



KELLOGG
RURAL LEADERSHIP
PROGRAMME

Farmer Storytelling

NAVIGATING OUR
NARRATIVE

**KELLOGG RURAL
LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME**

COURSE 40 2019

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Photo Credit: Geoff Walker

Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Introduction	1
Aim.....	1
Methodology	2
Defining Farmer Storytelling.....	2
Current State of the agricultural industry and it's storytelling...8	
Desired State of the Agricultural Industry and It's Storytelling .12	
Conclusions.....	15
Recommendations.....	16
Figures	17
Tables	17
References.....	17



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INTRODUCTION

The Primary Industries have long been described as the economic backbone of New Zealand, with farming businesses being a way of life since before anyone can remember.

Not too long ago, many of the city dwelling population had an Uncle and Aunt, or Grandparents, or family friends on a farm, that provided that nostalgic connection, and understanding of what it means to live and work on the land.

With an increasing national population year on year since 1950 from 1,908,000 to 4,468,457 in 2012 (New Zealand Population, 2019), the increase of those living in urban areas from 69.6% in 1991 to 71.8% in 2006

and the decrease of those living in rural areas from 12.2% in 1991 to 12% in 2006 (Stats NZ, 2019), the need for understanding what it is that the rural sector does and its role in our national brand is increasingly important.

The concept of storytelling can bring to mind thoughts of painting a positive picture of a company or industry, and not acknowledging any other aspects in order to please an audience (Fryer, 2019).

Whilst this is certainly true can also be used as a vehicle to get accurate information, in a relatable way, to a target audience, to create an impact, and it's this type of storytelling that could be the answer to bridging any gaps in education, perception, understanding and relatability that the rural sector are experiencing currently.

Rural New Zealand have heard the message loud and clear from its industry bodies and advisors across the board; get out there and tell your story.

But is it that easy?

And do those of us on the ground know where to start?

AIM

In this research, I will look to define the concept of farmer storytelling and to identify its various components, medium options and target audiences.

The aim of this study is to better understand the concept of storytelling, identify the current gaps and the impacts that the New Zealand agricultural industry desires.

The recommendations will aim to provide advice to the rural sector on how to execute storytelling in an effective way based on the findings generated by this research.

METHODOLOGY

The research undertaken for this project included a literature review, thematic analysis, survey and interview.

The literature review component was essential in understanding the current state of storytelling in the sector, and what the desired outcomes of successful storytelling actually were.

In conjunction with the literature review, grouping themes and viewpoints together was a large part of the project.

The surveys were conducted to provide examples of where different individuals and groups across the sector stood in regard to target audiences and desired impacts of storytelling. The 18 individuals surveyed were either professionals that the Kellogg40 cohort were given access to, such as industry and national leaders, past Kelloggers who were subject matter experts, or individuals whose employment was regularly in the agricultural sector.

Seven individuals were selected for the interview component of this research. Those interviewed were selected due to their successful involvement in taking a product from its origins on farm through to an end consumer, and the way they incorporated storytelling to achieve that.

The interviews provided examples of

successful storytelling which assisted in the recommendations made at the conclusion of the project, that would then allow other primary producers to do the same.

1. DEFINING FARMER STORYTELLING

“A way of sharing a narrative that educates those both inside and outside of the agricultural industry, providing insight into people, processes, products and ethics.”

Before we begin delving into Farmer Storytelling, and what it can be used for, it is imperative that we understand exactly what it is. Whilst there are many definitions for the term ‘storytelling’, it was more difficult to find a specific definition that

applied to Farmers.

For the purpose of this research project, I will define storytelling in its own right, and then add in the Farmer element to it, to give us a working definition for the duration of the project.

At its most basic, storytelling as defined by the Oxford Dictionary (Oxford Definition: Storytelling, 2019) is: “Storytelling: (noun) the activity of telling or writing stories”.

Wikipedia (Storytelling, 2019) offers a more in-depth definition, with more variety, with accurate application to this particular project and question.

“Storytelling describes the social and cultural activity of sharing stories, sometimes with improvisation, theatrics, or embellishment. Every culture has its own stories or narratives,

which are shared as a means of entertainment, education, cultural preservation or instilling moral values.[1] Crucial elements of stories and storytelling include plot, characters and narrative point of view.

The term “storytelling” can refer in a narrow sense specifically to oral storytelling and also in a looser sense to techniques used in other media to unfold or disclose the narrative of a story.

When we consider the above definitions, we can conclude that storytelling in business or industry is a way of sharing a narrative that educates those both inside and outside of said business or industry, providing insight into people, processes, products and ethics.

To be more specific with this definition, we need to re-frame it in regards to agricultural businesses, or in looser terms, farmers.

Due to this research discussing farmer storytelling, we need to also define what we are grouping as farmers, and for that we look to YourDictionary (Workman, 2019) (Definition: Farmer, 2019):

“The definition of a farmer is a person who owns, works on or operates an agricultural enterprise, either commercially or to sustain himself or his family.”

Farmers are then defined as people who own, work or operate agricultural enterprises, which could include but not be limited to sheep and beef, horticulture, dairy, arable etc. or otherwise known as the primary producers.

To define farmer storytelling, we can combine the two simple versions of each definition to create:

“a way of sharing a narrative that educates those both inside and outside of the agricultural industry, providing insight into people, processes, products and ethics”

As this project continues, this will be the definition of farmer storytelling.

