

# High performance farmers

March workshop 2016

Qualitative report



# Approach



# Objectives

1. Gain a sense of what the industry could do to support these top performers more
2. Explore where they see potential to further improve their performance
3. Provide an open forum for these farmers to pick up on new ideas both from each other and a guest speaker

# High performance farmers workshop

- 🐮 6 focus group discussions
- 🐮 Farmers were mixed into different groups for each discussion
- 🐮 Each discussion lasted around 1.5 hours
- 🐮 Each group consisted of either 8 or 9 farmers
- 🐮 3 focused on ways in which the industry (RMPP) could support these farmers
- 🐮 3 group discussions focused on ideas to increase performance

# Overview of findings



# Industry support

- Promoting the sector in a more positive way to help:
  - Attract more quality people into the industry
  - Address the urban/rural divide
- Interlinking data across programs to help:
  - Farmers operate more efficiently on their own farms
  - And interact more efficiently with the wider industry
- Discussion groups
  - Ensure these are fostered as much as possible as critical to the success of most top farmers
- Ways to pick and promote winners
  - Help the industry move past mediocracy and assist farmers who are less schooled in picking winners
  - Make scientific information more readily available to farmers
  - Tasks diary to assist farmers with making decisions on time
- Improve broadband
  - Farmers lack the platform to readily access new technology
  - Potential for local solutions

# Ideas to drive performance

- 🐮 Electronic Identification (EID)
  - 🐮 Needs to be more cost-effective and easier to use
- 🐮 Better ways to regularly measure animal performance
  - 🐮 Portable and practical weighting devices
- 🐮 Drones
  - 🐮 Potential to help farmers become much more efficient
- 🐮 Range of new technologies
  - 🐮 Soil probes
  - 🐮 Cheaper DNA testing
  - 🐮 Monitoring devices
  - 🐮 Deciding where Genetic Modification sits in New Zealand farming

# Industry support

Ways in which the industry could support these farmers to help further drive performance



# Attracting the next generation

- 🐄 Developing and promoting career pathways in sheep and beef farming
- 🐄 Show the equity partnership pathways - steps from shepherd to equity partner
- 🐄 Promote the opportunities – new technology (aging farm base – so need for a new wave of farm owners)
- 🐄 Industry needs to appeal to committed and sharp operators (must challenge the paradigm - “if you are dumb go farming”)
- 🐄 Reposition ‘farmer’ in the minds of New Zealanders as a more dynamic, exciting and proud occupation

# Develop and demonstrate career pathways - verbatim

*They have to see that in 15 years they may not own the farm but they might own a farming business or a share within that, so they have to see a clear profitable pathway. I think dairy did that really well because the sharemilkers were making 20% return on investment and then when all those sharemilkers became owners they haven't been as generous with the new generation, so they've killed that – well not killed it but completely stifled it, so I think you've got to share the wealth creation, whatever you're making, halve it and give half to the next generation so they can see there's a pathway to having some – ownership's changed. You may not own a farm but you may own part of the farming ... (Male)*

*Fifty percent of sheep and beef farms have got to be succeeded in the next 10 years so there's got to be huge opportunities or equity partnerships, huge. (Male)*

*And they've got to be happy with that. It's getting them convinced that that is a good option. (Male)*

*So we need to redefine our pathway because if you start on the ladder as a shepherd, you get on at step one and there's two or three steps missing. Equity partnership has come in and ... one of those steps. I still believe it needs to get easier. (Male)*

*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)*

# Reposition 'Farmer' as more dynamic, exiting and proud occupation -verbatim

*Do we need to lose the term 'farmer' and say "hey guys, we're actually producing your food"? (Male)*

*We talked about the marketing of red meat. Firstly look at marketing the rural story and then secondly the product. That comes back to raising the positivity around the industry so that being a farmer is something to be proud of, not something to be shy about. (Female)*

*A 'proud to be a farmer' campaign to make our industry sexy, so people view our industry as sexy and vibrant and tech, to make sure we're capturing the youth, and that's for farmers themselves to kind of stand up, shoulders back and say "I am proud to be a farmer" so making sure we're viewed as a sexy vibrant industry. (Male)*

*So that's where the language should change from sheep meat and that, like into proud protein producer and stuff like that. (Male)*

