

Lifting The Profile Of Farming In New Zealand

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A growing division between urban and farming communities is having far reaching implications in this country.

While 47% or \$17.2 billion of this country's export earnings comes from food production, only 7.7% of New Zealanders lives in what Statistics NZ describes as either rural areas with low urban influence or highly rural/remote areas.

This country is unique globally in that it is the only first world nation that is economically reliant on primary production yet the division between urban and rural communities is, according to the former Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment Morgan Williams, this country's single most important emerging political problem.

A lack of understanding of this country's farming systems, upon which the economy is dependant, is leading to attitudes that threaten the right of farmers to farm in a sensible and sustainable way. The majority of antagonism towards farming is centred upon environmental concerns particularly about changing land use and water. Extreme elements of the environmental movement are spreading misinformation about the impacts of farming and this is material is being taken as fact by local and central government decision-makers as well as the general public. The Save Our Water campaign which ran in Christchurch during the last local body elections was a good example of such propaganda.

Objections that come up during the resource consent process are too often based on misinformation and lack any basis in science.

Disquiet between urban and farming communities begun in the 80s; a time of economic reforms, the pronouncement of agriculture as a sunset industry by the Labour government of the time, and the emergence of comic characters such as Fred Dagg and Wal from the popular comic strip Footrot Flats. Urban communities began to laugh at rural New Zealand and New Zealand's image as a rural society was revealed as being untrue. Urban heroes such as artists and film-makers replaced rural heroes such as Colin Meads and Sir Charles Upham.

Agricultures poor profile is impacting on the number of agricultural students entering university and this threatens the future viability of many sectors of the agricultural industry. Unlike previous generations, most school children today have no connection with a farm, and school teachers are more likely to be white, urban females with a Bachelor in Arts and no knowledge of farming systems.

Overseas many westernised countries, whose economies are only partly dependant on agriculture, have been pro-active about addressing the urban/rural divide and have implemented programmes and campaigns to lift the profile of farming. These include opening farms to the public, media campaigns and providing multi-media resources to school teachers and school children on farming systems and how food is produced.

Efforts in this country to raise the profile of agriculture are fragmented, are often sector-specific and aimed at recruiting people rather than educating. Country Calendar is the exception and is, after Coronation St, the world's longest running television programme. However it portrays country life in a magazine-type format, rather than strictly being about farming.

This country's agricultural industry is in a good position to draw on experiences of overseas programmes and campaigns to form a pan-sector public relations campaign. A three-prong strategy would provide resources to school teachers and school children; give the general public access to commercial farms in a managed way and engage interest groups to foster greater understanding between farmers and environmental groups. This strategy would be driven by a body such as a Trust which would be one-step removed from any political or sectorial organisations, yet would receive funding from a variety of industry organisations.

THE URBAN RURAL DIVIDE-AN EMERGING ISSUE.

“It amazes me, coming from a country where agriculture is appreciated (because we are partly dependant on it), that in New Zealand, which is hugely more dependant on it, the population does not seem to appreciate the importance of agriculture and dairying in particular.”

Mike Murphy, Irish dairy farmer and businessman.

- New Zealanders have become disconnected from the land.
- Urban attitudes are threatening the right of farmers to farm in a sustainable way.
- Farming is a distant process.
- Rural/urban divide is New Zealand’s biggest emerging political problem.
- Economic reforms of the 1980s damaged the image of rural New Zealand.
- Death of the rural ideal.
- Concerns about water and land degradation.
- Antagonism based on envy.
- Few good news farming stories in mainstream media.
- Few tertiary students studying agricultural science.
- School teachers lack an understanding of production agriculture.

“Farmers are selfish, insular and possess an indefatigable sense of moral superiority over everyone whose front door looks upon a street instead of a paddock.”

These vitriolic words were written in July of 2008 by left-wing political commentator Chris Trotter in his column in the Sunday Star Times.

While he acknowledged that farmers were the backbone of the nation and earners of our overseas funds, he went on to say that farmers, who heedless of the enormous biosecurity implications, illegally released the rabbit-killing calicivirus into New Zealand and then laughed at the efforts of the authorities to hunt down the perpetrators.

“The people who, when asked to contribute to the cost of scientific research into how as a nation New Zealand might control the methane released into the atmosphere by our cows and sheep, refused point-blank to contribute, branded the levy a “Fart Tax” and got away with it.

“The people who have aggressively resisted every government effort to secure legally protected rights of way across the countryside so that all New Zealanders might enjoy the beauty of our wild open spaces, and who, once again, have got away with it.

“The people whose dairy herds befoul our rivers and streams.

“The people who refuse to pay for the pollution they cause.

“The people who are bending all their powers towards securing control of our nation’s water-even as they make it unfit for our children to drink or swim in.”

His words alone suggest that farmers in this country indeed have an image problem.

In May of this year, the then president of Federated Farmers Charlie Pedersen delivered a speech in which he stated that too many New Zealanders had become disconnected from the land.

He says he wasn’t sure that many people today understand what farming is about and certainly have few links with the land.

A generation ago, everyone had townie relatives who came and holidayed in the country but with the urbanisation of New Zealand this connection with the land has been lost. Fewer people, says Pedersen, understand the nature and vagaries of farming and the modern production systems which make New Zealand a world-class food producer.

“Today people have a relationship with their supermarket and I’m certain many have little idea of how a farm operates.”

The public's lack of connection with the land, says Pedersen, is leading to attitudes which threaten the right of New Zealand farmers to farm in a sensible and sustainable way.

Certainly some extreme elements of the environmental movement are spreading misinformation about the impacts farming has on the environment, and some of this material is being taken as fact by local and central government decision makers.

An example of this "misinformation" was the pamphlets circulated in Christchurch by Save Our Water campaigners, in which it was implied, through caricatures, that cows defecate directly into Canterbury's drinking water. It claims that unlike dairy farmers in the United States and Europe, farmers in this country do not have to pay for the water they use or any of the damage done to the environment so their costs are lower and profits higher. It also blamed the high incomes of dairy farmers for recent interest rate rises. The fact that dairy products are this country's largest single export earner has been conveniently overlooked.

Pedersen's sentiments are echoing views expressed by others in recent years, including the former Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment Morgan Williams. He has described the rural/urban divide as the country's biggest single emerging political problem.

While 47% or \$17.2 billion of this country's export earnings come from food production, only 7.7% of New Zealanders lives in what Statistics NZ describes as either "rural areas with low urban influence" or "highly rural/remote areas."

This country is unique globally in that it is the only first world nation that is economically reliant on primary production. Yet the bulk of the population have little or no knowledge of farming practices, other than what is reported in mainstream media which is often inflammatory or inaccurate representations of the impact farming has on the environment.

So where did it all go wrong for the image of rural New Zealand?