1.1 COMPONENTS OF STORYTELLING

According to Allie Decker’s blog “The ultimate guide to storytelling” (Decker, 2018) there are 7 key components to successfully telling a story, I’ve summarised these below.

1. Know Your Audience

Who needs to hear your story? When you consider who your audience might be, many questions come to mind; what stories do they know already, are they a particular age, sex, industry, geographic location, and will you have more success through keeping your target audience quite broad?

For a farm based story, more often than not, the desired outcome will influence who the target audience may be. For example if the story is intended to bridge a rural-urban divide by way of education and understanding, then the audience will most likely be urban New Zealand, and more specifically the larger centres such as Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.

We’ll discuss target audience’s specific to the agricultural industry further in section 1.3.

2. Define Your Core Message

Once you’ve established who needs to hear your message, you need to be clear on what that message will be. Is it a position or stance on an issue? Is it selling a product, or a business tag line?

A core message can be anything, but normally will be a single point that you need someone else to understand. A short, sharp punchline is a great way to describe a core message.

3. Decide What Kind Of Story You're Telling

Continuing on from your core message, it's imperative that your story makes sense. This is where you'll expand on that main message and explain to your audience what your about.

Examples of types of stories include:

- Provoke action
- Provide education
- Explain values
- Bring together community
- Show the human side to a business, industry or cause

It is important to note that throughout a storytelling journey, the narrative can, and in many cases, should change. For example, a Farmer might begin with showing the human side to his business, him and his family on the farm each day, real people that others can relate to. He might then delve into sharing their values, or vision or mission statement of the business. Then a topical piece of legislation may come about and he might appeal to his wider audience for action in a particular direction. At times these kinds of stories will overlap, which absolutely makes sense.

4. Your Call-To-Action

An effective story will have something that you want the audience to do at the end of it. Popular examples are to buy a product, support a cause, give money, follow a Facebook Page, vote a particular way, the list goes on.

When we think of Farmer Storytelling, a call-

to-action could be the purchasing of products, voting in a way that supports the industry or encouraging open-minded thinking and understanding of processes and practice.

5. Choose Your Medium

Another component again influenced by earlier described components; the medium you choose will often relate to the target audience. It's imperative to understand where your target audience source their information from when positioning your message.

Mediums, as outlined in the following sub-heading, fall into four simple categories, but within those, the options are hugely diverse.

Within each category you have the option of who uses that medium to convey the story.

Is it first hand, directly told by you? Could it be an interested party who has an agenda (either to support or oppose your story and it's message), or is it a third party who is less likely to be bias, but harder for you to influence. An example of each of these for a Primary Producer could be first hand, telling the story themselves, perhaps via a Facebook page or video, an interested party such as Beef and Lamb or Dairy NZ could tell your story for you, or a third party such as a national news program with no prior knowledge of your business could run a story.

6. Write your story

Once the strategy around the above components are complete, the blueprint is in place to begin the creative process. This is often a difficult part for the humblest of New Zealanders, as talking about ourselves, and being proud of what we do can be intimidating, but no one knows your business or strategy more than you, and this is the time to put pen

to paper, or tap away on a key board, and lay it all out there for the audience.

In other corners of business in New Zealand, many would enlist a Copy Writer, or someone who has a way with words and is able to capture the values and key messages that one might have to offer. A professional wordsmith can also transcribe the story in such a way that the target audience can understand and respond to in the desired way.

7. Share Your Story

The hard work is done, and with one leap left, the final component is all about sharing the story. The biggest thing to consider here is a slight juxtaposition; it's important to follow the plan, or the components described in points 1-6, this will ensure that you are sending your message, through the right mediums, to the right people. But equally important is the ability to be flexible, and to assess the success of your storytelling, an example of this would be if your target audience were the younger members of urban New Zealand, and you had been using print media as the main means to get your message in front of them with little results, but the Facebook post you boosted in Auckland was proving far more successful than anticipated, then you should ensure you have the ability to test the waters and then react accordingly.

1.2 STORYTELLING MEDIUMS

Gone are the days of choosing between the local newspaper and the radio for your marketing purposes. For those sharing their stories there is more choice than ever.

Here we break down the 4 main categories that different medium fall into, and provide examples of each in line with Allie Decker's recent blog (Decker, 2018):

Table 1: Storytelling mediums

Written	Spoken
Books	Face to face
Articles	Conversation
Newspapers	Seminar
Publications, handouts	Expo
Audio	Digital
Pod casts	Social Media
Radio Interview	QR Codes
	TV Program
	Video Footage and YouTube
	Documentary and Film

Within each medium, there is the opportunity to choose the narrator, which can ultimately decide the success or failure of the story being told.

These include:

Table 2: Narrators of the story

First hand Story told by Farmer Authentic but possibly bias	
Second hand Story told by an Interested Party Possible agenda (positive or negative)	Third party Story told by Independent Party No agenda or bias, but control of story told is lost

For many businesses and industries, the decisions around choosing the right medium, mixed with the right narration is crucial for successful storytelling. A variety of medium and narration may be required depending on the desired result.

For example, a farmer looking to share a story of values, and products for sale may well have a speaking slot at regional seminars to



Photo Credit: Geoff Walker

provide that face to face experience and create trust. At such a seminar, an industry body, or interested party, may speak as well, throwing support behind the farmer and his business. At the same time they could be promoting their business Facebook page on social media that portrays their daily life in the first person, with products mixed in to cover the digital aspect of storytelling.