# Reposition farming (cont.) - verbatim

*I can see in 15–20 years' time we're going to run out of farm workers, or the only farm workers we'll get will come from the other side of the world. I reckon we're going down the wrong track. We're pushing them away. Farming's an exciting place, it's a nice place to normally grow up, and we're teaching our kids that it could be dangerous doing this or you can't come out with me doing that because we could have an accident or something. So we're pushing them away and their mates that come on the farm. We're pushing them as well and they're all our future really. I just don't get a good feeling about where we're going. (Male)*

*One of the stories that has come out of the drone story is that a whole lot of young people are being attracted to agriculture because of the technology. So changing their degrees so they might have been doing commerce, and now they're doing agcommerce. They might have been doing multimedia and they're changing it to some ag qualification so we're seeing significant numbers. It's nothing to do with the drones, it's to do with the technology and something cool and making it attractive. (Male)*

# Make farming an acceptable option for the next generation – verbatim

[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)*

*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)*

*That would be something that the industry could do is go into schools and promote farms and give good positive pitches on farms because all they see on One News is all the negative stories that come out and people don't like farmers, especially if they're in town. (Male)*

# Attract committed people to industry - verbatim

*That's changing the mantra that we want to take the top people out of the class, and if you can't do anything else you can go farming.*  
(Male)

*We still don't want those who can't get jobs anywhere else being forced into agriculture, but that's what's happening at the moment.*  
(Male)

*[Anything else you want to add to the list?]  
Immigration. We need to relax the laws to bring in more people. They're getting forced to employ the 3% of New Zealanders that are unemployed. You don't want to employ the 3% of New Zealanders who are unemployed. They're unemployable. You can't run a multi-million dollar business with the 3% that are unemployed. [Need the right people] I didn't think it was applicable to my business but when I said I needed to employ those people, my wife said we don't even want them in the meat processing because they're dangerous, they're on drugs, they don't show up on time.* (Male)

# Breaking down the rural/urban divide

- 🐑 Link sheep and beef sector more with schools providing positive stories
- 🐑 Promote the aspects of sheep and beef farming that create pride
  - 🐑 Legacy, looking after the environment
  - 🐑 Great products
  - 🐑 New technology
- 🐑 Use celebrities to help tell the story (Mike Hosking)
- 🐑 Master Chef
  - 🐑 How about a 'master farmer' or a 'rural survivor'

# Break down rural/urban divide - verbatim

*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” – I think there's a ... stream for industry good providers to actually – probably tie it up with education – within New Zealand 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)*

*I think we've got to do something serious in our schools. I think most of the town want us to be conservationists and look after the birds and the water, not produce their food, so I think we've got to have a huge focus into educating young people. (Male)*

# Break down rural/urban divide – verbatim (cont.)

*There's that big promotion at the moment with getting Mike Hosking onto a farm and it's been going on for a few weeks and people have been sending him things and photos of this is what you can do. Like him or hate him, he has some sort of pull and he's a bit of a townie. So that kind of thing – I mean there was that ad campaign with the farmer in New York going into the dinner – [The Silver Fern one. (Interjection)] It's that concept but doing it in a meaningful way. (Female)*

*You've got them. You've got Masterchefs, we've got Master Builders. Where's our master farmer on prime TV? We need to showcase that we're quite intelligent. We're not just farmers. We're actually mechanics, accountants, butchers. We're multi-talented, multi-million dollar businesses. (Male)*

*Pitching an idea for a show, that's great. [A reality show. Survivor, rural survivor. (Interjection)] (Male)*

# Interlinking data across programs

- 🐮 Efficiency is critical
  - 🐮 Less double entry
  - 🐮 Systems that are quick to pick up and use
- 🐮 Frustration at range of programs doing the same thing
  - 🐮 Recognition that this is part of competition and market forces will determine the best player succeeds
  - 🐮 However, some calls for industry leadership and ownership of universal tools (environmental measurement...)
- 🐮 Leads to calls for more industry collaboration
  - 🐮 Support more efficient farmer interactions with industry requirements – ASD and NAIT
  - 🐮 Help create more industry wide data capture and analysis systems

# Solve double entry issue - verbatim

*You do it because you enjoy it because 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)*

*It's got to be simple when something feeds in, and they've all got to interlink because you don't want to be doing it here, and then going into here and doing it. (Male)*

*[Is that other people's experience?] I think they have to be interlinked. If you're going to go to all the work – because there's so much work to just put them in. (Female)*

