business. Farmers have a very strong emotional connection to their business. The rural professional must understand the farmer, farm business, and wider environment, when translating complex information. Summarising information allows farmers

to stay informed, but spend less time on ambiguity, whereby affording them time to be spent elsewhere.

Be future focused: tough conversations may be necessary on occasion, especially surrounding regulation. Opinion received was that many rural professionals continue to operate in the production driven advisory space. Of these rural professional's there is a disservice when they are not prepared to remain current with the changing needs of the farmer. At all times ensure the advice is up-to-date, objective, and has a future focus.

---

“the most profitable business with the lowest footprint will win the market share” Richard Kyte – Rural Professional Southland

---

#### Theme 4: Trust and Empathy

Trust is earned and is the most sought after rural professional attribute. Interviewees suggested the following when specifying how trust can be earned:

Share the weight: farmers are facing multiple avenues of “modern pressures” and are currently feeling very isolated from society. The social license to operate needs to be repaired, and rural professionals have a role to advocate for the farmer. The weight can be shared when it is openly discussed with farmers. Public opinion can be swayed when rural professionals participate in open discussion.

Slow down: build enduring relationships and go the extra mile for every individual. Provide quality over quantity. Every farmer is part of a farming community network, therefore approach each individual farmer engagement as between yourself and the entire farming community.

## 10. Research Discovery – Rural Professional Organisations

Throughout the research phase of the project it was clear that for a rural professional, as an individual, to be effective the organisation for whom they work has a significant role to play. All people interviewed (farmers, rural professionals, and programme managers) were asked to provide suggestions for rural professional organisations. These suggestions have been collated into themes and summarized.

### Theme 1: Capacity

Increasing the capacity of the rural professional sector is often touted as the biggest challenge “we need more technical experts on the ground to deliver farmer change programmes”. While those interviewed generally agreed there is a capacity issue, most recommendations did not focus on increasing capacity, rather the focus was to develop effective programmes. The premise described if the right programme and environment is achieved then capacity will naturally build through increased work satisfaction.

---

*“the answer is not to find a bigger hammer to crack the same nut, but to seek opportunities to shift the dial” Andrew Fraser – DairyNZ programme manager*

---

### Theme 2: Coach and Empower

Rural professional companies have always focused on building sound technical knowledge of their staff. It was recognised that technical knowledge must be maintained; however, capability needed to extend wider than technical knowledge alone. Responses stated a need to shift approach from providing information as “the answer” to working alongside the farmer to empower learning. This shift would focus farmers on becoming better decision makers, and in doing so would result in programmes not having to “push information”, but rather farmers would work out their own information gaps and request information or advice to advance their understanding.

### Theme 3: Measuring and Reporting Success

Responses all agreed that the primary sector is doing a poor job demonstrating farmer achievements, particularly in the environmental space. The ability to capture success and report at a level which meets public and consumer expectations is critical to maintain our social license to operate. The importance of data to report on success was highlighted, and it was considered programmes needed to do more to ensure appropriate data was collected.

---

*“have an industry standard of reporting to bring the sector together in a transparent and credible way” Penny Clark-Hall – social license consultant*

---

#### Theme 4: Value relationships

Industry programmes need to be flexible enough to allow staff to build enduring relationships with the farmers involved. Farmer workload needs to be considered by avoiding programmes which will force appointments on farmers due to inflexible programme time constraints. The programme also needs to recognise that farmers will not all be in the same stage of decision making.

It was viewed as underappreciated how much resource and energy it takes to generate change. Programmes need to focus on understanding the farmer, their values and drivers, and building from this position when designing with the farmer the future state. Once the desired state is known the process to implement is easier to achieve as farmer buy-in is achieved.

#### Theme 5: Technology is a double-edged sword

The use of technology on the one hand is very effective to reach farmers with information, however without appropriate support it was not seen as a sole catalyst for change. Delivering information through digital platforms can easily be “glossed over” by the farmer and end up adding to the current situation of information overload. It was deemed necessary to ensure any technology is supported with follow-up and discussion to embed the information and activate change.

Technology was highly valued when used well to support and empower farmers decision making. Continued development of tools and platforms which empower farmers and facilitate efficient discussion was encouraged.

#### Theme 6: New graduates

Within the interview process and personal communication, it was pleasing to find that “graduate” rural professionals were being well received by farmers. Farmers often were quick to recognise the value-add opportunity of these graduates, specifically when operating under the brand of a respected credible company. Farmers afforded respect when individuals “prove themselves” through delivery and follow through. Farmers were very receptive to the “additional strengths” of graduates including their enthusiasm, being up to speed with modern changes, efficiency, and currency with advances in technology.