It's important to understand that different mediums can be used to achieve different outcomes, and that where farmers may have limited resources, there is support available in the wider industry.

1.3 TARGET AUDIENCES

Once you have a message that you want to get out there and a chosen medium to help you convey that message, it's important to determine who are you trying to get a message to? In different industries and business this will vary.

Oxford (Oxford Definition: Target Audience, 2019) defines a target audience as:

“a particular group at which a product such as a film or advertisement is aimed”

New Zealand's farmers have a number of possible target audiences, and for the purpose of this research, we have concentrated on the domestic situation, and also the audiences described as significant to those who were surveyed and interviewed. Possible target audiences could be but are not limited to:

- Government
- Regulatory bodies
- Industry bodies

- Lobby groups or activists
- Fellow farmers
- Urban New Zealand
- Consumers of primary products
- The next generation (schools)

It is important to acknowledge that there are many other audiences that New Zealand farmer's may like to tell their stories to, these 8 mentioned above have been chosen as a general cross section of the possible domestic audiences currently.

1.4 IMPACTS OF STORYTELLING

As mentioned previously, when a business, group, or industry go about telling their stories, they are looking for an action from their audience.

When farmer storytelling occurs, there are a number of possible impacts that could result.

Some of those impacts include:

- Education
- Perception
- Revenue
- Engagement
- Understanding
- Support

As with many other parts of farmer storytelling, there could be a number of desired impacts, or one in particular depending on the message that's trying to be conveyed, and the target audience attempting to be influenced. An example of this could be a farmer who has their own branded product in a butchery or supermarket, the impacts they would desire as a result of their storytelling would be revenue in the form of sales, support for their

brand and business and a positive perception as a valued producer of high quality products.

2. CURRENT STATE OF THE AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY AND IT'S STORYTELLING

Considering the impacts that could possibly be achieved through successful agricultural storytelling, it's important to take note of the current state of the Agricultural sector in New Zealand and the impacts that are currently being achieved.

2019 has been dominated by the idea of prices of primary products being generally good, but that;

"net farmer confidence remains at low levels, in overall negative territory, with more farmers pessimistic than optimistic" (TNS, 2019)

Below we will look at the impacts occurring in New Zealand right now, that may have led to this result.

2.1 UNDERSTANDING NEW ZEALAND'S AGRICULTURAL BUSINESSES

The KPMG Agri-business Agenda 2019 discussed the impact that understanding can have, and where the gap is currently. Describing a consumer who is inquisitive, and has heard a the noises of ethical production versus mass production with a bottom dollar in sight, the Agenda goes on to explain the reasons for this customer wanting a transparent process:

"from simply enjoying the provenance story behind the product, to ensuring it aligns with a consumers personal values (such as animal welfare, social justice or environment) to gaining confidence about its safety" (KPMG, 2019)

The agenda discusses that the trends are that these stories are not reaching the consumer, and that's where purchasing habits can drop off, when the information above hasn't been provided in a way that reaches the consumer.

This is backed up by recent research conducted by Colmar Brunton, where the discussion of how information, or lack of it, can shape individuals and groups understanding and perception of the industry was delved into:

"People's lack of knowledge or direct connection [to primary producers] leaves them open to influence or the 'opinion of the day'" (Brunton, 2019)

In regard to the impact of understanding:

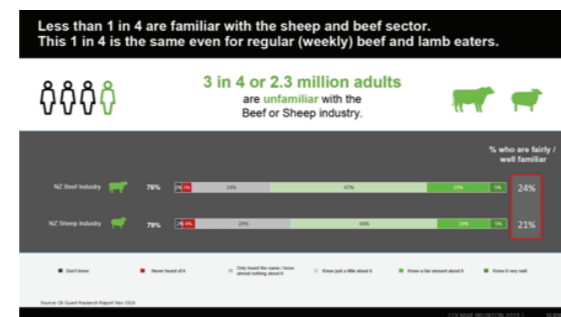


Figure 1: Colmar Brunton 1 (Brunton, 2019)

The table above shows where those surveyed by Colmar Brunton would place themselves on a spectrum in regard to their understanding or 'familiarity' with the NZ Beef or Sheep Industry.

The research then explains what admissions such as those above, demonstrating poor understanding of the industry, means for buying habits of those primary products and how they fare against other proteins.

2.2 REGULATION OF THE AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY

The introduction of regulation, around the

Zero Carbon Bill, Fresh Water Reform and land use restrictions have caused a number in the primary sector to feel concerned for the future of their businesses and communities.

CEO of Beef and Lamb, Sam McIvor discusses the importance of having farming stories available for audiences to hear, so that real examples are at the front of the public and Government's minds as they head into policy making decisions, and voting on them (McIvor, 2019).

2.3 PERCEPTION OF THE AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY

A further concept that needs no introduction is the concept of a rural-urban divide, and the idea of if there is one at all. A divide between the rural sector and its urban counterparts has been acknowledged heavily in the media, with perceptions of the rural industry being a key topic for many of our industry bodies. Recent surveys have opposed the theory of a divide, stating that:

"55% of respondents hold a positive view of primary industries, compared to 12% with a negative one" (Chivers, 2019)

Whilst these surveys are likely to change depending on what's topical in the media, what politicians may be putting out to the public, or how our industry is conducting itself on the domestic and global stage, we do know that there is something missing in the middle.