*Then also just send to Lincoln, like we use the TSI, like if you could somehow interlink – that's the Gallagher weigh system, they've got all the pedigrees like with the deer and stuff on there. If you could somehow interlink that with Cash Manager, like if you record a death in the TSI, if that could just keep the stock group in your Cash Manager up to date – because at the moment there's a lot of double-inputting. (Male)*

# Time efficient and easy to use - verbatim

[How do you make the call as to whether some technology is too expensive to use?] *It's got to be simple. I'm reasonably tech savvy but the Farm IQ one is too complicated for me, straight away. I've spent too much time on it. The Agri360 one looks a lot simpler.* (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)

*Cash manager's got a lot better. I used it 20 to 30 years ago, went off it and went to Banklink, came back onto it, and it's awesome now. It used to take me a day to do GST and now it takes me about five minutes.* (Female)

# More Industry collaboration - verbatim

*They talk about joining things together. Surely there must be something out there that can all be inter-related more and there's more freedom to be able to share that information. We give NAIT everything, they give us nothing back. (Male)*

*Just making them all compatible with each other. If you change fert companies, then all your information is stuck in that other place. [Won't read each other] You can enter it but you've got to do it manually whereas if you're with Ballance, like they'll just do it, it just happens. But if you bought fertiliser from Ravensdown and tried to put it into AgHub then you've got to type it all in manually and you're just not going to do it. You're not going to go home and sit at home at night and write how many kilos of what product you put on what paddock. (Male)*

*Totally agree, the likes of NAIT, cattle movement. Three emails. If you're getting 50 emails a day, why? – the first one is you've had a movement, please activate it or we'll send you to jail basically, so why don't these programmers just make it simple? The ASD forms, one a year. (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. [Who's doing Ag360?] An independent outfit, a group of farmers based out of Te Anau I think. I don't know what the different prices are, but AgHub seemed extremely expensive through Ballance. It was over \$1200 a year to subscribe to it, but at least then if you got all your fertiliser through Ballance, you could actually click on the paddocks and that would send it to the truck driver and they'd go straight to those paddocks and know how much to spread. You'd put the number straight in. AgHub and Ravensdown got funding. It would have been good that it was an independent thing that got funding to link with everyone. (Male)*

# More industry collaboration – verbatim (cont.)

*That's half the trouble is that every company's software requires you to learn a whole new thing again and so all these – you've got NAIT and all your smart maps through Ravensdown, everything. It's actually quite a learning process and it's actually a hell of a lot for farmers to get their heads around. These guys can't understand it. They'll take you through it, "will only take you five minutes", it's not. Competition is a good thing but I think a lot of the stuff that's being forced on us through water monitoring, fertiliser applications, things like that, I think there needs to be a lot of work behind the scenes that all these companies actually work together and deliver a package that actually – one package, they're all contributing for the greater benefit of industry as a whole. (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)*

*We're talking people from Farm IQ, 360 degrees, everyone's just overlapping, replicating, clipping the ticket. (Male)*

*You've got all these different products. How do you know which one is the best one? Like you were saying before, if they could all just get together and just make one good one, wouldn't that be better? How many of you use Cash Manager? That's basically been developed and that seems to be an industry-wide program. You speak to most farmers who use it. Could there be something like that for the likes of all this? One major player. I see the point about competition but.. (Male)*

# Discussion and conversation

- 🐮 Well-structured discussion groups key factor in success
- 🐮 Good groups must have open and honest benchmarking
- 🐮 Sharing of accurate information is critical
- 🐮 Helps to create healthy competition
- 🐮 Definite cycle of value linked to experience of participants
- 🐮 Helps farmers to think critically about their farm decisions
- 🐮 Important to have a wide pool of ideas – (get outside region where possible)
- 🐮 Just having conversations with other farmers can be enough to spark an on-farm improvement

# Discussion groups critical - verbatim

*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)*

*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 make stuff up – it's fact. I think the discussion groups, it's kind of a thing where when you first get into it you absorb so much straight away. You make huge leaps in your business for the first three or four years, starting plateauing out and then when you try and get into more the senior – you stick in there, you probably don't get as much – there's still things you learn every day but it's more about giving it back to the new ones coming in. [A cycle] I think it is. I feel like it's a duty that you've taken from the group and you've got to give something back and stick in there. It would probably be easy for me to pull out of our groups now. (Male)*