#### Theme 7: Avoid “one-stop” programmes

It was deemed a necessity of any programme to incorporate multiple engagement opportunities between the farmer and the rural professional. Enduring relationships built on a platform of respect and trust takes time to develop. Continued engagement ensures the farmer is supported through decision making. Every programme needs to allow the opportunity for staff to follow through, as it cannot be expected all questions will be answered (or asked) in one visit.

**Theme 8: Avoid cold calling** – without prompting, every farmer interviewed highlighted cold calling as a negative practice to avoid, citing a lack of respect for the farmers time. Farmers stated the interruption to the farmers day is often underestimated. Farmers are time poor and go into their day with a plan of what they need to achieve, and even a “short” 15-minute discussion has an impact. The parallel drawn was with a client booking time with a lawyer – it would be very rare to visit the lawyer without first booking in time, so why is the farmer any different?

## Theme 9: Farmer and Community benefit

Think holistically about how a programme will benefit not only the farmer but also how this will result in community benefit. Programmes considering community benefit must be aware of how individual farmers, industry sectors, and all sectors within the community interact. Cross sector collaboration was desired through farmer change programmes to inspire collective action and ensure alignment in objectives.

---

*“by supporting farmers we must also be thinking of how it will build resilient rural communities” – Mark Patchett - MPI director*

---

**Side note:** Is the term “rural professional” disempowering the farmer who the rural professional is tasked to assist? A question relayed through the interview process suggested a negative connotation to the “advisor being referred to as the “rural professional”. The question asked was “if the advisor is the rural professional, then what is the farmer?” the implication was that the farmer must then be the rural amateur. If this negative connotation undermines the intent of the advisor, an alternate naming convention should be sought.



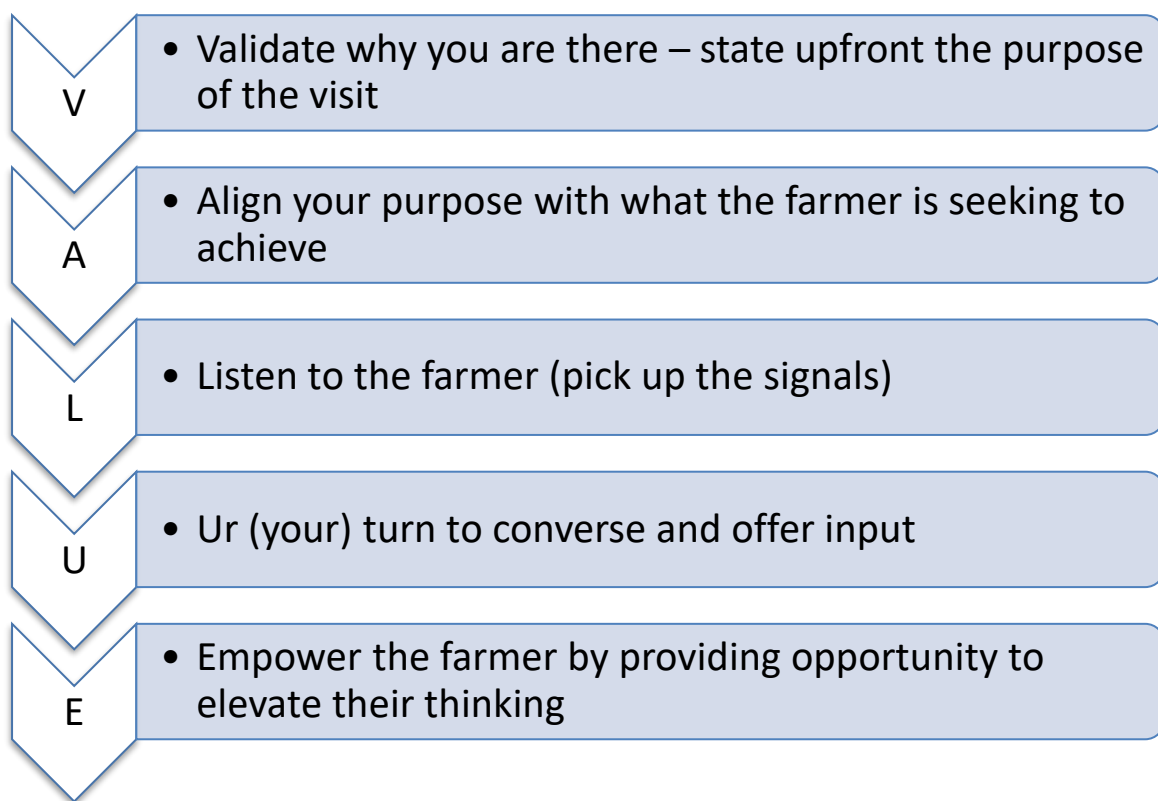
## 11. Discussion

Considering the themes through research discovery there were two areas where it was identified further strengthening or explanation was required:

1. Making effective first points of contact, for which the author has created the VALUE approach, described below; and
2. Ensuring rural professionals give regard to their own, and others, mental health and wellbeing, for which a recommendation is provided

### 11.1 VALUE the first contact

To ensure the first point of contact is well received and purposeful, the author has created an approach called the VALUE approach. Rural Professionals are encouraged to observe the VALUE acronym at the first point of contact:



Source: Adam Duker 2019

### 11.2 Wellbeing and Mental health

The nature of farming exposes people living and working on farms to numerous factors which can negatively impact mental wellbeing. These include:

- Working long hours often in isolation
- Living and working on the farm 24/7
- Sleep deprivation at certain times of the year
- Dealing with farm succession
- Financial stresses: often high debt and stressed cash flow
- Uncontrollable such as weather

Rural professionals are part of the farming community, and everyone needs to look out for all members of the community (including yourself). Rural professionals must understand the signs of mental stress, including depression, and be prepared for what to say and do if encountered. Completing a short course such as “Good Yarn” will provide the preparation necessary to recognise and respond to a negative wellbeing situation.

## 13. Conclusions

The current pressures facing farmers is such that the way they have been farming must change. Rural professionals are tasked with an important role - not only to help farmers, but to be advocates of a primary sector which is currently struggling to meet the expectations of the general public.

Every rural professional has a role to play. To be effective the rural professional must value the importance of investing time into building enduring trusting relationships, not only directly with the farmer but with the farmers trusted networks. Technical competency will always be valued in a rural professional's role, however, equally important is the ability of rural professionals to empower farmers by creating the motivation and desire to change.

Rural professional organisation's must also play their role by ensuring programmes of work are “enabling”. To be effective any change programme must be future focused and present the opportunity within defined operating boundaries. Opportunity will not solely be an economic decision, but will place value on environmental, economic, and socially sustainable farm businesses within a strong New Zealand primary sector.

The multitude of challenges facing farmers today mean there has never been a more important time to consider the role of the rural professional and make improvements with programmes which support farmer change.

## 14. Recommendations

### 14.1 Individuals – enabling change

As a rural professional you have an opportunity to influence and steer the primary sector. Your effectiveness to enable change will be enhanced by following these recommendations:

Make a positive start - Follow the VALUE Approach for first interactions. An honest and effective conversation cannot be undertaken without first gaining trust. Trust is earned through demonstrating respect and aligning values.

Build your networks – it is all about networks and positive influence. Farmers trust and learn from their peers. Treat each interaction as between yourself and the community, if you do a good job with one person, they will disperse the information through their own network.

Go slow to speed up – invest time to build relationships and get to know the individual and what drives them before making recommendations. Go the extra mile to deliver; understand, advise, reflect, reinforce, and follow up.

Ensure your logic is grounded - Aligning your Kaupapa with those of farmers to ensure connection is made with values and purpose. Find a sounding board to test your logic and approach. Effective communication is key. Good leadership is about the simple translation of a complicated matter.

Develop your coaching skills - Technical expertise is important, but equally important is your ability to weave into the conversation opportunities to empower farmers to make informed future focused decisions.

## 14.2 Organisations – empowering change

Rural professional companies provide the direction, resource, and programmes to support farmer change. For an individual working within a support programme to be effective it is recommended the company follows the following recommendations:

Follow the coach approach – Historically, extension activities have been based on delivery of technical information. Programmes must focus on shifting mindset, by creating the motivation and desire to become better decision makers. To do this we must spend time to understand the drivers of the individual for change.

The extension model is still sound - A programme does not have to reach everyone directly. No programme has the resources to be everything to everyone, therefore the target audience must be identified. If the programme is right, it will reach everyone (eventually) through the extension network. Trusting your programme allows cold calling to be avoided (which also lacks respect).

Take data seriously – The complete picture cannot be formed without evidence. to be world leading we need to have defined metrics which not only show final outcomes, but also the change process. A change programme is about change in capability, motivation, and confidence – Evaluation must capture these qualitative values to demonstrate when change has occurred.