A them and us mentality is occurring particularly around regulatory issues, where the blame game as to who the worst offender is an on-going argument for both sides, examples of this can be seen regularly in the comments section of various social media platforms where differences of opinion can

escalate into personal attacks, which in turn reinforces negative perceptions of both parties.

2.4 EDUCATION AND CAREERS

Pathways into the industry are also facing challenging times, this came to light quite publicly with the recent closure of Taratahi Agricultural Training Centre in the Wairarapa (Fuller, 2019).

In May 2019 Immigration NZ released its Immediate Skill Shortage List (Immigration NZ, 2019), with the Agricultural Industry getting a mention for every region, only coming in second to the Trade Industry.

2.5 SALES OF PRIMARY PRODUCTS

When our audience or consumer isn't having a number of their needs met, or their understanding of the products we are selling is low, or incorrect, sales will be impacted.

Farmers have always been in the business of feeding the world, and much of this business sees our products head offshore.



Figure 2: NZ's Top Exports (Workman, 2019)

Jim Klein describes the most basic motivators

behind purchasing a product of service. He details the emotional need or want that comes first, the logic that follows next in the decision-making process and the perceived value that the purchaser considers before they finalize the transaction. (Klein, 2019)

Domestically though, we do need to be aware of our nation's shopping choices, particularly when correlations between understanding and shopping trends occur as we see below here. The same meat types that experienced less familiarity or understanding, also saw a decline in consumption, which begs the question; if they don't understand it, or eat or buy it, will they support it?

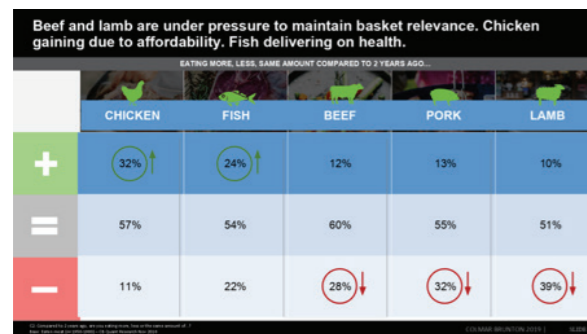


Figure 3: Colmar Brunton 2 (Brunton, 2019)

2.6 CASE STUDIES

For the purpose of this research, a number of our own surveys and interviews were conducted.

A survey was conducted, which involved 18 individuals from across the agricultural sector answering a number of questions around storytelling, the impacts, the audiences and other components. The individuals ranged from those on the ground as Primary Producers, to those connected to Industry Bodies or support businesses, as well as some involved directly in media.

Some results of interest that give a clear

idea of the current state of storytelling and industry include:



Figure 4: Graph 1 - What's missing in current agricultural storytelling?

The answers given for this question show that in the view of those surveyed, there isn't a lack of stories, but the ones that are currently out there are being overlooked by the more click-worthy negative stories. Not only that, but the stories out there currently may be missing the mark audience wise and aren't being told in a way that provides enough understanding to those who are hearing them.

Those surveyed were also asked:

"When told effectively, what is the main impact that could be achieved?" and "Likewise, when these stories aren't being told effectively, or aren't being told at all, what is the main impact that could be achieved?"

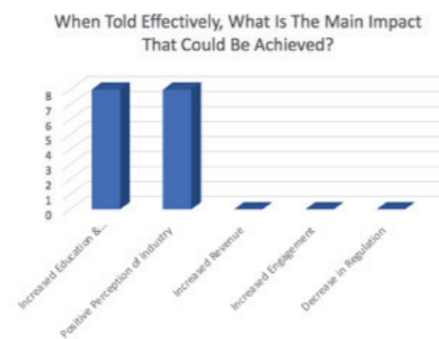


Figure 5: Graph 2- Impacts achieved by successful storytelling

NB: 2 of those surveyed didn't want to choose 1 option, they wanted to choose all of them

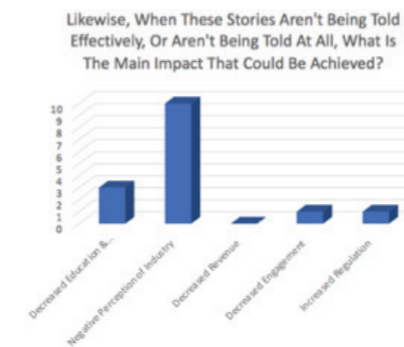


Figure 6: Graph 3 - Impacts achieved by poor or no storytelling

NB: 5 of those surveyed didn't want to choose 1 option, they wanted to choose all of them

This comparison quite clearly shows that those surveyed see the concept of storytelling being key in delivering impacts such as greater education and understanding of the sector and achieving a positive perception of the industry by those outside of it.

Interesting to note that the majority of those on the ground surveyed were primarily discussing the understanding and perception piece over revenue and regulation.

The survey was deliberately provocative, for the two above questions there was no "all of the above" answer, although on both instances, people took the opportunity to comment saying they did believe all would be effected, mostly in the absence of successful storytelling.

The answers became more diverse when the question was flipped and those surveyed looked at the impacts they believed would be delivered in the absence of successful storytelling, but still revenue was not an impact considered by the majority.