Cultural historian Jock Phillips says the first European explorers viewed this country with an eye to productive agriculture. Edward Gibbon Wakefield, a director of the New Zealand Company, had a vision to create a stable English rural society where farms were supported by a number of country towns. The New Zealand Company gave land to colonists in the hope that this land would become productive.

For this reason the Company sought to attract settlers with experience in agriculture, mechanics, farm labouring, gardening and domestic servitude. These people came to New Zealand from rural areas of England such as Warwickshire, Devon, Cornwall and Middlesex, all seeking the opportunity to obtain free or cheap land.

Such was the importance placed upon rural dwellers that the vote for people in the country was, in those early years of the colony, worth 28% more than the vote from people living in cities.

Until the turn of the 20th century the essence of New Zealand was the family living on the farm with half of all adult men owning land. However in 1911 the number of the people living in cities for the first time exceeded those living on the land.

During the 20th century there was very strong growth in the tertiary and service industries so New Zealand went from a society of farmers to a society of bureaucrats. The key to this change was education.

However during this evolution this country continued to present the idea of being a primarily rural society, says Phillips. There was a growing mythology about the importance of rural NZ and the growth of cities was a major threat to NZ's identity of hard, rugged outdoorsy types personified by All Blacks such as Colin Meads and war hero Charles Upham

The various governments had, over the years, taken every opportunity to foster this rural image. Indeed the growth of suburbs, with their quarter-acre sections, was a sort of surrogate farm giving people the opportunity to escape the "wickedness" of the cities.

The rural identity was essential to the identity of this country yet towards the latter part of last century this image was becoming increasingly unreal. By 1976 83% of the population was living in urban areas yet the rural mythology was very much alive and well.

It was the economic reforms of the 1980s that highlighted just how unreal this mythology was. The reality dawned that NZ was an urban society and during this time there was an explosion of interest in urban culture and an emergence of urban heroes such as artists and filmmakers.

Rural mythology became comic and the most obvious manifestations of this were Fred Dagg, the comic character created by comedian John Clarke, and Murray Ball's Footrot Flats.

Urban people started to laugh at rural New Zealand.

There was also the emergence of two major issues that, according to Phillips, very clearly divided rural New Zealand from urban NZ; these were the Springbok tour and the Homosexual Law reform bill. Phillips believes that rural folk almost unanimously supported the tour and opposed the Homosexual Law reform bill.

As the city became more confident, and as a nation there was less of a focus on the rural identity, country people looked to the cities for possibilities for its future. Rural NZ began to accept some city values, particularly around science and computer technology.

The rural mythology that had been key to NZ's identity changed dramatically and city life and values became central. Increasingly rural people have had to turn to these values.

Phillips says in his view the death of the rural ideal may be seen as a loss, but it could also be viewed as a great gain. The old kiwi image of physical strength and number eight wire mentality may have gone and been replaced by the urban image of education and specialisation where science and technology are crucial. These are the values that are needed in agricultural communities today.

“The death of the rural ideal and resurgence of urban ideal is the best thing to happen to agriculture and land-based industries.”

However the legacy of the 1980s view of farming as a sunset industry and the image of the Fred Dagg poorly educated farmer continues to resonate and this is what needs to be turned around, says Phillips.

The industry has to re-position the idea that farming is all about physical strength and number 8 wire. It needs to be presented as a creative and innovative business.

Murray Sherwin, the Director General of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF), points out that many overseas nations value and support their farmers.

In Australia, the government has a political imperative to support “The Bush” while under the EU's CAP reforms urban dwellers are, in effect, buying an almost idealised view of what rural society should look like in their willingness to support farmers. Despite being a highly urbanised society the United States recent Farm Bill, worth over US\$100 million was passed. This bill represents a continued commitment to the US's inefficient but well supported agricultural industry. The Japanese happily support their farmers primarily for food security reasons, but there is also the sense of supporting a rural lifestyle.

Yet despite this country's dependence on agriculture for its economic well-being, food production is seen by urban dwellers as a distant and remote process.

Sherwin believes the emergence of food as a leisure activity will make reconnections back to the farm sector and this is seen to some extent in the popularity of farmers markets.

In 2008, MAF has been carrying out a survey and working with focus groups looking at the attitudes toward urban and rural communities. Sherwin says early indications show urban NZ view farmers as “Colin Meads” types with the values that come from that caricature. While urban people tend to be positive about the primary sector, says Sherwin, there are environmental and sustainability questions around the perceived environmental degradation of land and water. These two issues in particular appear to be at the heart of the divide between urban dwellers and commercial farmers particularly in Canterbury.

As much as 70% of Canterbury's economic activity comes from agriculture, yet the sector is being continually criticised in local media and by political organisations such as Save Our Water and non-governmental organisations such as Forest and Bird and Fish and Game.

The rapid growth of dairying in the region has changed the landscape and undoubtedly put pressure on underground water resources. Bob Engelbrecht, an Ashburton-based farm consultant, believes attitudes toward farmers are driven by a lack of knowledge and understanding as well as unwillingness to understand farming and the agricultural industry.

“A big part of the urban population believes that if farmers all packed up and left the country would be a lot better off.”

Statistics New Zealand figures show that 88% of New Zealand's population is living in towns and cities, meaning the urban population is more removed than ever from what happens on farms. But despite successive governments doing their best to get away from this country's reliance on agriculture, agriculture continues to grow twice as much as any other industry, with 72% of exports coming from land-based industries. With no mineral wealth, this country's competitive advantage is in having a temperate climate in which it is possible to grow grass.

Like Phillips, Engelbrecht traces much of this disquiet between town and country back to the government reforms of the 80s. In the early part of that decade the urban population saw farmers as a privileged group, making a lot more money than they in reality did. The typical perception then, says Engelbrecht, was the privately-educated boy with lots of money, big cars and a golf handicap; who simply watched the grass grow and the money rolled in. He believes this perception has come back again to some degree.

There was some sympathy with farmers in the late 80s when some lost their farms and homes in the wake of economic reforms, but because recovery was slow, the sympathy disappeared. This has been replaced by intense antagonism towards farmers, particularly in the past five years as land values have increased substantially. Engelbrecht believes this antagonism is based on envy, particularly as dairy farmers reap the rewards of globally high dairy prices.

Farmers, he says, are often perceived as being as thick as two short planks, yet they are making money and to many people in town this does not seem right. The tall poppy syndrome is alive and well in this country; the feeling that if someone is successful they have probably got there by cheating. City people see rural people coming to town spending money, but fail to see the long hours these people work in often difficult conditions and the risks they take in running their businesses. They don't appreciate the losses farmers make year-on-year; they only see the growth in the value of their assets, which of course does not typically translate to cash flow.

Farmers, says Engelbrecht, have over the years been categorized as manual labourers rather than business owners and professionals. This is despite the fact that the average farmer is running a business worth \$3million.