*I think that was one of the best parts of the discussion group was you got to compare apples. Not only all the figures. You've got to be there. We had one where everything was written down and it was broken down to whatever category you liked but you had to physically look around that farm and make up your own mind whether you thought this guy was doing it right. You got to compare apples with apples. [And actually set up some goals too to try and beat the top producer in that group. (Interjection)] (Male)*

*Isn't that where your high-performing discussion groups become quite important because a lot of information comes through information sharing in a discussion group. (Female)*

# Discussion groups critical - verbatim (cont.)

*We had a lot of discussion about how the mere fact you are in a discussion group and every two years they're going to come and nit-pick all your decisions and they're looking at your financial situation and looking at everything, so the mere fact that that's happening and 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. That's what we do a lot of in our discussion groups. That's where a lot of information comes from. [Is that a tough process, exposing yourself to that kind of scrutiny?] Doesn't seem to be within our group. (Female)*

*It's also where you're going to get more critical analysis of those things. You've got good minds in the group so you've got people who think about things. (Male)*

*[What have you learnt from that? Can you give an example going off-farm?] You're always learning something. You're always picking up something. Our discussion group travels quite widely. We do a North Island tour every second year and we do a South Island tour annually so for us that's where most of the guys in the group are probably getting a lot of their knowledge from. You come home and you might just try it on a small scale and if it works you implement it and carry it on. (Male)*

# Conversations and mixing with farmers – verbatim

*For me it was very much the people is the key to it. I think most businesses rely on people. Doesn't matter whether it's a big business or a little business or whatever. People make the difference. The next thing is networking. That's 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. That's another thing that keeps me motivated – 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" or whatever so I've just called it network but rubbing shoulders and outward looking. Then it's the basics: it's efficiencies, it's costs, it's keeping it simple. For us I tell anyone who comes onto the place to work for me, it's cobalt, clover, costs, cash. That's all you need to worry about in our business. You get them right and you'll turn lambs off in no time. (Male)*

*[Is there anything like that that's come to fruition?] Probably, yeah. Lambing old ewes early. Probably come from a conversation with other people, those kinds of things. [And that's worked out?] Yeah. It's that process. Sometimes you're playing with ideas and then you have a conversation. Sometimes it's the conversation that comes first which makes you start playing with ideas. (Female)*

# Better flow of information

- 🐄 How can farmers access all the current information sitting in the universities?
  - 🐄 A need for an easily searchable database for farmers to access
- 🐄 Some calls for a tasks diary for farmers to easily access ‘decision triggers’
  - 🐄 Top farmers tend to always make earlier decisions than lower performers
  - 🐄 Lower performers seem to always be chasing their tails/missing the boat
  - 🐄 They could be helped by easy access to a diary of tasks type information
    - Essentially a series of decision triggers – put the ram out in three weeks so start flushing your ewes soon etc.

# Easier access to information – verbatim

*One other thing that I thought about is – along the lines of we don't know what we don't know but what sort of research might be sitting on a shelf somewhere in a university or at AgResearch that could be applied on farm and how do we know it's there. (Male)*

*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)*

*It could be, but how do we know it's there? What has been done, and how do you know it's there? Is there some sort of way of scrolling through – [Tapping into the database of theses and research papers and so on] Some of it will be nonsense. (Male)*

*A lot of it's already been done when you go through all the grasslands. (Male)*

# Tasks diary - verbatim

*Got to be careful with that that they don't get too long-winded. It's got to be simple. You open a thing of three or four pages – it just should be key – like for heaps of the farms in our area, if something just popped out – just everyone's tugging on the 1st of April. If on the 5th of March an alert came out saying "it's on, three weeks to go", I'd turn it up. "If you've got anything left to feed them, feed them", that kind of thing. (Male)*

*That lucerne group that started up in Marlborough and heaps of the blueprint within DairyNZ has almost a paint by numbers approach to what people are doing, like the people doing the lucerne, they just get their text alert. All the key points in the season, out comes a text alert and they all get into motion. The key big parts of the industry could be broken down in a similar way and you could say "I've got a sheep breeding system and a lucerne lamb finishing system, can I get on those text alerts?". There'd be no excuses to not at least being given a heads up every time it pops up, or email alerts. Then everyone would have a good crack at being on time and organised. (Male)*