As we look to understand the current state of the Agricultural Industry, the impacts being

achieved and what is missing in the stories being told, we can conclude that the less-desired impacts that were outlined earlier in this research, are happening right now. This is not to say that there are no good stories being told, or that all agricultural storytelling occurring now isn't working. As a whole, this is something our industry could do more of and do better, the next segment will discuss a number of steps that can be taken to achieve this.

2.7 COMMON THEMES

A common theme amongst the survey respondents was the need for farmers to tell their own stories, and that it was predominantly urban New Zealand who needed to hear them. This is a sentiment echoed by National's former Minister for Agriculture, Nathan Guy who points out that rural stories can't go on being told by people in suits, it needs to be someone in a swandri (Guy, 2017). Yueh's recent research article also discusses in depth the narrator behind agricultural stories told, and that this type of storytelling is a way of successfully linking the consumer to the farmer (Yeuh, 2019).

A second theme noted from the survey results was the mediums in which storytelling should be told through. Whilst it was noted that less controllable mediums such as mainstream media and rural tv would be preferred, the two mentioned mediums that farmers do have control over were social media and in person.

This was also apparent throughout the interviews conducted in 3.6 Case Studies, where all had social media as an answer to the question around chose mediums, and over half telling their story in person. Jason Ohler mentions the significance of many quieter storytellers being able to communicate in a

digital space, the importance of being able to provide a wide range of viewpoints in a world now saturated by media, and social media being a way to achieve that (Ohler, 2006).

A third common theme generated by the survey respondents was the idea of understanding of the agricultural sector being the biggest impact required right now, and that current storytelling was missing the mark, or not enough. This is a theme also common amongst those with positions in National Government or opposition, examples such as Nathan Guy encouraging farmers to get their phones out and share what they are doing on farm because we need more of that (Guy, 2017). This theme also commonly heard throughout the industry from the likes of KPMG's Ian Proudfoot also encouraging farmers to take control of their own narrative before negative stories became the norm (Pidcock, 2018).

3. DESIRED STATE OF THE AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY AND IT'S STORYTELLING

When we set out to tell the story of our industry, it's important to think ahead about what it is that the sector would like to achieve. What are the impacts that we as an industry are aiming for?

Many of the desired impacts that would come to mind are reasonably straight forward, but it was important to canvas those in the industry to gain insight into what was top of the list for them, when they hear their story told, what do they want the reaction to be?

Whilst completing the survey on agricultural storytelling, 18 professionals from the Agricultural sector were asked "What is the most important impact that needs to be achieved right now in the farming industry?".

This question was deliberately a short answer question, allowing the participant to be as broad or specific with their answer as they required. Their answers can be grouped as follows:



Figure 7: Graph 4 -Most important impact needed now in the agricultural industry

The points above will be expanded on below.

3.1 UNDERSTANDING NEW ZEALAND'S AGRICULTURAL BUSINESSES

The most desired impact by those who took the survey, was that of understanding. Specifically, those questioned mentioned understanding in the following contexts:

- Dealing in facts on both sides of any argument rather than emotions, soundbites or following the majority opinion of the day
- Parties outside of the Agri-sector understanding progress being made on farm, such as farmers voluntarily planting areas and fencing waterways out of their own pocket for the benefit of environment
- Parties outside of the Agri-sector making accurate comparisons between NZ farms and the rest of the world, in many cases NZ agriculture is leading in regard to best practice, environment and ethics
- Parties outside of the Agri-sector understanding what regulation changes on

the agricultural sector may mean for them as consumers and the national economy as an exporting nation

- All parties both inside and outside of the Agri-sector understanding that change takes time, that we are all working toward the same goal, but the time frames need to be realistic for all involved
- Farmers understanding regulation changes that affect them and why they are necessary
- Build trust and tell the truth so that those outside the agricultural sector can understand on farm ethics, passion and processes

The last point around building trust and telling the truth is very significant. When we think of storytelling, it's important to come back to the definition we developed at the beginning of this project:

"a way of sharing a narrative that educates those both inside and outside of the agricultural industry, providing insight into people, processes, products and ethics"

Storytelling for the agricultural industry isn't about smoke and mirrors, it's about conveying real stories, and real truths so that those who aren't on farm everyday can gain an insight and understanding, and make informed decisions.

3.2 REGULATION OF THE AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY

The concept of regulation can be quite broadly described as a way of ensuring that everyone does the right thing. All businesses and industries in NZ are subject to various regulations, and the agricultural industry is no different.

At present, regulation facing the industry is

quite the hot topic, specifically around the Fresh Water Reforms that will affect the all corners of agriculture.

When advising sheep and beef farmers around the submission process (Beef and Lamb NZ, 2019), Industry Body Beef and Lamb have been extremely vocal about supporting the intent that the Freshwater Bill is driving.

The opposition comes in when we delve deeper into the details of how it will be rolled out, executed and implemented in an effective and fair way.

Survey results showed Environmental Sustainability as the second most important desired impact of successful agricultural storytelling, coming in at 22%.

Similar to the viewpoints of the Industry Bodies, regulation was also mentioned in the understanding impact space, and the need for understanding the agricultural sector being key to successfully rolling out effective regulation.

This is a clear example of two impacts that need to be achieved together in order to deliver the desired result. With clear understanding will come the empathy and education required to achieve the goals set around environment, or other areas where results are required.

3.3 PERCEPTION OF THE AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY

Earlier in the Current State, 45% of those surveyed answered that a 'positive perception of our industry' would, in their opinion, be the biggest impact of well told stories. This demonstrates the expected influence and reach that communication can have on perception.