Somewhat surprisingly, Engelbrecht believes the division between town and country is very apparent in Ashburton, a rural support town that has direct contact with farmers and is thriving on then back of the dairy boom. For example in the Ashburton Rotary club, only 12 of the 70 members are either farming or connected with farming, the balance having little or no knowledge or appreciation of the technical skills farmers require.

Another theory put forward by Engelbrecht and Terry Heiler, the CEO of Irrigation New Zealand was one of a changing social order in Canterbury. Traditionally many of the upper echelons of Christchurch's business community had associations with long-established sheep and beef Canterbury farming families. Links were through private schools and long-held family connections, but the emergence of the dairy industry has changed all that.

Dairy farmers are the new wealthy and rather than bearing the Canterbury farming names, these people are just as likely to be of Dutch descent. Blue overalls and gumboots have replaced the moleskins and aertex shirt and rather than coming from the family farm, these people often started with nothing. To a conservative city such as Christchurch, this is a big change, and one which both Engelbrecht and Heiler believe has led to a degree of resentment amongst its business leaders.

Having recently returned to live in Canterbury, after many years working abroad, Heiler says the divide between urban and rural communities in Canterbury is very evident and is accelerating. He says it is worse in Central Canterbury and it is primarily about irrigation and water use. It comes up at every meeting, he says, and is impacting on the whole future of irrigation in the region.

Objections that come up during the resource consent process are all too often based on misinformation and lack any scientific basis. Heiler believes this is in part to do with Fairfax media who rarely run stories on farming issues-rather they focus on the bad news stories. This is a view shared by the Minister of Agriculture Jim Anderton who often laments the paucity of good news farming stories in mainstream media.

In Heiler's view, another part of the problem is the growing numbers of young policy analysts working in councils who lack both professionalism and objectivity. These people, who provide information upon which council decisions are made, are taking their value-set to work with them and these values, often based on misinformation, are in Heiler's opinion having too much influence of policy development.

Like Phillips and Engelbrecht, Heiler believes the reforms of the 80s and early 90s contributed to this division between rural and urban New Zealand. The attitude changed from public good to the market rules and power was devolved from central government to regional government. In 1991, central government left regional councils directionless as the National Policy Statements, which were meant to provide the framework for councils to work around, never appeared.

In Canterbury there is a disconnect between the Christchurch City and Regional Council and Heiler suggests the City Council has no understanding of what happens in its hinterland. Lacking direction in a region where underground water resources are under strain, the Canterbury Regional Council has resorted to a policeman's role; policing the resource rather than managing it.

The lack of flexibility within the Resource Management Act (RMA) contributes to the problem. The Canterbury Regional Council, says Heiler, is caught in a mess and this is contributing to the division between urban and rural communities.

Unfortunately the farming community seem unable to tell a coherent story about the positive things happening in their industry as mainstream media seem unwilling to listen. They do however seem very willing to listen when there are issues are non-compliance to report.

Heiler believes issues such as water resource development need to be community projects and benefit the whole community including farmers, environmentalists, urban dwellers and recreationalists.

“We need to have conversations with communities about what they want,” he says.

While most criticism is targeted at the dairy sector, Heiler says sheep and beef and arable farmers have been caught up in the negative perceptions around dairying.

“It's an interesting social phenomenon and it goes back to the sense of community lost during the public sector reforms. It is now every man for himself.”

Instead of working together, urban and rural communities are looking after themselves and the Environment Court has become the perfect place for a fight.

The Resource Management Act has also enabled the capturing of science and by organisations such as State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) and people with enough money to pay scientists to gather together the science that suits their cause. This, says Heiler, has created tensions within the community at large.

The agricultural sector's poor profile is also having an impact on the number of agricultural and horticultural science students coming through universities, which in turn is threatening the future of the sectors. Agricultural scientist Dr Jon Hickford, from Lincoln University, says there are plenty of opportunities for well-paid careers in

agriculture, however very few people are telling students about these opportunities. While this means what few agricultural science graduates there are will benefit from extremely well-paid jobs, it is, says Hickford bad for the industry not to have the “brains trust” there.

He believes it will not be until these high salaries are realised and food shortages become an issue to the middle classes, that their sons and daughters will look at agricultural science as a career option. We are likely to go from famine to feast and back again, he says.

Given the importance of agriculture to this country’s economy, Hickford cannot understand why the government is not strategically funding agricultural students. However at the core of the problem is the industry’s lack of profile, a problem Hickford believes starts at pre-school level. The majority of teachers, starting from pre-school level, are young, urban females who are far more likely to have a Bachelor of Arts than Bachelor of Science. Their connection to agriculture is zero and their image of agriculture is men whistling at dogs and putting cups on cows, a far cry from the technical, scientific-based industry it is.

Most school teachers just don’t have a feeling for the technical nature of production agriculture. It is, says Hickford, not there from the beginning and agriculture is not typically included in the school curriculum. At secondary school level, there is only the occasional larger rural high school such as Rangiora High that includes agriculture in its curriculum. Boarding schools do have a number of students from rural areas and as they mix with urban children, this does help raise the awareness of farming in these schools. Hickford says Lincoln University tries to raise the awareness of agriculture to teachers by running a careers day, but they are attracting the same 20-30 teachers every year.

He feels to address the issue, the industry needs to deliberately set out to target teachers and provide them with information about what this country does well and what pays the bills.

This problem of the industry not attracting enough people has gone on for close to 30 years; a result of increased urbanisation and the majority of the population having no connection back to the industry that earns so much money for this country. Even with people connected with the agriculture there has been no push to get sons and daughters to enter the industry.

Ironically the light at the end of tunnel for this country’s agricultural industry comes from the post- graduate agricultural students that are coming to this country from Asia and South America. Hickford says while they are not used to NZ farming systems they are technically correct and understand the fundamentals of production agriculture.

A lack of understanding of farming systems and the agricultural sector is having an impact on the economical, social and indeed environment sustainability of New Zealand.

The pastoral sector and the export earnings coming from that sector have and will continue to, provide the economic platform upon which this country is based. The ability of New Zealand's farmers to grow grass and produce high quality saleable product from that grass is this one country's main economic advantage.

Yet it needs the support of the urban-based majority in order to progress the industry into the future. This support needs to come from people; to both work in and provide support services to the agricultural sector and from political and bureaucratic support, to allow the sector to continue to grow and realise its potential.

In Canterbury a proposed irrigation scheme, Central Plains Water, which includes significant storage and has the potential to add many millions of dollars to the local economy, has further divided rural and urban communities. A long consent-hearing process for this scheme has highlighted a lack of understanding of the concerns of both communities.

While Canterbury is a water-rich province, the problem is having enough water when it is needed the most in the summer months, hence the need for storage. This storage would enable irrigation development and, more importantly provide farmers with security and reliability. Having irrigation from stored water gives farmers the ability to increase production and to know they can reliably meet the demands of export markets. It also has environmental benefits, such as replenishing lowland streams and fish stocks and taking the pressure off underground aquifers.