*It's probably also the follow up because some people might like the idea of doing something but the opportunity keeps slipping past. Certain things have to happen to get stuff to happen but even if you wanted to do, even a re-grassing programme, then you've still got to have sprayed out by a certain date, and a whole bunch of stuff has to happen all in a row. A lot of people appear to just miss those key dates then they say "oh well, we missed out on that because we didn't get started". Some of the vets have started doing really good little quick newsletters in our area where they highlight what should be happening, what's hot that week and what you should be getting ready for next month. It's an easy reminder of best practice that just keeps coming. It could be like that with re-grassing programmes, or even flushing programmes and stuff. Like I've had heaps of farmers who have been caught out with how early – suddenly they're "oh heck, 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)*

# Tasks diary – verbatim (cont.)

*There's a few newsletters like there's the Ag Letter, some of you subscribe to that. It's quite current. It doesn't cover off everything but it's getting you thinking ahead of time about maybe some of the things that you should be aware of. Like a text type one might just prompt. (Male)*

*[Is it more of a diary type?] Yeah, effectively decision triggers that should be taken up. (Male)*

*Yes, here's the East Coast re-grassing programme or here's the Southland ewe breeding thing that you're on, xxxx by now your hoggets should be – because I think half the farmers just muddle along always on catch up mode. (Male)*

*None of it happens if you just wake up tomorrow and say "I'm going to do whatever". It's all building time. I think people miss the boat because they haven't caught the stuff in time. Everyone can't do everything on the last day. It will allow far more people to get on the good boat probably, and come along for the ride. (Male)*

# Improved access to broadband

- 🐮 Limited access to quality and cost effective broadband services
- 🐮 Industry seems to have a blind focus on new technology yet farmers lack the platform needed to access much of it
- 🐮 Fear that farmers will be left behind
- 🐮 Potential for local solutions but needs leadership to drive and co-ordinate

# Limited access to broadband - verbatim

*That satellite-based internet is incredibly limited ... New Zealand farmers are on. It's a tenth of the size package for five times the cost of what people get in the city. Soon that ... will just be ridiculous because the internet seems to triple in size every couple of years. (Male)*

*There's a guy who's paying \$300 a month and it doesn't even come close to what other people are paying in town for the service, and it's so slow and everything else. Satellites are becoming less and less. (Male)*

*Just one thing that's been mentioned that I'd like especially out our way that's a problem is like this broadband and be 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. [Is going to improve in a substantive way? What are the messages you hear on that?] We can only get one at the moment and that's the farming site. We've tried the other ones but until towers or something like that gets set up – but for those guys to come out and set up the towers for the amount of people that you're going to hit, they need something from the government to give them a bit of a subsidy to set them up. (Male)*

# Farmers left behind without good access – verbatim

[Top things you think the industry can do to help you and help others.] *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)

*With more technology and software packages out there, farmers just can't keep up.* (Male)

*If you've got the EID stuff down in the yards, you can push a button and it's automatically stored, but if you've got no cellphone reception and you're halfway between the house and the yards and you drop your phone well it's gone, you've done that day's information.* (Male)

[Three or four things that would make the biggest difference and are achievable] *Access to the technology. The data.* (Female)

*A lot of this stuff is cloud-based now and you need constant access to the internet.* (Male)

*All these product developers are galloping on ahead thinking that the farmers can get it or hook in or can do X, Y, Z, like those interactive programs – you just write one word and it sends it out there and back it comes, kind of thing, it's almost every minute now, all your stuff goes out and it comes back fresh. It's going to get hungry. Got to fix that.* (Male)

# Local solutions - verbatim

[It's hard to reconcile the discussions we had in the first group about the increased role technology is playing on the farm with lack of connectivity that you're telling me about now] *We went to our local guy who's putting in stuff and I said "how long before we can get a tower?" and he went five years. I asked him what the problem was and he said money. We paid for the tower but we get six years' free internet which works out about the same, so we're on high speed. We were on 80 GB but now we're on unlimited. That solved it. (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. Within each area they could possibly be looking at their groups of farmers that are probably all struggling with the same thing. Maybe if they help organise us, it might be that they could actually figure that together we could club it together and do the maths and figure out what it would be each, like you would on a water scheme. 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