We can also see that in the survey, participants ranked 'communicating well' as the third most important impact needed right now in the industry.

Perception and understanding can also go hand in hand, if our audiences understand what takes place on farm and why, their perception can be influenced by facts and stories that resonate personally with them, or answer a question for them.

An audience that has little to no understanding of our industry is able to have that perception swayed, sometimes without fact and instead drawing their own conclusions, or following a media or group lead conclusion (Brunton, 2019).

3.4 EDUCATION AND CAREERS

Skill shortages in any industry can be expected, but how much influence do other impacts we've visited previously impact those who are making career and education choices?

For individuals who have spent most of their life in an urban environment, with little understanding or education of what the primary sector entails, the decision to take up tertiary education or a career in agriculture would be less likely as that awareness of it even being an option isn't there.

Likewise, an observation that rural children are obviously very exposed to the various careers in the agricultural sector would be correct, but concerning results such as

".... net farmer confidence remains at low levels, in overall negative territory, with more farmers pessimistic than optimistic" (TNS, 2019)

begs the question of what is it that rural children will be hearing in their homes about

the agricultural industry, and is it an industry their parents would recommend to them?

'Confidence in the sector' was an impact specified by 11% of those surveyed as an impact needed now, and that certainly would pose a direct influence over those entering the sector for both education and career pathway.

3.5 SALES OF PRIMARY PRODUCTS

Interestingly enough, sales was not one of the answers generated by the survey focus group when asked what impact was required right now for their industry.

It is reasonable to assume that sales, is one of the outcomes that the agricultural industry can expect to enjoy, when the other impacts are all achieved.

The 2019 KPMG Agri-business Agenda describes an evolving customer with different purchasing patterns to their predecessors:

" "Consumers are starting to ask questions around their food – and all aspects of it," says Paul Ryan, Trust Codes CEO. "These consumers are motivated to do their research on the spot... they want real-time intelligence they know they can trust. This includes everything from verifying the product is what it says it is, through to the way it is produced."

(KPMG, 2019)

This is a consumer who demands information in order to feel confident about their choice of product or service.

Again we see the importance of storytelling, or information sharing with this customer, ticking off the impacts, understanding, perception, education, regulation (or seeing it being followed), to create an informed individual equipped with facts, that were delivered in a way they could easily absorb and respond to.

3.6 CASE STUDIES

For the purpose of this research, a number of exemplary agricultural businesses were invited to participate in an interview that would discuss their experiences in telling their story, all of which involved getting a product direct to a consumer.

Out of those invited, 7 were willing to share their findings.

Those who accepted were from a wide variety of sub-sectors in agriculture, including sheep, goats, beef, dairy, wine and horticulture.

The purpose of these interviews was to provide some data that could be analyzed from across the industry, particularly looking for patterns in how successful storytelling has occurred.

The following is a summary of the answers given for each question.

For confidentiality reasons, these businesses and individuals will not be named.

Q1. & Q2 Please outline the agricultural story you tell, and what parts of your story do you put the most emphasis on?	
Answer	% of those interviewed
Environmentally friendly or sustainable	100
People	100
Transparent process or ethics	100
Local	71
Quality	29

Environment and people come first

Some consistencies were noticeable when it came to what parts of their agricultural stories that those interviewed emphasized. All seven of those interviewed described putting emphasis on 1) being an environmentally sustainable business, 2) caring or having a focus on the people within the business and 3) having a transparent process for their product and an ethical way of conducting their business.

Whilst quality was something only two of those interviewed put emphasis on, with the other points high on the list of priorities, we can speculate that those would provide a quality assurance.

A follow up question of 'why' was also put to the interviewees and in all cases, interviewees felt as though they were answering a potential question or concern that their customer or audience would have, or they were sharing something relatable that would ease a customer or audience's mind.

Q3 Who do you tell your story to?	
Answer	% of those interviewed
End consumer or target market	86
Everyone	57

Tell that story to everyone

This question was relatively straightforward for our interviewees. It became apparent very quickly that all the businesses we were talking to have a clear idea of where they were pitching their story.

Those who answered 'everyone' had their wider industry hats on, and were looking to either set the record straight, or enlighten an audience who may not have had all the facts in front of them yet.

Q4 How do you get your story to them?	
Answer	% of those interviewed
Social media	100
In person	57
Retailers	43
TV	27

Social media as the simple solution for communicating

Another question easily answered by our group, with 'social media' being a clear medium for all involved. The reasons around this were primarily ease, cost and accessibility direct to audience. This is a concept that Nathan Guy echoed in his 2017 address of the Balance Farm Environment

Awards where he pointed to the influence achieved by this medium, and also how simple it is for each producer to use it as a means to tell their story (Guy, 2017). Further down the list of mediums used was 'television', a medium those interviewed had less control over. 'In person' proved to be popular with over half of those interviewed, which was not surprising when we look at how important the people aspect of their agricultural stories is. Putting the people in front of the audience or consumer absolutely makes sense when trying to connect.