Many people living in towns and cities believe irrigation development will destroy their supply of high quality water through the leakage of nitrates, cause the salinisation of the Canterbury Plains, result in a dairying monoculture and ruin in-stream environments and environmental bio-diversity.

Their concerns are completely justifiable, but farmers and the industry have done a poor job at explaining their irrigation and farming practices and what they are doing to mitigate the environmental impacts of intensification. Many farmers have invested significantly to protect and enhance biodiversity on their farm, yet their tale is left untold.

WHAT DO URBAN PEOPLE THINK ABOUT FARMING?

- Six urban households interviewed.
- Concerns about impact farming is having on the environment.
- Farmers seen as innovative and community-minded.
- Lack of understanding of what farming contributes to the economy.
- All would welcome opportunity to visit a commercial farm.

To get an indication of urban attitudes toward farmers and farming practices, six urban households were asked 10 questions. These questions were about this country's farming industry and included a question about the impact the agricultural industry has on the environment.

The demographics of the households are:

Household A: a professional couple in their 40s with one young child.

Household B: A computer programmer and stay at home mother, aged 44 and 35, with four children aged 7-13. Their religious beliefs dictate they don't have radio or television so exposure to media is limited.

Household C: A retired professional couple aged 78 and 56.

Household D: A flight attendant and small business owner- aged 46 and 60- living in a de-facto relationship with no children.

Household E: Lawyer and food stylist, both in their 40s, with one child aged 10.

All those questioned viewed farmers in a positive light. They saw them as having a strong community spirit, as being innovative with a can-do attitude with strong family values.

They all acknowledged that agriculture does have a big impact on the New Zealand economy, although they were not entirely clear how. Only one household mentioned export earnings.

One household put a lot of emphasis on the employment opportunities created by the agricultural sector.

Another household believed that while agriculture has an impact on the economy it has, in recent years, been surpassed by tourism and the IT industry.

When describing the strengths of this country's farming systems only one household noted that farming was not subsidised.

Other households described the strengths of the industry as being its innovation, plentiful land resources, use of technology such as genetics and colonial attitude.

When questioned about changes in the past 10 years the use of computers was the most common answer.

Only one household knew of any leaders in the agricultural industry. No-one knew who the Minister of Agriculture was.

Most gained their knowledge about farming from Country Calendar (and enjoyed its diversity) and from newspapers and television.

Overwhelmingly all had concerns about the impact farming has on the environment particularly around water use and water quality. There were also concerns expressed about deforestation, the use of chemicals, the loss of wetlands, erosion and greenhouse gas emissions.

All households questioned would very much like the opportunity to visit a commercial farm and were enthusiastic about the prospect.

In conclusion, there appears to be a contradiction between the positive image of farmers as being community spirited and innovative contributors to the economy, and the idea of farmers, particularly dairy farmers as being arch polluters, driven more by profit than by any sense of environmental responsibility.

Conversations with several of these households outside of the interview revealed many viewed farmers as being financially very well off based on the value of their land asset. They failed to recognise the lack of cash flow in the sheep, beef and arable sectors and the increasing costs of inputs farmers face.

As none of the households had any regular contact with commercial farmers, it could be concluded their attitudes have been formed through mainstream media which notoriously fails to report on farming success stories yet is quick to highlight issues of non-compliance.

Their Answers

1) When was the last time you were on a farm and what type of farm was it?

- a) Lifestyle block/ farm stay four years ago and periodic pig hunting trips over hill country farms.
- b) Stayed with cousin on sheep and beef property in Southland in summer holidays 2008.
- c) Visited dairy farm six years ago. Milked a cow as a child and visited uncle's sheep and beef farm as a child.
- d) Visited a lifestyle cattle property and ex-boyfriend owned hill country sheep farm.
- e) Visited friends on hill country property although only visited the house.

2) Apart from sheep what other types of farming are you aware of.

- a) Deer, dairying, arable, llama, goats, specialist seed crops, forestry.
- b) Dairy, sheep, cattle, deer, pigs, goat, studs, orchards, fish.
- c) Deer, dairy and arable.
- d) Poultry, mixed cropping, dairy, deer.
- e) Aquaculture, deer, dairy, beef, pigs, poultry and cropping.

3) Can you list some agricultural products this country exports?

- a) Dairy, pork, lamb and goat meat, wine, avocados and forestry products.
- b) Milk powder, cow milk, meat, wool, gelatine, leather, venison, velvet, pork, forestry, barley, grass-seed, horse.
- c) Lamb, dairy products, beef, hides and sheepskins, velvet, venison.
- d) Lamb, chicken, beef to USA, seeds, pinus radiata, live sheep, pork, salmon.
- e) Deer velvet, venison, lamb, wool, milk products and beef.

4) What are the strengths of New Zealand's farming industry?

- a) Close-knit community, use of technology combined with kiwi ingenuity, isolation has made farmers innovative, diversity.
- b) Temperate climate, ample land, grass, good wool, community spirit, innovative, use of genetics.
- c) Clean and green, lots of space, farmers very hands-on, no housing of animals. Family values- family farm underpins the industry.
- d) Climate, colonial attitude, wanting to do a good job, striving to be efficient, no longer subsidised, educated farmers, concentrating on growing for the market i.e listening to the market, caring for the land.
- e) Innovative, quick to identify and exploit market opportunities, free-range systems, history of being a farming nation, being an island NZ has bio-security advantages.

5) What contribution does agriculture make to the New Zealand economy?

- a) Massive contribution- major exporter and creates employment both directly and indirectly.
- b) The whole support economy behind farming creates significant employment.
- c) Huge contribution to the economy especially now. Export income from agriculture has saved the economy. Always been mainstay of the economy.
- d) Agriculture does make a big contribution but not as big as in the past as it has been overtaken by IT industry and tourism. However agriculture is still very important.
- e) Agriculture makes a significant contribution to the economy and many provincial towns are dependant on agriculture. Agriculture, particularly dairying, has kept the south Island buoyant in the recent recession

6) What changes do you believe have occurred in agriculture (in this country) in the past 10 years?

- a) Big advances in use of technology, working out what is profitable, measuring production, use of computers, diversification, use of genetics, compliance and health and safety.
- b) Use of computers.
- c) Use of computers, more mechanisation.

d) Changing land use striving to be more efficient and market orientated.

e) Technology, increase in farm size, more corporate farms, agriculture has become part of the global economy, emergence of new markets such as China.

7) Where do you get your knowledge of farming?

a) Country Calendar (watched religiously), watching No.8 Wire when feeding new baby.

b) Visiting farms, videos at school (provided by classmate), neighbour (farming journalist) newspaper, talking to people, visited Mystery Creek years ago.

c) Newspaper including Farming Page, Country Calendar, TV news, Christine Fernihough book (haven't read it but heard about it).

d) National Radio, Country Calendar (enjoy it being so diverse), father used to follow farming keenly and often discussed it.

e) Country Calendar, farming contacts through school, newspaper, Radio New Zealand National, A&P Shows- attend two or three a year.