- 🐮 Industry seems reticent to pick and promote winners
- 🐮 Farmers waste a lot of time sorting through a plethora of offerings to determine what actually works
  - 🐮 Top farmers are better at sorting through options and making the best call for their business
- 🐮 Is there a way to make this sorting process more objective and efficient for farmers struggling with this task?
- 🐮 Could consider a platform to help other farmers not as well versed at ‘picking winners’
- 🐮 Suggestion was an independent review platform like trip advisor
  - 🐮 Makes it farmer driven so industry not seen to be picking winners

# Reticent to pick winners - verbatim

*They seem terrified of stepping on anyone's toes. There seems to be quite a few people that operate at a reasonably high level over our industry that must be aware of the duds and the pretty good things in whatever field it is, but they don't tell us and everyone just stumbles along in the darkness on their own, finding out on their own, whereas there could be even a basic level of approval tick on the Beef & Lamb site that says "if you're looking for a mapping program, heaps of our farmers tell us these are good". It might not have to be exclusive but it could say "look at Ag360 and Tracmap because heaps of our clients like those" or "if you've got a broadband problem in your area, look at these three bits of technology". If you can get a sniff of cellphone reception for \$800, you can get a signal condenser. It may be that in your area you can buy this thing off the net and away you go for \$800 and suddenly you've got full strength signal. (Male)*

*[Is there enough information out there for you to make calls around those topics?] There's a lack of any real leadership in terms of somebody saying, "hey look, in your part of the Wairarapa don't bother with this, this and this" because farmers have already failed with that and gone on to something else. There's again the fear of picking winners, like to say "look, that variety of rape's really good and that's a bloody good grass" and that's whatever. There's still people casting around. (Male)*

# Sorting through what works - verbatim

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

*[Are there any other areas that you want information on that you're not getting at the moment?] All this latest technology, this IDing, the monitoring really, like Farm IQ, Farmax. Ballance has got the ... Ravensdown have got their own system. Which one do you use? What's the best product to use? You can go to different people and they can recommend, "well I'm using this one", you can be using that one but which is the best one? (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)*

*[What information are you missing at the moment?] Just about the different grasses and everything out there. You get bombarded with all the different companies and are there comparisons between them, different areas and everything? I don't know. That's one example. (Male)*

# Independent review platform - verbatim

*Or you could have an open review type system like TradeMe and stuff like that. You get a bunch of recommendations – or like Trip Advisor or something like that. The customers rate them just on how much they like them. Eventually it will build a body of support for certain stuff and others will be left for dead and people will realise that they probably should have worked them. (Male)*

*[How would that platform work?] It could be like a Beef & Lamb review site. It could be a Red Meat Profit Partnership review site. All you have to stick on there is the thing you used, or the product ... review and a star rating or something. There's millions of outfits like that. That's how most people navigate the internet buying products now. Not most, but heaps buying a random thing from overseas or deciding where to stay. It's pretty powerful. (Male)*

*But then you could just have a body of good reviews. You can't hang someone for giving a good review and it probably doesn't have any standing when it's one person. Once it's 30 people from the same area it would probably start to – people might look at it and say, "I don't have any idea what to do but that's pretty well recommended, I'll do that". That's what you end up doing when you're travelling. A lot of people now do that. "That place is well reviewed, it's pretty likely to succeed" and it does. If it's got 20 good reviews in the last three months, it tends to be good. There's no reason – that's not negative, that's just weight of positivity around good ones. The ones where people are having a bad experience, if they're brave enough the customer will put a bad review in or it might just not get in there. I think it's better than everyone being too frightened to say anything. I would have thought what we've got to get away from is all men alone, kind of dog eat dog environment where we're all individuals because probably the only ones that rise to the top are the ones that are already there. A small group get good at dealing with that, and if the aim is to lift the industry that model is unlikely to be helpful. (Male)*

# Promote red meat

- 🐄 Use chefs to promote the sustainable kiwi farming story
- 🐄 Promote red meat to captive tourist market

# Promote red-meat to tourist - verbatim

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

*On the marketing one, do we utilise our tourists? We've got three million people coming to this country every year. Do we promote to them at all? They're all potential customers and they've all got friends back at home. Even if we gave them a free feed of lamb. [Should be serving on the planes, should be at the airport. (Interjection)] (Male)*

*Every New Zealand teenager leaving the country should be our best ambassadors, cooking a lamb roast overseas. (Male)*

*Or a world-renowned chef that's independent from farming can say "we buy our stuff from New Zealand", we grab someone, that's significant. (Male)*