A follow up question of 'has that changed at all as your business developed?' was asked, with answers mostly varying depending on where the business was at in their journey. For those who had been in business for many years, the introduction of Social Media as a possible medium saw a change in tack. Other businesses who were newer to the game had not revisited their mediums and were continuing on with the likes of social media until profits allowed furthermore costly mediums to be brought into the mix. One business detailed how the medium had not changed as much, but the way the message was positioned and the tone of it had with the introduction of a Copywriter. The example given here was the brand had two parts to it, the history and where the name had come from, and the person themselves. Early on their journey they realized that it was the people part of the Brand that people responded to best, but this individual felt embarrassed to promote themselves, but knew it was what their audience was after. A Copywriter was brought in to deliver that skill and assist in getting more knowledge about the people behind the brand to the audience.

Q5 What aspects of good storytelling are important to your business?	
Answer	% of those interviewed
Authentic	71
Honest	57
Transparent	29
Simple or easy	29

Authenticity is key

Answers given for this question were simply around ensuring the story was real, and easy for the target audience to absorb. One of the interviewees summed up their answer brilliantly; "One of the most important parts of good storytelling for us is making the story relevant/relatable to the consumer. If they either can't understand it, can't relate to how it is important to them, or just plain find it a boring story then we have failed."

Q6 What feedback have you had regarding your story?	
Answer	% of those interviewed
Interested/Love it	100

People want to hear the story

Those interviewed had shared their story in many different ways, some for a number of years, and one in particular having done over 100 different speaking engagements describing their business. Positive feedback had come to the interviewees in many forms, one described having been on Country Calendar, where for the weeks following the episode airing, most time was spent replying to positive emails and Facebook comments, sometimes from 4am in the morning until 1am the next day. Through various forms of engagement each interviewee had created a loyal customer or fan base, who appreciated the information given via the story.

Q7 What are the positive impacts on your business due to successful storytelling?	
Answer	% of those interviewed
Educating	57
Sales	57
Understanding and Perception	43
Counter Negative Stories or Alternative Facts	28
Relationship Building	14

Successful storytelling providing a range of positive impacts for business

This question provoked a range of more diverse answers from our interviewees, with education and sales being something over half the group had in common. Those who commented around 'countering negative stories or alternative facts' felt extremely passionate about that being a part of their business that they were proud of, and there were also links to this concept of setting the record straight, and easing minds actually resulting in sales. 'Understanding' also sat in the middle of the pack and also fed into sales, and positive perception which has been grouped together in this table.

Q8 Have there been any negative impacts on your business due to storytelling?	
Answer	% of those interviewed
Lack of Support from Within Industry (Fellow Farmers)	42
No Negative Impacts	42
Lack of Support from Outside Industry (Media/Activists)	14

More negativity from within the sector than from outside it

A range of answers described here by the group, from experiencing no negative impacts, to experiencing some of that old fashioned tall poppy syndrome behavior from fellow industry persons, to being the target of 'online trolls'. 'Lack of support from within industry' was explained as having fellow farmers criticizing around a particular business taking steps in a new uncharted direction or facing upset from others because they wanted to undertake the same venture but hadn't already. It is very interesting to note that among the sample interviewed, the criticism from within the industry was 3 times more prominent than criticism from outside of the industry. Another point of interest was that the interviewee who described being targeted by activists and groups online had not been one

of the businesses that had experienced a lack of support from within the industry.

Q9 Has there been a storytelling strategy that hasn't worked so well?	
Answer	% of those interviewed
No	86
Yes	14

Majority of storytelling strategies are working well

With only one of our interviewees answering yes to this question, we see the previous answer regarding the activist explored further. The example given discussed a business whose online advertisements were being followed by activist groups and 'online trolls' who would hijack the ads with negative feedback. Other than this example, all others interviewed did not consider any of their storytelling strategies a failure.

Q10 Do you have a marketing plan of how your story will reach your target audience?	
Answer	% of those interviewed
Use a plan, but not a rigid one	71
Yes	14
No	14

Flexibility is key

The majority of our interviewees being very clear about where they felt they and their business fell in regard to a marketing plan, the predominant answer was that there was a plan, but within the greater plan was the flexibility to make necessary changes when opportunities presented themselves or if the need arose. One interviewee who answered no quickly followed up by commenting that this was a priority for their business going forward.

Q11 Who do you think needs to be telling the stories of the NZ agricultural industry?	
Answer	% of those interviewed
Farmers and industry champions	86
Industry and trade bodies	28
Everyone	28

Farmers need to be the storytellers

A clear theme amongst answers for this

question was that the stories need to come from those on the ground to deliver the most authenticity, with industry and trade partners and organizations playing a supporting role. Those who answered everyone referred to a national understanding of the agricultural industry that would then transcend into your average New Zealander being a supporter of the primary sector, and they would also tell our stories for us, with New Zealand Inc in mind.

Q12 Who do you think needs to hear these stories?	
Answer	% of those interviewed
NZ Population/consumers	71
Government/MPI	14
Future farmers	14
International audience	14

Tell the stories to all New Zealanders

A common audience of the New Zealand public who are in most cases the customers for those interviewed, was described as the group who needed to hear these stories the most.

One answer each given to the other three answers, but many of those will also be swayed by the general population's views, making them understandably the most important audience for our groups targeted storytelling.

Q13 If you could give any advice to those trying to tell their story, what would it be?	
Answer	% of those interviewed
Just do it, be authentic and honest	71
Think it through, know your market	14
Outsource the skills you don't have	14

Authenticity and honesty at the heart of successful stories

Can do attitudes came to the forefront for our final question, and that perhaps should not be a surprising trait amongst a group of agricultural leaders. The advice of get out there and do it was very popular, with two of our interviewees providing some insight into the importance of knowing who you're trying to communicate with, and the idea of knowing your own strengths and not being

afraid to outsource the tasks you are less skilled in was also valuable for those entering this realm.

