

# Red Meat Profit Partnership

High Performance Farmer (HPF): UMR overview of main findings for farmer participants

March 2016



# Background

*In March 2016 the RMPP invited farmers who had participated in the 2014 HPF research on 'drivers of high performance' to attend a workshop day in Christchurch. This workshop had three main objectives and these were:*

- 1. Gain a sense of what the industry could do to support these HPFs*
- 2. Explore in what areas these HPFs saw potential for further improving their and other farmers performance*
- 3. Provide an open forum for these farmers to pick up on new ideas both from each other and a guest speaker*

*The day consisted of the following:*

- Six focus group discussions; three in the morning and three in the afternoon with the guest speaker talking in between these sessions*
- Farmers were mixed into different groups for each discussion*
- Each discussion lasted around 1.5 hours and was run by an independent UMR facilitator*
- Each group consisted of either eight or nine farmers*
- Three focused on ways in which the industry (RMPP) could support these farmers*
- Three group discussions focused on ideas to increase performance*

*A full report on the findings coming out of this day has been provided to RMPP. This is an overview of the main findings for farmer participants.*

*This overview lists key themes and provides some verbatim quotes on each theme to convey how participants voiced their view on the topic.*

*To order to keep this overview short and concise only top level themes are reported.*

# Summary of themes

## Areas for further industry work

- *Need to attract the next generation into farming*
- *Need to breakdown the urban/rural divide*
- *New technology must be efficient to use – need industry collaboration and software needs to interlink*
- *Promote open and honest fact-based discussion groups – they are critical to driving performance*
- *Need more efficient access to current information*
- *Tasks diary – early notification of critical farm tasks that require preparation or else the opportunity is lost (farmers that get this wrong are behind all season)*
- *Improved broadband for famers – its holding back the sector (could collaborate on local solutions)*
- *Pick and promote winners – make it easier for farmers to sift through all the information to find what works*
- *Promote red-meat to tourists – missed opportunity*

## New developments

- *Drones potentially bringing more efficiencies – needs more development*
- *Electronic identification (EID) – but needs refinement*
- *More efficient weighting systems*
- *More accurate and efficient measuring and monitoring devices – live soil moisture and grass growth monitors*

# Areas for further industry work

## Need to attract the next generation to farming

*That's making sure that the equity partnership story is available to them. You might not be the sole owner but you are going to own a piece of this pie. (Male)*

*Mentoring a new generation so creating pathways for new generations coming through. (Female)*

*[Do you feel that applies to you guys as well as to dairy farmers?] They lump us all in one basket I'd say. It would be good to even have programs in schools where they're actually on some sort of app that they set up their own little farms and they've got to borrow money from the bank and they start with so much, and they actually can make money. If you set up a proper thing then they can make money and they can find out what farming's really like. They could make it a big competition. (Male)*

## Need to breakdown the urban/rural divide

*There's a growing disconnect between rural and urban. If all they ever see is a negative story – “these bleating farmers again, they're polluting the waterways, they're on multi-million dollar assets and they're not making any money, and living a great life” –New Zealanders need to get a greater understanding. We touched on it before, with what RMPP is starting to do with kids in schools. I just think you can't emphasise that enough really. (Male)*

*You've got to start with the young. Just like you've got to look after your hoggets and your young stock. Get all the kids involved early and try and set them on the right track. (Male)*

## New technology must be efficient to use - need industry collaboration and software needs to interlink

*You're going to start getting tired if you've got to write down that such and such died today, and then in the next program “oh he died today”. If you could just put it in once, then it's across all your stuff. (Male)*

*That's the thing with technology. Whatever they do – like for me anyway, it's got to be time efficient. I don't want to get home at night and sit down for two hours trying to punch in information. (Male)*

*It's just a bit frustrating, the likes of Ministry of Primary Industries has obviously given out all this money and everyone's doing their own thing. Ballance has got one, they've got AgHub and then Ravensdown's got their own thing, and then there's Ag360. It would have been good to see something actually developed that was fully interlocked with all the fertiliser companies and completely interlinked. (Male)*

*Amalgamation of organisations so they're not at cross-purposes for funding, and that relates to software companies and research and development as well. There seems to be own agendas but they overlap a bit but the funding still at the end of the day comes out of the same place. (Female)*

## Promote open and honest fact-based discussion groups – they are critical to driving performance

*Discussion groups are definitely number one, and benchmarking in the discussion group. It's no good just having a group having a yarn about it if you don't know all the figures behind it. Anyone can go down the pub and skite about their lambing percentage, but until you actually see it all on paper where you can't bullshit it any more – it's fact. (Male)*

*I belong to two discussion groups – a spade is a spade and if you're not doing something right, you'll have 15 other guys tell you. The benefits I've got out of that have been amazing. They tell you straight and go through all your financial books and your accounts analysis and everything's checked and compared with all the guys in your group. It's been terrific for me. (Male)*

*The mere fact that you're bringing them onto your farm makes you perform better, and look at all your decisions and even the things that haven't gone well, and you should be able to explain why it's gone like that, why it hasn't worked or why it has worked and be able to look at your story, then the brainstorming happens about where to from here. (Female)*

*People make the difference. Getting off the farm, rubbing shoulders, having an outward look and whether that's a discussion group or ongoing education or just being exposed to different people from different parts of the country. You're always bumping into someone that's got a different idea and that's probably what will happen today. There'll be someone that I'll talk to today that will be doing something a bit different or I'll think "okay, maybe that's worth exploring". (Male)*