*We talk about promoting red meat to tourists at home. I was interested to hear you saying that because my husband's quite passionate about that. When you go home from having been in a country that you've enjoyed, you often want to have that lovely Thai meal or whatever it is again so then you start buying the meat. You're right, it's an ideal opportunity isn't it to persuade a new taste. How you go about it, I don't know. (Female)*

*The principle is right I think. How you go about it is always going to be hard. 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)*

*Get that chef to go out to the farm and sell the green grass, the fresh air first. The second part is the meat itself, but get them to buy into the romance and then by the way tonight you're eating a lamb that comes in the form of a lamb chop. (Male)*

# On the Horizon

Ideas, concepts and practices that could help increase farm performance



# Drones

- Potential for more accurate and efficient pasture management
- Identify cast ewes
- Shifting stock in tricky terrain
- Needs to be more cost effective, with GPS features to fly predetermined paths
- Nutrient measurement

# Drones: measuring pasture - verbatim

[Do you have a deep sense of how your farm is performing?] *Just by eye really, but a couple of farm discussion groups went down to a farm just out of Gore. He actually contracted from Gore once a week. He comes around. He's adapted a plate meter to go behind a four-wheeler and it doesn't take him that long. He scoots around quite quick around the farm and he comes once a week to measure it. It costs between \$5000 and \$6000 a year I think it is, getting all this information once a week. But I've got a real hilly farm so it's not practical on my farm, but the drone thing would be good. I find the pasture measurement really hard because the variation like you've got your ewes out there with the lambs on them and it could be just like this up on top and it will start growing like you need cows down the bottom, you know. On the hills, you know – so yeah, measuring's quite a hard thing. (Male)*

*I think probably drones might come into play a bit. They'll have devices to scoot around your farm. They'll be able to measure how much pasture you've got. (Male)*

*If there was an easy way of measuring pasture growth rates, feed covers, pasture growth rates, whether the drone's capable of doing that in the future on a weekly basis – so you can get a trend would be ideal because at the moment I think probably most of us – you've got your ewes, you lamb them down and – we never sell store lambs so we don't – the grass has got to grow enough that we can fatten everything. We've got an emergency bit of silage or whatever at the back and if it gets tight the ewes get locked up and the lambs get everything, so you just fit your system to what the weather throws at you, I guess, but if you had some drones up you'd actually be able to make more informative decisions earlier and possibly we'd come up with a totally different farming system if you knew what was actually going on at the time. (Male)*

*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)*

# Drones: other uses - verbatim (cont.)

*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)*

*[Have you seen much interest in drones?] No, not yet. [Is it something you're excited about, or is it just going to be a toy?] I think it has potential. I've got one that's more of a toy at the moment, for spotting ... and scaring them away. More for that type of thing. But on the coastal farm we've actually used it to muster the coast without a dog. You can imagine, especially when the sea's roaring, they don't hear the dog barking sometimes to lift up and you can't send the dog over the side because if they get spooked they'll just be in the water. Things like that that fly around, it's quite good. (Male)*

*[Somebody was using a drone. What did they use it for exactly?] They were just monitoring livestock. Instead of getting in amongst them. Mainly just for cast ewes and sheep with lambing problems. They had a really good lane system on this farm so basically instead of going into a whole heap of paddocks, he just flew the farm and then went back and went, "oh I need to go there, there and there" and then he went home again as opposed to going through 20, 30 or 40 paddocks. For us, we can spend four hours a day going to some of our run country and picking up cast sheep. Sometimes you go and you'll get none, but just the day you don't go you'll get 10 or a dozen, so for us we actually do need a drone. We just haven't got around to it. The technology's getting better and better every year and it's getting cheaper and cheaper. [What do they cost now for one that would be useful for you?] I think you can get one for \$5000 or \$6000, \$7000-odd but it's just a matter of it being user friendly. [Some are easier to use than others. (Interjection)] Some farmers are really good at all that sort of thing. [Some need retraining. (Interjection)] (Male)*

# Electronic Identification (EID)

- 🐮 Needs to become more cost efficient
- 🐮 Needs to be made easier and more efficient to use
  - 🐮 Voice activated like Siri
  - 🐮 Record and monitor without catching or yarding
- 🐮 Closer to real time
- 🐮 Linked in with portable weigh technology
  - 🐮 Scanner or platform to run animals across while shifting