Aspirational programmes – Programmes already have a focus on credibility. This can be further enhanced by ensuring programmes launch from a positive platform by ensuring credit is given for change already made. Programmes must be aspirational to rise a level by shifting the conversation from a reactive negative mindset based on compliance to a consumer values perspective.

Global perspective at a community level – work at a local community level to drive change. Invest at a strategic level to gain alignment, and then inject resources which provide opportunity for local leadership and ownership. Celebrate the small wins and build momentum. Operating locally ensures the diversity of individual views is recognised and programmes can be built to extend understanding, motivation, and confidence.

## 15. The Opportunity - What happens when we get it right?

**Farmers will lead their own change** with advisors operating in a support capacity by providing advice when the issue is complex. Rural professionals will assume a coaching role, to help farmers elevate their thinking and empower decision making. When this balance is correct it won't be necessary to push programmes on farmers, as it will be the farmers themselves who are able to identify their gaps and what they require to continue to enhance their own understanding.

Rural professionals will continue to be **respected for their core technical knowledge** and valued for their ability to translate complex information to what an individual farmer needs to know. Farmers will continue to challenge rural professionals to increase their technical knowledge, as they will be hungry to fill any knowledge gaps. Any advice will consider relevance beyond the farm gate, and include environmental, social, economic, and consumer considerations.

The capacity issue will be solved with rural professionals operating in a highly respected and rewarding sector. Rural professionals will know when they have done a good job and will gain **personal satisfaction knowing they are adding value** to farmers. Rural professionals will remain within the workforce and will be enjoying their work and proud of their success. Capacity will increase with the existing workforce retained and new "recruits" continually entering.

Technology advancements will continue to bring the consumer closer and closer to the farmer. Farmers will be empowered with accreditation programmes that **meet the current and future expectation of consumers**. Farmers will be proud to be demonstrating excellence. Performance will be achieved with programmes seeking commercial value at a bar much higher than compliance alone.

A "think globally but operate locally" mantra will ensue. Individuals will be empowered to want to improve their practice, understanding the benefit to themselves, family, locality, region, and beyond. Incremental small-scale improvements will be recognised and used to build momentum to maintain NZ farming at the leading edge of **world best farming practice**.

## 16. References

<https://www.bakerag.co.nz/news/open-letter-national-policy-freshwater-statement>

[www.nzipim/career pathways 2019](http://www.nzipim/career_pathways_2019)

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/southland-times/southland-top-stories/115640486/how-did-farmers-become-public-enemy-number-one>

<https://nzfarmlife.co.nz/foods-wicked-problems/>

Kubler Ross Grief Cycle [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C3%BCbler-Ross\\_model](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C3%BCbler-Ross_model)

Kubler Ross Grief Cycle diagram <https://acmdtt.com/connections-fall-2018-change/>

The Bell-Shaped Curve for Adoption [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technology\\_adoption\\_life\\_cycle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technology_adoption_life_cycle)

Janis, I. L., & Mann, L. (1977). Decision making: A psychological analysis of conflict, choice, and commitment. New York, NY, US: Free Press

Kelly, G.A. (1955) The Psychology of Personal Constructs. Vol 1, New York: W.W. Norton (abstract obtained from reference Phillips, T. I. (1985)

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity

Phillips, T. I. (1985) The Development of Methodologies for the Determination and Facilitation of Learning for Dairy Farmers. Masters Research Thesis, Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry, University of Melbourne.

Prochaska, J. O., Norcross, J. C., & DiClemente, C. C. (1994). Changing for good: A revolutionary six-stage program for overcoming bad habits and moving your life positively forward. New York, NY: Avon Books

Shadbolt N.M., Olubode-Awosola F., and Rutsito B. (2013) Resilience of New Zealand Dairy farm businesses.

The Global Risks Report 2019, 14th Edition, published by the World Economic Forum

Ministry for the Environment and Ministry for Primary Industries. 2018. Essential Freshwater: Healthy Water, Fairly Allocated

Ministry for the Environment. 2019. Climate Change Response (Zero Carbon) Amendment Bill: Summary. Wellington: Ministry for the Environment.