## Need more efficient access to current information

*I'm sure there's something sitting on a shelf that could be applied. There'll be different things for each of us here, but we don't know what we don't know and where do you find it? (Male)*

## Tasks diary – early notification of critical farm tasks that require preparation or else the opportunity is lost (Farmers that get this wrong are behind all season)

*It's probably also the follow up because some people might like the idea of doing something but the opportunity keeps slipping past. Like an easy reminder of best practice that just keeps coming. It could be like that with re-grassing programmes, or even flushing programmes. I've had heaps of farmers who have been caught out with how early – suddenly they're "oh shit, we're putting the rams out next week" and they haven't already been doing stuff for four weeks before it. They just missed the markers. (Male)*

## Improved broadband for farmers – its holding back the sector (could collaborate on local solutions)

*There's a problem with broadband and being able to do a lot of stuff and access it readily. For them to hurry up and improve so it does get out to the further reaches. (Male)*

*The first thing that came up was better infrastructure around broadband, cellphone coverage so a lot of these technologies they're talking about, how are we're going to actually use them. (Male)*

*It would be interesting whether Beef & Lamb or someone from within the industry could help local groups of farmers sort through all the crap a bit better, like with the likes of the broadband technology. If you all got together this would be your cost of more sustainable broadband with a tower or band condensers or something, but if all of us in isolation are sitting there scratching our heads, it's too hard for heaps of us. That technology thing is probably do-able for them, I reckon, to take leadership on. (Male)*

## Pick and promote winners (make it easier for farmers to sift through all the information to find what works)

*Watch the rugby and you get three different grasses in the ads these days. (Male)*

*Having a body that's actually screening it all, or doing a bit of that sifting through what's really good relevant stuff versus what's crappy stuff. Your one was the endorsing of that information. It's like having an independent body and saying, "right, this is actually really good juicy stuff that will make a practical difference at the farm gate, here it is", and those that want to uptake it, that are motivated to, will. A lot of the work's actually done for you. You can spend a lot of time just doing the sifting around and sometimes it's not that productive. (Male)*

## Promote red-meat to tourists – lost opportunity

*To the year ended December, 1½ million tourists came into New Zealand so you do have a captive market. I don't know how many of them were in campervans and eating tofu or beans – some, but it's the high end Chinese that you've got to funnel through a restaurant and give them top end steak and lamb. [Even if it costs us to do it, in my opinion. (Interjection)] A good marketing spend. [We're spending millions overseas on promotions. (Interjection)] [Spend some of it here instead. (Interjection)] (Male)*

*It just seems like it's a captive audience. (Male)*

# New Developments

## Drones potentially bringing more efficiencies

*Just got to get them more automatic. At the moment they're quite expensive to get something that will just fly – like it would be nice to send it out on a 10 km route, to fly all around, but they're quite expensive to get one of those ones. I only bought a \$1400 one which can still fly 2 kms away. Amazing footage from the camera, it's incredible. It looks like you've got more grass that's green than you actually have but they must be able to get them to measure the grass I reckon. To fly around and just land in three spots automatically, GPS spots. It all comes back – a bit like your cellphone – longer battery life. You've got to get more batteries to last longer. At the moment we can fly 20 minutes I think it is. (Male)*

Earlier this year they showed a presentation that they are developing a drone thing that profiles your whole farm and it actually makes a map that says you've got a whole lot of P there and K there and this area is low on one. It can somehow figure all that out from the sky. That would be amazing because then you could even up all your nutrients. It would probably be better for the environment as well. (Male)

## Electronic Identification (EID) - but needs refinement

EID and individual animal identifications is potentially a game changer for the sheep industry but it has to be commercialised, simple enough on a commercial scale. [Works for studs?] It's got to be cost effective on a commercial scale. Then you can do stock weighing from paddock to paddock, a whole bunch of things. (Male)

Making it simpler, easier and quicker to record stuff, and then the best way to sift through it all to get value and info back out of it. (Male)

EID tags and it's just getting that technology more modern and more user-friendly and everything else. We run a merino stud at home, so data recording and actually being able to generate stuff out of that simply and efficiently. (Male)

## More efficient weighing systems

They were talking about rolling out a mat as big as this. It counts how many feet and senses the weights and does the maths. You just roll it out through a gateway and chase the stock through it, or in the middle of the paddock. However many went over it, it figured it's got to be 20 animals. (Male)

The answer is yes, it will come. Individual animal identification, walk over weighing, go from paddock to paddock, do them through a gateway. After three days you'll know whether they've put on 100 grams or one gram. (Male)

## More accurate and efficient measuring and monitoring devices

In Australia last year I was at a course and the Dutch have invented a soil probe to measure nutrient as in phosphate, sulphur. An instant reading. It was supposed to be in New Zealand for \$1500. For us to be able to walk around our farm and test every hectare or half-hectare was going to be a massive saving for us. I still haven't seen that technology show up here yet. For us to get out and test a paddock in 10 different spots and get an instant reading without having to actually do the soil testing was going to be massive for us. [That would be great. (Interjection)] I'm yet to find out why it hasn't got here. Whether or not our soil companies have squashed it. (Male)

Real time growth as well. Cameras you can stand on in the paddock that are pushed into the pasture and it will measure actual growth back to a computer. It was logging soil temperature, moisture and growth. It's not far away. I don't know why it hasn't shown up yet. [You'd get onto that as soon as it was available in New Zealand (Interjection)]. (Male)