8) Do you know any farming leaders eg President Federated Farmers?

a) No

b) No

c) No

d) No

e) Craig Norgate, Peri Drysdale, Hugh Little, Tom Lambie.

9) What concerns do you have, if any, of the impact farming is having on the environment?

a) Use of water, effluent pouring into streams, chemical use (across all farming types), attitude that if Grandfather used these chemicals so should we, chopping down trees to make room for dairy farms, loss of wetlands resulting in soil loss.

“It's not that they (farmers) don't care, they are driven by economics.”

Farmers need to have a different approach- more organic- we perceive that not many farmers are doing that, these options are not pushed.

Too much chemical use overall and explosion of dairy farming is too much. Concerns over water, both quantity and quality and loss of forestry from the landscape.

Believes there will a glut of dairying i.e-a boom bust cycle similar to what has happened in kiwifruit and avocado industries.

b) Concern about use of water by dairy industry, polluted waterways.

“I have no incentive to conserve water when I know dairy farmers are pumping it.”

Council’s consents given too freely for a limited resource. Councils giving water consents for money not thinking about long-term sustainability.

Dairying not natural on Canterbury Plains. Question whether dairy industry is sustainable.

Can no longer canoe down the Avon due to lack of water- suspect this is influence of irrigation.

Need to make a concerted effort to remain green.

c) Concerns about leaching of nitrates into the water supply and greenhouse gas emissions.

Farmers need to stay clean and green and don’t turn into factories

Hope that Canterbury farms don’t all convert to dairying, sheep industry needs to be competitive.

Concerns about pests ie resurgence of rabbit populations and possums.

d) Big issue of effluent from dairy farms getting into streams, deforestation causing erosion on hill country farms, impact irrigation has on natural water courses. Feels there can be harmony between nature and productivity but balance is swinging towards making a profit at expense of environment.

Would like people in general to go back to a more relaxed lifestyle- less driven by profit.

Also acknowledges pollution created by cities, particularly Heathcote river.

Farming in general is not good for water, also concerned about greenhouse gas emissions and impact on global warming.

Concerns about lifestyle blocks taking up productive land.

e) Agriculture needs to strike a balance between economic growth and ruining the environment. Have major concerns about the impact irrigation, and the expansion of the dairy industry in Canterbury is having on water quality and quantity.

Intensification of dairying on the Canterbury Plains is too much too quickly and there is a lack of understanding of what the long-term consequences will be.

Hate seeing centre-pivots. No-one knows what the long-term affect will be of taking so much water out of the ground. What affect will it have on the aquifers?

Cows pose the biggest threat to the environment; they consume a lot of pasture for not much product and produce a lot of effluent.

Maybe the dairy industry hasn't done a good job of telling us about what it is doing to minimise its impact on the environment?

While the country can't get back the areas of native bush and forest that have been destroyed to make way for farming, it can't afford to lose any more.

Don't like overseas investors like Shania Twain buying up land in this country.

10) Would you like to visit a farm, is so what type?

a) Very keen to visit a farm- would like to visit that has diversified and is not just driven by economics but is working to improve the environment.

b) Very keen to visit a farm, would prefer educational-type visit.

c) Love to see a deer farm, interested to see a dairy farm and High Country station. See how they muster etc.

d) Would love to visit dairy farm and High Country farm.

e) Dairy farm, fish farm, high country farm, farmer doing something very innovative e.g growing ultra-fine Merino wool.

THE ISSUE OVERSEAS.

- In other countries farmers have been proactive about promoting farming to urban communities.
- Ontario “Farmers Feed Cities” campaign.
- UK Open Farm Sunday programme and LEAF organisation both set up to bridge the gap between rural and urban communities.
- Queensland’s Every Family Feeds Family is a media campaign while Australia’s Farm Day gives urban families the opportunity to spend a day on a farm with a farming family.

The problem of the urban-rural divide is in no way unique to this country. It has been identified in western nations throughout the world including the UK, Denmark, Australia, Canada to name but a few. In many of these countries farmers have both collectively and individually been pro-active about countering negative press about farming practices and lifting their profile in urban communities.

All of the countries listed above have launched campaigns and/or initiatives to increase understanding between rural and urban communities.

Canada

In Ontario, the “Farmers Feed Cities” campaign has been running for five years and emerged from the political struggle of farmers who felt they were not being heard by urban communities. Nuffield scholar Ali Undorf-Lay, recently visited Ontario and met campaign organiser Scott Allison. He says the campaign aims to grow awareness amongst city dwellers about the role agriculture plays in maintaining rural landscapes. Farmers Feed Cities focuses on celebrating the safe, reliable, great tasting food produced by local growers. Undorf-Lay says the campaign doesn’t want to defend farmers from urban criticism, but tries to set the scene and make the news.

“I liked the campaign and the positive way that it prompted farmers and their urban neighbours to get together, says Undorf-Lay. “It made farmers real people.”

One of their sub-campaigns- “Thank a Farmer” encourages people to write in with comments to farmers and they are receiving contributions from urban dwellers praising farmers.

United Kingdom

In the UK Open Farm Sunday is billed as the English farming industries annual open day. This year the day attracted 150,000 visitors to 400 farms throughout the country.

The initiative of Lincolnshire farmer Ian Pigott, Open Farm Sunday involves commercial farmers opening their gates to the public for a few hours on a set day of the year. This year the event was held on June 1. Open Day Sunday, which has been running since 2006, is co-ordinated by the organisation Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF). The key objective of the day is to link farming with food but it also allows urban people to discover first hand what it means to be a farmer and where possible see and taste the produce. It also encourages discussion and de-mystifies farming to urban people.

Each farm is unique and has its own set of activities based on the host farmer's individual story. Activities may include a farm walk, a nature trail, tractor and trailer rides, machinery demonstrations, wildlife activities, mini farmers markets, and activities for children. Farmers can make the day as elaborate or simple as they wish as the success of the day is very much down to the host farmers.

In the past two years statistics show that the majority of visitors were adults accompanied by children so it gives the farming community an opportunity to appeal to the next generation of consumers and career seekers. For this reason there needs to be different activities for different age groups.

LEAF provide a lot of support to farmers willing to participate in the event including facilitating workshops, providing literature on how to run an event, publicity material and a page on the LEAF website dedicated to Open Farm Sunday. Drawing on farmers' experiences in hosting an Open Day, LEAF offers a number of suggestions on how farmers can make the day a success. These include keeping the event simple, providing one or two easily identifiable take home messages, and ensuring it is interactive with tours encompassing talking and questions, activities and quizzes.

The farming story means more if it is told through personal stories rather than trying to represent the whole industry. Most importantly the link needs to be made between food and farming, but it is recommended that farmer hosts start with the food rather than the farming end of the chain. This presents the opportunity for meat and milk processors to get involved in the day in demonstrating some of the end products. The day can also involve others such as representatives from the industries that support a farm, for example a vet with a scanning machine.