MPI Request for Proposal document 2019 (obtained directly from MPI)

Spiral model of change diagram <http://hamsnetwork.org/images/spiral.gif>

### **Kellogg and Nuffield Scholar reports referenced:**

(sourced from <https://ruralleaders.co.nz/>):

Chris Garland (2005). The sheep and beef industry and agribusiness consultancy in 2020

Eva Harr (2017). Strategies for creating and implementing sustainable change programmes

Joanna Greaves (2017). Emotional Intelligence: Seismic Shifts in the Primary Industry Compel Whole Brain Leadership

Kate Scott (2019). Enabling better environmental outcomes in agriculture

Laura Keenan (2019). What is the future for farm compliance in New Zealand

Nathan Keoghnan (2015). Why do the All Blacks need a Coach when 76% of farmers don't – a guide for farmers engaging consultants

Penny Clark-Hall (2018). Social Licence to Operate

Sharon Morrell (2015). Navigating constraints: Primary producers coping in changing contexts

## **17. Appendix 1: Research Interviews**

It is with gratitude that the following people assisted the project through interview:

Penny Clark-Hall – Social license consultant

Andrew Fraser – DairyNZ senior manager – farmer experience

Murray Holdaway – Taranaki dairy farmer

Chris Garland – Wairarapa BakerAg consultancy director

Mat Hocken – Manawatu dairy farmer

Denise Bewsell – Red Meat Profit Partnership specialist extension manager

Braydon Schroder – Waikato Perrin Ag agribusiness consultant

Richard Morrison – Rangitikei Sheep and beef farmer

Richard Kyte – Southland farm consultant

Mark Patchett – MPI rural communities and farming support director

Dan Brier – Beef and Lamb NZ GM farmer excellence

Vicki Compton – MPI farm systems change workstream lead

## 18. Appendix 2: Research Interview Questions

### Introduction for all interviewees

My Kelloggs research project focusses on the role of the rural professional, and opportunities to be more effective during this time of change and uncertainty. My research report will seek a balanced view by looking back at the NZ primary sector to understand what change has occurred, and at what pace, then understand the current picture, and what is required of rural professionals, moving forward. Depending on where it lands the change may be based on continuous improvement for some, and transformational change for others – depending on the individual, company, or sector.

I seek your opinion on the role of rural professionals within this climate.

### 18.1 Questions asked to farmers

#### **Current State**

1. Why are you in the business of farming?
2. What is your vision for your farm?
3. Think of a rural professional who you trust:
  - a. How long have you known them?
  - b. What would be the single biggest commonality with you two?
  - c. What do you think they hold as highest importance to the way you operate?
4. In the last 2-3 years think of two rural professionals you met for the first time – one which you value and trust and one you do not value or trust. What stands out as different?
5. (if needed based on response above) What do you feel would be the biggest indicators of the start of a positive trusting relationship when meeting a rural professional for the first time?
6. How many rural professionals know your vision? (not necessarily word for word but you would say have a good general understanding)

#### **Looking forward**

7. To enable change on farm what are the most significant elements?
8. What are the most significant pressures you face farming which were not at this same level 10 years ago?
9. To be effective for your farm business over the next 10 years:
  - a. what key attributes should a rural professional, as an individual, demonstrate?
  - b. Which of these attributes do you feel need more emphasis?
10. Likewise, to be effective to your business over the next 10 years:
  - a. what operational areas should a rural professional organisation ensure is delivered within their programme?
  - b. Which of these operational areas do you feel need further emphasis?

### 18.2 Questions asked to rural professionals

1. Please describe the nature of your job
2. What is your why?
3. What is your company why?
4. Think of a farmer you have a great relationship with:
  - a. How long have you known them?

- b. What would be the single biggest commonality with you two?
  - c. In terms of your relationship, what do you think they hold as highest importance to them?
- 5. To enable change on farm what are the most significant elements?
- 6. What would be the most important change you could help a farmer with?
  - a. How open would they be to this change?
- 7. Accepting the change requirements within the nature of farming; If you owned your company, what would be one change you would make which would really benefit to farmers in this era?
- 8. Overall, what do you feel are the biggest shortfalls within the rural professional sector?

### 18.3 Questions asked to Company “change managers”-

- 1. Please describe the nature of your role
- 2. What is your company vision?
- 3. To enable change on farm what are the most significant elements?
- 4. What areas of your current farmer change programme are working well?
- 5. What values of a rural professional would you believe farmers would rate highest?
- 6. What are the most significant pressures farmers face which were not at this same level 10 years ago?
- 7. Thinking about these “modern pressures”, if you were to step into the shoes of a farmer right now, what do you think they would highlight:
  - a. rural professionals currently do really well?
  - b. as gaps in terms of what rural professionals currently provide them?
  - c. what further gaps do you see within the rural professional sector?
- 8. Where do you get your inspiration from when developing changes to your change programme?
- 9. Can you provide an example of a new area you are bringing (or have brought) into your work programme to meet the needs of farmers over the next 10 years?
  - a. what is needed to achieve this?