

SUPPORTING NATIVE BIODIVERSITY MANAGEMENT ON FARMS

How can farmers be empowered to manage native biodiversity on farms?

That was the question for the Farming with Native Biodiversity (FwNB) pilot project, as part of nationwide initiatives to protect and improve Aotearoa New Zealand's biodiversity.

WHY IS BIODIVERSITY IMPORTANT ON FARMS?

In New Zealand, pastoral farming accounts for over half of overall land-use. Sheep and beef farms contain almost a quarter of all native vegetation in the country. This means that farmers can play an integral part in caring for and revitalising our natural environment.

On the demand side, consumers are increasingly asking for sustainably produced farm products. This means that, by integrating biodiversity management into farm practice, there is an opportunity to produce high-value products.

THE FARMING WITH NATIVE BIODIVERSITY PILOT

The FwNB pilot project worked to bridge the gap between science and the farm system. The goal was not only to help farmers learn about native biodiversity, but also to find win-win approaches for biodiversity management and farm productivity. The project carried out this work through three main initiatives: ecological support on farms, upskilling farm advisors, and the collaborative development of user-friendly digital resources. While the FwNB pilot has finished, the digital resources are available on the Farming with Native Biodiversity website. There remains a need for comprehensive support throughout the farming system to empower farmers with the knowledge and confidence to manage native biodiversity.



AT A GLANCE

Farmers can play an important part in caring for and revitalising our natural environment. This pilot project bridged the gap between science and farm systems - supporting farmers to learn about native biodiversity and start managing it on their farms.

ECOLOGICAL SUPPORT ON FARMS

The FwNB project brought together ecologists and farmers to collaborate on long-term biodiversity management farm plans. These management plans outlined specific actions and projects farmers could undertake to protect and improve native biodiversity on their farms.

Forty farms from the Silver Fern Farms suppliers group participated in the FwNB project. The farmers and ecologists built strong working relationships that facilitated valuable knowledge exchange and resulted in biodiversity management plans that are both ambitious and practical.

The final biodiversity management plans for the 40 participating farms recommended a total of 224 individual biodiversity management projects. These comprised of 34 wetlands, 29 forest remnants, 63 riparian margin restorations, and 45 new planting projects

UPSKILLING SUSTAINABLE FARM ADVISORS

The FwNB team worked to upskill Fonterra's Sustainable Dairy Advisors (SDAs) on how to manage biodiversity. The team gave webinars and conducted "walk-and-talk" sessions on farms to share recommendations about managing native biodiversity and advice for dairy farms. The advisors were very interested in helping dairy farmers manage biodiversity. The sessions gave them the knowledge and skills to know where to start.

FARMING WITH NATIVE BIODIVERSITY DIGITAL RESOURCES

In addition to working directly with farmers, the FwNB project developed digital resources in collaboration with farmers, farm advisors, catchment groups, and councils. These resources were designed to reach an audience beyond those who were involved in the pilot. The digital resources are easily accessible, they present clear and reliable information about native biodiversity, and make it easy for farmers to start taking realistic actions to manage biodiversity.

The FwNB digital resources include the six-episode podcast "Our Farms, Our Future", nine e-learning modules, and a toolkit for delivering a workshop on how to plan biodiversity actions across a landscape. The FwNB website (www.biodiversity.nz/) is a hub for information about managing native biodiversity on farms, with links to other relevant materials



The Farming with Native Biodiversity project ran from 2021 to 2023 and was led by the NZ Landcare Trust with support from Silver Fern Farms, the Living Water Partnership (Fonterra and the Department of Conservation), the Ministry for Primary Industries, and the BioHeritage National Science Challenge.

The FwNB website and resources are now hosted by NZ Landcare Trust.



CONCLUSIONS

The Farming with Native Biodiversity pilot project has shown that access to trusted advisors, expertise and resources address the biggest barriers to farmers taking action to manage native biodiversity on their farms.

References

1) Pannell, J. L., Buckley, H. L., Case, B. S., & Norton, D. A. (2021). The significance of sheep and beef farms to conservation of native vegetation in New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Ecology*, 45(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.20417/nzj ecol.45.11>

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