Before a farmer hosts an Open Farm day, LEAF suggests they inform their insurer about what they are doing and undertake a risk assessment to spot potential hazards. LEAF also provides a generic risk assessment. Also available to farmers and teachers is a Health and Safety Executive publication outlining the possible hazards that could be found on farms.

LEAF itself was set up in 1991 to address the problem of the ever widening gap between consumers and farmers and the need to understand both sides of the debate was seen as being essential. With the key objective of developing and promoting integrated farm management, it was the first time farmers, environmental groups, food and agricultural organisations, consumers, the government and academics had got together to do something positive for the farming industry. LEAF is a registered charity with funding coming from memberships, corporate memberships, corporate sponsorships and government grants.

Australia

Looking across the Tasman, in 2006 AgForce, Queensland's equivalent to Federated Farmers, launched phase one of its Every Family Needs a Farmer media campaign. The main aim of this campaign is to bridge the gap between the city and what the Queenslanders call the bush. It is AgForce's boldest initiative, but one the organisation believes is critical as, unlike 20 years ago, most people in urban areas no longer have friends or family living on farms.

AgForce believe this has created a divide based on a lack of understanding and they want to rebuild the connection between the city and rural areas in order to counteract the influence of the radical groups, which have heavily influenced government policies through the urban vote. The campaign uses prime-time television advertising to reach the metropolitan audience and in phase one of the campaign, the message AgForce wished to convey was told through three generations of one farming family. It aimed to show how Queensland farming families were doing their best for the environment, for their livestock and their family to grow food for Australia and international consumers.

AgForce president Peter Kenny says the whole idea of the campaign is to help people living in cities to understand where their food comes from, how it is produced and gain some insight into the issues country people deal with. It will help ensure farmers are there for the future and help consumers understand the quality food and fibre that farmers produce and the safety assurance of that product.

The farming family the campaign used were the faces they wanted urban dwellers to recognise as typical of many farming families, families who build viable, sustainable enterprises that will last well into the future. Backing up the television campaign, AgForce has produced a range of fact sheets around the positive aspects of farming in Queensland. The fact sheets deal with issues such as the environment, economy, animal welfare, business and other activities. As well as being available on the AgForce website, the material is being adapted for use by primary school children and resources have also been made available for teachers.

In phase two of the television campaign launched this year, AgForce has enlisted the services of three high profile rugby league players all of whom are from farming backgrounds. These three are shown at a barbeque and it essentially highlights how much of the food at the barbeque was produced by farmers.

The message is “no farmers no food”.

Research after the “No Farmers No Food” campaign showed the message is being clearly conveyed. Almost two-thirds of those surveyed, who recalled the advertisement, cited the main message to be the importance of farmers and how they, as city dwellers, depend on farmers for their food. Four out of 10 surveyed were aware of the Every Farmer Needs a Farmer campaign.

There was an increase in the proportion associating the catch-cry “where our food comes from” with rural Queensland from 57% after two weeks of wave one of advertisements to 63% after wave two. AgForce say these results suggest the campaign is effectively communicating the message to urban Queenslanders.

Phase three was rolled out in June with the theme “We Care About Our Country.” This phase features the 2008 Australian of the Year, Lee Kernaghan. Kernaghan, who champions the rural sector, is a singer songwriter and has written a song highlighting how farmers care for their country to accompany the campaign.

AgForce president Peter Kenny says the third phase has an environmental focus because research after phase two revealed some urban perceptions around the bush remain negative, with only 22% of those surveyed believing farmers cared for the environment.

“We need to emphasise that farmers care about their country and communities. “Farmers don’t just talk about the environment. We live in the environment and have a vested interest in ensuring we keep it as healthy as it can possibly be.”

The campaign has been supported by the Queensland government, several insurance companies and rural media.

Another Australian initiative began three-years-ago when Victoria-based farmer Deb Bain had a discussion with her husband about ways to off-set the bad press agriculture was getting in the Australian media. Issues such as water, genetic modification, muelsing and land degradation were capturing the attention of the press and the Australian public, and were not balanced by stories of responsible land management.

Bain and her husband, who are sheep farmers, wanted to help people understand farming and conversely help farming people understand the concerns of city dwellers. As Bain says, most farmers are very good at showing people their properties and what they do on them, and so Farm Day was born.

Farm Day matches an urban family with a farming family willing to host urbanites for either a day or a weekend. Farm Day take place on a set day of the year. This year it was held on May 27.

In 2006, a total of 75 families from Victoria took part in the day, but in 2007 the concept went national, and 200 urban families visited farms. This year 300 city families visited 300 host farms.

Bain, who originated from Vancouver city, says when she started the project it was only on a small scale. However based on the response from public and the media, she realised the idea was much bigger than she had first thought.

This year 1000 families applied to be placed on farms for the day, the only limiting factor in the programme is getting enough farmers willing to host people. This year 400 farmers put their hands up to participate, but they lost 100 farms due to location- they were simply too remote.

Bain is discerning about the farmers she uses and they need to meet a set of critieria. She says the farmers she is looking for are at the cutting edge of the industry, with a strong vision for the future. Preferably they are doing some land care work and be willing to talk about land care practices.

Similarly urban families need to be participating for the right reasons.

The one aim of the Farm Day programme is to strengthen links between town and country and from this Bain is unerring. She stresses that the day is very much pitched at grass-roots level and this is how it has to be. The farm experience can be as simple as meeting a farmer and patting an animal to becoming involved in full-on farming. There are no hidden agendas- it is simply about breaking down the urban/rural divide, and it is for this reason she has not sought government funding for the programme.

She has sought sponsorship to make it happen, and has secured \$100,000 from corporate and philanthropic sources to enable her to set up a website and pay a public relations company to do the necessary media work. Fortunately the concept has caught the media's attention and it has been very supportive in spreading the word about Farm Day.

Bain describes the results of the Day as being fantastic and feedback very affirming. She says she has heard some beautiful stories and just from this anecdotal evidence, she knows she has achieved her goal.

Another measure of the success of the day is the number of urban families looking to repeat the experience year after year. This represents a challenge to Bain as she has to balance these families with the families yet to have the farm experience After the Farm Day experience 70% of urban and farming families stay in touch with each other.

While Farm Day has been a huge success, Bain says they did have a few obstacles to overcome including distances to farms and getting farmers to participate. Bain sees it as a tragedy that they couldn't match every single urban family with a farmer.

Farm Day was always touted as a day visit, next year they will expand this to a weekend visit to a region, with the primary focus being the farm visit. Bain says they want to encourage families to make a weekend of it and stay in the region for a couple of days. This of course benefits regional economies.