In this section, broad desired impacts have been discussed, and we can see that many of these interact with each other, rather than being an impact in isolation. Examples shown in selected Case Studies have demonstrated how a number of Agricultural businesses are already successfully achieving some of these desired impacts and there are a number of similarities in regard to content and strategy.

3.7 COMMON THEMES

There were a number of common themes that occurred in the interview answers, one of these is that the importance of including both environment and people at the forefront of these stories.

Paul J Zak also describes the importance of having people at the heart of a successful story in order to get buy in from an audience, and that character-driven stories are the ones that deliver the impacts required over any other strategy (Zak, 2014).

A further common theme in the interview answers was the utilization of social media and in-person communication when delivering a message or story to the audience.

The interviewees also discussed using these mediums as a way of delivering authenticity to their audience and generating understanding for the wider industry, something that was a clear desirable amongst those surveyed (see results in section 2.6).

Sam Halstead spoke to the Kellogg40 cohort regarding the importance of not falling into the trap of telling our agricultural stories to ourselves and strive to achieve further credibility with the audience (Halstead,

2019), and Robert McKee discusses the power of persuading people through emotional ties and the way that human connection can create deeper understanding of each other (Fryer, 2019).

Another emerging theme through the interviews was the advice to get out there and give it a go, and to get out there and tell your story even if you weren't sure, and it became clear that this had been the case for almost all of those who answered the questions.

CONCLUSIONS

The data and literature presented shows three key conclusions.

One is that for agricultural storytelling to reach the urban audience authentically, the stories need to come directly from the farmers, they must be their own narrators.

A further conclusion is that successful mediums available to farmers instantly for storytelling include the use of social media, and in person communications.

A final conclusion is that the most important impact required and achieved by telling stories successfully is that of understanding the agricultural industry, the people in it, the processes and the reasons behind their decisions made.

In New Zealand's primary sector, there are many examples of industry champions who are getting their storytelling components and aspects right, now is the time to share this expertise across the industry and achieve the impacts that we so desperately need.

My recommendations are as follows

RECOMMENDATIONS

To assist New Zealand's primary producers in using storytelling as a means to successfully achieve desired impacts, the following is required:

1. Training packs for primary producers

Put storytelling components and aspects into an incredibly simple form and share this with the wider industry. This could easily be a cross sector resource, rather than created with one part of the industry in mind.

The pack could be available online and in hard copy and use rural examples to explain how to address each component.

The idea would be to keep it as simple as possible, and have the resource be a starting point for those who genuinely don't know how to take the first step, but want to do so on their own, and at their own pace.

2. In person storytelling

Connecting with audiences is necessary in person, people play a large part in the stories the agricultural industry need to share, and in person interactions allow for honesty and authenticity.

Open days on farm are not uncommon, particularly in the dairy industry, and allow for those who have questions or interest in certain business type to access information and form opinions.

It would be advantageous for the industry as a collective to promote open days across the sector, and to continue to build connections between those on farm and off.

The need to support those on the ground with assistance around logistics and marketing the day would be required from industry bodies and the inclusion of school groups in the target audience also important.

Post open day, the communication would need to continue.

Concepts of farm memberships or planting areas for communities could be a way to tie in long term emotional and intellectual investment.

3. Interactive tools

Websites are a simple and effective way to reach people from the comfort of their own time and at a time that suits them.

The development of a website that would prompt the user to answer questions around what their story is, what impact they desire, and then help to choose who the target audience needs to be, would be extremely beneficial to those who are new to marketing themselves, their business, or wanting to weigh in effectively on a subject.

This online tool, depending on what the user chose at each stage, would then make recommendations, ie: if your story is XXX, and your desired impact is YYY, and the people you want to influence are ZZZ, here are some recommendations for your situation, such as suggestions of what mediums your target audience are currently spending most time in when it comes to information gathering.

This website could also include with real life examples of storytelling done well and desired impacts achieved, so that users could click through examples for ideas, or see someone doing what they are hoping to do and collecting tips to achieve similar results.

The concept is not to share all the successful storytellers trade secrets, but rather an online place for rural people to gather and talk openly about what works and what doesn't, it is important that all sub-sectors in agriculture, and horticulture, are represented here.

FIGURES

Figure 1: Colmar Brunton 1

Slide from research document discussing unfamiliarity with the sheep and beef sector

Figure 2: NZ's Top Exports

Image of NZ's export categories and their percentages

Figure 3: Colmar Brunton 2

Slide from research document discussing changes in consumption of meat in NZ

Figure 4: Graph 1

Graph showing results of survey question: "When you think of the current farm stories being told, what's missing, or not working?"

Figure 5: Graph 2

Graph showing results of survey question: "When told effectively, what is the main impact that could be achieved?"

Figure 6: Graph 3

Graph showing results of survey question: "Likewise, when these stories aren't being told effectively, or aren't being told at all, what is the main impact that could be achieved?"

Figure 7: Graph 4

Graph showing results of survey question: "What is the most important impact that needs to be achieved right now in the farming industry?"

TABLES

Table 1: Storytelling mediums

Table displaying a number of mediums available to those looking to share a message

Table 2: Narrators of the story

Table displaying a number of possible narrators who can share messages

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