Bain has been very proactive about health and safety and Farm Day has full insurance cover. They have what Bain describes as a minor discussion with hosting farmers about health and safety and provide them with recommendations from Farmsafe Australia. Visiting families also sign a waiver if they are participating in motorbike or horseback riding. Bain says fortunately they have never had an incidents or accidents.

For Bain herself, the concept has been enormously rewarding but also enormously time consuming. It is a more than full-time job for six months of the year and part-time for the balance- but Bain has yet to receive any financial recompense for her work. She is hoping this will change in the coming year.

As acknowledgement of her work, this year Bain was named Australian Rural Woman of the Year, a title that has given her profile and opened many unexpected doors.

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN NEW ZEALAND TO LIFT THE PROFILE OF FARMING?

- New Zealand's agricultural industry has lagged behind in connecting with urban communities.
- Farming leaders often fail to explain the basics of farming practices in the media.
- No information on farming practices on Ministry of Agriculture or Meat and Wool New Zealand web-sites.
- No resources about farming in New Zealand readily available to school teachers.
- Country Calendar is very popular but highlights rural life rather than commercial farming practices.
- Mainstream media reports stories of non-compliance and ignores good news farming stories.
- Industry initiatives such as Outstanding in the Field and Get Fresh are aimed at recruitment rather than educating.

While New Zealand's agricultural industry is an acknowledged world leader in terms of agricultural practices, it seems the industry has lagged behind when it comes to connecting with urban communities. Perhaps farmers have been so busy in the post-reform period they have failed to engage with the majority of the population who live in urban areas.

Too often farming leaders are heard in the media defending farming practices yet are failing to explain the basics. A good example of this is the centre-pivot irrigator, so often attacked as symbolising the expansion of irrigation and the perceived stealing of water by farmers. The majority of the population don't know these are an extremely efficient way at applying water, especially compared to the old border-dyke irrigation schemes which were built unchallenged at the end of last century.

Similarly urban dwellers don't hear about or see the monitoring and measuring that is carried out on farms everyday throughout the country, as farmers strive to reduce their inputs and mitigate their environmental impact. They don't know that this country's farming systems are amongst the most efficient in the world in terms of productivity per stock unit while retaining high standards of the animal welfare. These are stories that are worth telling and indeed need to be told.

Information Resources

The websites of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Meat and Wool New Zealand and Federated Farmers don't even have any basic information about farming practices in this country and certainly nothing for children.

Fonterra's website does marginally better with colourful animation and some useful facts on how milk is made. However there is nothing about farming practices or this country's grass-based farming systems.

Contrast this with the raft of web-based resources aimed specifically at children put out by agricultural organisations overseas such as the Danish Agricultural Council, Beef USA, United States Department of Agriculture and Ontario Pork Producers, and Californian dairy farmers to name just a few.

Ruth Rainey, a Rangitikei farmer and former provincial president of Federated Farmers quotes a primary school teacher in Manurewa who, in trying to teach a unit on farming, struggled to find any resources on farming in this country.

"We did a unit on farming in term one of this year and the kids had pretty much no prior knowledge of what goes on with a farm and why we have them. The kids, who don't get to leave Auckland, have a very hard time imagining a paddock with 300 cows in it. I found it hard to find good New Zealand resources for this unit. It would be good to have teacher created resource packs with photos and worksheets of farming.

"Also the websites that I got my kids to look at were all American ones as we couldn't find any kid orientated ones about farming. It would also be great to have a video or DVD of a day of the life of a farmer. It is hard to try and explain to the kids how the cups get put on in a milking shed without them having a visual reference. It would have needed to be pretty basic stuff for most of them though, because they had almost no prior knowledge."

Open Farms.

The idea of open farms has been bandied around and three years ago members of the Kapiti Coast community formed a group known as the Guardians Trust. This Trust lobbied to get the Department of Conservation (DOC) to purchase Whareroa farm, a 450ha Landcorp hill country property close to Wellington. Once in the hands of DOC the farm would fall under the auspices of the Wellington Regional Council.

The Guardian Trust was proposing to run the farm as commercially viable, sustainable property and open it to the public to highlight best farm practice and to provide Wellingtonians with recreational opportunities. Unfortunately the idea is

floundering because the farm is too run down and the investment required to get it up and running is beyond the means of the Trust and the Regional Council.

Molesworth Station is arguably New Zealand's most famous farm which is open to the public, but it is so extensive and only runs cattle therefore it does not reflect this country's typical farming systems.

Media.

The perennially popular Country Calendar is, after Coronation Street, the world's longest running television series. It is consistently in the top 10 programmes viewed every week and while its rural audience is the most loyal, it is also essential viewing for 100,000s of city folk.

When the programme first went to air in April of 1966 it was very much aimed at farmers, and including the results of research, stock sale prices and farming inventions. Today it has a very different format and highlights all aspects of rural life rather than focusing on commercial farming.

The Young Farmer of The Year competition is an annual event and while it is televised and replayed later on a Saturday evening, the bulk of the viewing audience are rural based. Young Farmers CEO Richard Fitzgerald says the organisation has to fight to get the show televised every year, but they are afforded some protection under the TVNZ charter. The competition does portray the professional and multi-skilled nature of farming and highlights the calibre of the young people in the agricultural industry.

Mainstream print media in this country tends to highlight the bad news stories of non-compliance while choosing to overlook the good-news stories and stories championing best farming practices and environmental responsibility and enhancement.

Farming editors on many of the daily papers throughout the country often lament the struggles they have to get space for positive farming stories in their newspapers.

The rural news on Radio New Zealand National amounts to two daily five minute slots, while Country Life, which is broadcast for an hour on Friday nights and Saturday morning touches on all aspects of rural life but again has a largely rural following

Industry Initiatives

One initiative aimed at secondary school children is The Hoof and Hook competition organised by Feilding-based Future Beef NZ. The competition aims to encourage school pupils to learn about and become involved in the beef industry. Interested pupils from around the country are given a given a steer which they learn to handle and prepare for showing before the animal is sent off for slaughter and processing.

Mark Stevens from Future Beef, says this was their second year of the competition and they attracted 53 participants from as far afield as Southland, Christchurch and Auckland with the majority coming from urban backgrounds. Stevens says initially they approached agricultural colleges in the hope of attracting participants, but were shocked how little many agricultural students knew about beef production and handling beef. This is because, says Stevens, many agriculture teachers are from a horticultural background.

The cattle, which are sponsored, are kept at farms close to town and participants spend half a day a week for two and half months learning about beef production, handling cattle and preparing their beast for showing.

Stevens says the participants know from the outset their animals will be slaughtered and this has not been a problem. In fact they tend to view their animals in terms of carcase characteristics rather than a pet, comparing size and growth rates with fellow competitors.

Stevens is expecting around 100 participants next year as word about the event is circulated.

Meat and Wool New Zealand's "Outstanding in the Field" has been running for three years and includes a number of initiatives. These include hands-on experience days for year 10-13 students and career workshops for teachers, career advisors and students which are run in conjunction with Massey and Lincoln Universities.

Joanna Taylor, who along with her husband Peter runs the Outstanding in the Field programme for Meat and Wool NZ, says the majority of participants live in urban areas. They began the programme in 2006 with five field days, this year they will, by the end of the year, have run 13. The field days include five or six modules typically including science, agribusiness, beef and sheep handling, a dairy module and a veterinary module. The beef and sheep modules are very hands-on and students get the opportunity to drench a sheep, draft and use electronic scales.

Peter and Joanna Taylor get young role models from a variety of agribusiness backgrounds, such as rural bank managers, soil scientists and stock agents, to talk to the students about career opportunities in agriculture.

This year they have had close to 857 students (only 90-95% students fill out their assessment forms) attend the 12 field days run by October 1, with only 395 of those coming from a farming background. Out of the all students who had attended the days 538 sought more information about careers in agriculture.

DairyNZ have been running a series of television advertisements seeking to attract people into the industry. These advertisements certainly highlight the positive aspects of dairy farming including career pathways, using technology, being close to family all day and working outdoors.

The dairy industry's Get Fresh campaign uses a range of tools including social networking sites, texting and an internet-based campaign, radio advertising and billboards to try and attract young people into the industry.

While the Outstanding in the Field, Get Fresh and Come Dairying campaigns all highlight the positive aspects of their respective industries, their primary aim is to recruit young people into the industry not to educate the general public.

A MODEL TO LIFT FARMING'S PROFILE.

- In New Zealand efforts to bring rural and urban communities together have been fragmented.
- Agricultural industry in good position to draw on success of programmes overseas.
- Three- pronged strategy proposed.
- Resources to schools, open farm programme and engagement with interest groups.
- Trust would drive strategy and would be industry funded.
- Investment in this strategy would be an investment in the future sustainability of the agricultural sector.

While the problem of the urban rural divide appears to be a hot-topic, and indeed was the subject of a one-day seminar at Massey University this year, efforts to address the problem so far have often been localised, sector focused and fragmented

In seeking to lift the profile of agriculture in this country, the industry would do well to draw on the successes of programmes implemented by agricultural organisations in other countries.

Lessons learnt from The UK's Open Farm Sunday programme, Queensland's Every Family Needs Farmer campaign and the various web-based resources for children put out by producer organisations overseas could all provide a basis upon which this country's unique agricultural industry could form its own pan-industry public relations programme.

To address all the issues associated with the urban-rural divide, a three-pronged strategy could be implemented.

The first would be providing resources, both hard copy and web-based, aimed at school teachers and school children to help them better understand **basic** farming systems.

As farming covers a number of curriculum subjects such as science, biology, economics and geography the agricultural industry would be in a good position to advocate the inclusion of this country's farming practices as part of the curriculum,

particularly at primary and intermediate school level. This would tie in with the populist topic of “where food comes from” and increase the awareness of food and food production systems all of which impact on human health. This is particularly pertinent as this country faces an obesity epidemic particularly amongst children.

The second prong would be to make commercial farms accessible to the general public through a carefully managed open-farm programme.

This could either be through a day when farms throughout the country open their gates to the public (to be held on a set day of every year), or through a smaller-scale initiative where urban families are linked to farming families, also on a set day or weekend every year.

In both of these, farms need to fit set criteria: They need to commercial farms and have high standards of land and stock management. Farmers willing to be involved in such a programme would need to be doing it for the right reasons; wanting to inform and educate rather than be antagonistic towards urban visitors. Hobby farms and those running tourist operations or seeking remuneration from hosting urban families would be excluded from such a programme.

Advice would be sought on how best to manage Health and Safety concerns and this may include insurance cover for participating farmers and or ensuring visitors sign a waiver before entering the property.

An accompanying media campaign would be an essential part of this strategy. The experience of the Australian Farm Day programme, for example, has shown mainstream media to be very interested and supportive of such an initiative.

The third part of the strategy would be the engagement with interest groups including governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community groups and iwi, particularly those concerned with the environment.

Tom Lambie, former president of Federated Farmers and Chancellor of Lincoln University believes it is important to engage with interest groups and influence the people who help form opinion in the community. The South Canterbury Water Enhancement Group is a good model where a number of interest groups come together and work through issues concerning water bodies in South Canterbury in which they all have an interest.

Encouraging better understanding of farming systems and providing both practical and scientific-based evidence of responsible land management and environmental enhancement could go some way towards dispelling myths about the impact farming has on the environment. However transparency is critical and where there are problems it would be important to show that those problems have been identified and possible solutions articulated.

By better engaging with interest groups, the farming community may better understand and appreciate the concerns of interest groups. All parties may then be better positioned to seek common solutions. To drive this programme a body such as a Trust would need to be formed with a primary focus of creating better understanding between urban and farming communities.

To be credible this Trust would need to be one-step removed from single-sectors, political lobby groups and the government. A board of trustees made up of volunteers concerned about the growing urban/ rural divide could provide strategic direction for the programme and this Trust could employ and support, in the initial stages, one paid employee.

This employee would be responsible for writing resources for schools, getting an Open Farm programme off the ground, which would include engaging with media as well as making contact with various interest groups. Underpinning the programme would be farmers willing to engage with both the public and interest groups.

Such a strategy would require pan-sector financial and material support-both in the seeding phase and for its on-going functioning.

Support could be sought from a number of agricultural and agribusiness organisations as well as rural media, universities and training institutes, sector bodies and funding bodies such as Agmardt and Sustainable Farming Fund.

This programme would, I believe, have economic, social and environmental benefits. Providing the urban population with both a fundamental knowledge of farming systems and an opportunity to visit commercial farms, would improve their understanding of farming systems and reduce the number of objections to farming practices and developments that have the potential to generate economic activity.

By targeting school children, the programme would plant the seed of thought in young children that agriculture is a progressive and dynamic industry and an industry that they would want to be part of in their adult life. This may be at any level, from farm management through to the number of support industries so vital to the well-being of the agricultural sector. Lack of staff is often cited as one of the biggest threats to the industry, yet so few school children know what career opportunities exist in agriculture.

The environmental benefits would come through communities working collectively to improve their environment and through farmers being in an economically better position to invest in protecting and enhancing their farm and local environment.

In order for the industry to grow, prosper and be sustainable into the future, it is undoubtedly in the interest of every sector of agriculture to invest in a much-needed public relations programme. The antagonism that exists between rural and communities seems ridiculous in such a small country which is so dependant on agriculture for its financial well-being. This antagonism is impeding progress and stifling economic growth.

It is also costing farmers and organisations caught up in bureaucratic wrangles significant amounts of time and money.

Farming in New Zealand is a success story that ought to be celebrated- not criticised. Bringing urban and rural communities together to discuss each others concerns and ambitions will be in the best interests of New Zealand's future.

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