# EID: more cost efficient - verbatim

[What are you looking for with EID?]  
*Cost. Everything's got to be a cost. If the cost of them can be reduced, then all of a sudden you'll see a lot more usage.*  
(Male)

*I gave a big spiel in my group on 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. [... the studs at the moment, works really well?] Yeah. 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)

# EID: simplify the process - verbatim

*I don't believe it's the cost of the tags or anything like that at this stage that's putting people off it. In a commercial situation it's the ease of usability and information off it. I bought it when we were an aggregate and the same thing came up and it was being able to identify a ewe with her two lambs. If you can match the ewes to the lambs and realise that she's come through with a 20 kg set of twins, this one's come through with a 30 kg set of twins – you can soon whack out your bottom, your non-productive ones. You'd make huge gains in a real short space of time. (Male)*

*For me it would be just helping simplify all that monitoring. I know you've got people I can go to and talk to on all that sort of stuff, but if there's anything for us to improve, I reckon that's possibly where it is. 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. [Are you using any of those farming programs like Farmax?] We're not using Farmax at the moment. We are looking at it. We do use TSI. I'm going to see someone tomorrow about getting more benefit out of it. (Male)*

*If they improved the likes of SIRI so that you could say there's 553 lambs in here, I'll shift them to such and such a paddock, if you can just say that into your phone and it's recorded and sent to your computer at home, that type of technology. Or you weighed them and they average such and such. I don't know if you would use that type of thing or not but I would use that rather than have to go through everything and program it in. I don't like texting, I'd rather phone somebody. With a text, to get all your information out, you just about need to do 10 different texts and it's quite an effort for somebody like me. [Simpler access to technology] Yes, something like that would be brilliant. I suppose it's an app nowadays. They could make an app to record things better that way. (Male)*

# EID: simplify process - verbatim (cont.)

*Something like that is relatively accurate but I'm thinking at the moment there's no way you've got – you see a lamb, a set of twins or whatever out in the paddock and you've got no way of linking them together at the moment without actually DNA'ing everything. Even if you single site a mate, and you know the sire, it's still not really a lot of benefit for the commercial guy. I was after something that if you've got a chip in a ewe, an EID tag, tag the lambs at tailing and you can just drive around with a scanner – when they're standing together it will just read the whole three. [As a unit] Yes, so you can identify any real top-performing ewes with their lambs, your bottom 10%. I think you could make some real headway real quick in knocking out your bottom. It would be time well worth spent. (Male)*

*And getting it closer to real time so you don't have to go and get all the information once a month or something, that it's coming in weekly. (Male)*

*My two things are based on what's already been done but there's a bit of stuff there with EID tags and everything else, 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)*

*Probably the same as that but a simpler way to identify ewes and their lambs out in the paddock. Easier to see the poor performing ones in the paddock that are coming through the yards and trying to match everything up. Basically if you've got your ewes tagged and your lambs tagged and you've got something that can scan them out on the paddock and say "right they're all gone" or "they're all exceptional". [So a more efficient way to have that recording system in place without having to go back to the yards to do it] Along those lines. [Without having to catch it. (Interjection)] (Male)*

# EID: connected to portable weigh technology - verbatim

*For years I thought that there's two things the sheep industry needs to really make progress. One was individual animal identification that can be done on a commercial scale like big numbers. That gives you the day to day measuring – well perhaps not daily measuring but ability to measure more often. So walk over weighing from paddock to paddock, initially it might have to be single file but they'll get to the point where it could be a mob through. It could be a 12 foot gate and it would capture an average if not an individual one. So that when you come to pick your ewe lambs you've got some measurable data behind them rather than just which one comes off the race and winks at you or looks nice or whatever as so many do. (Male)*

*I've heard there's talk about putting a scale through a gateway or something with a scanner just scanning them as you shift your mob of sheep. I know they'll be single file ... or whatever but you can just weigh them. That's something I'm more or less envious of the old cow cocky. Every day they record what they're producing. [They get feedback. (Interjection)] Like us ... bulls, it's only monthly if you're drenching monthly. You don't just run them in just to weigh them. So just to get the benefit of what you're feeding them on how that's converting to feed like the different grass species or the different parts of your farm. You're more sheltered country. It's just trying to get that sort of info, something that would be quick and easy to transport so we can record more often more regularly. (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)*

# EID: connected to portable weigh technology - verbatim (cont.)

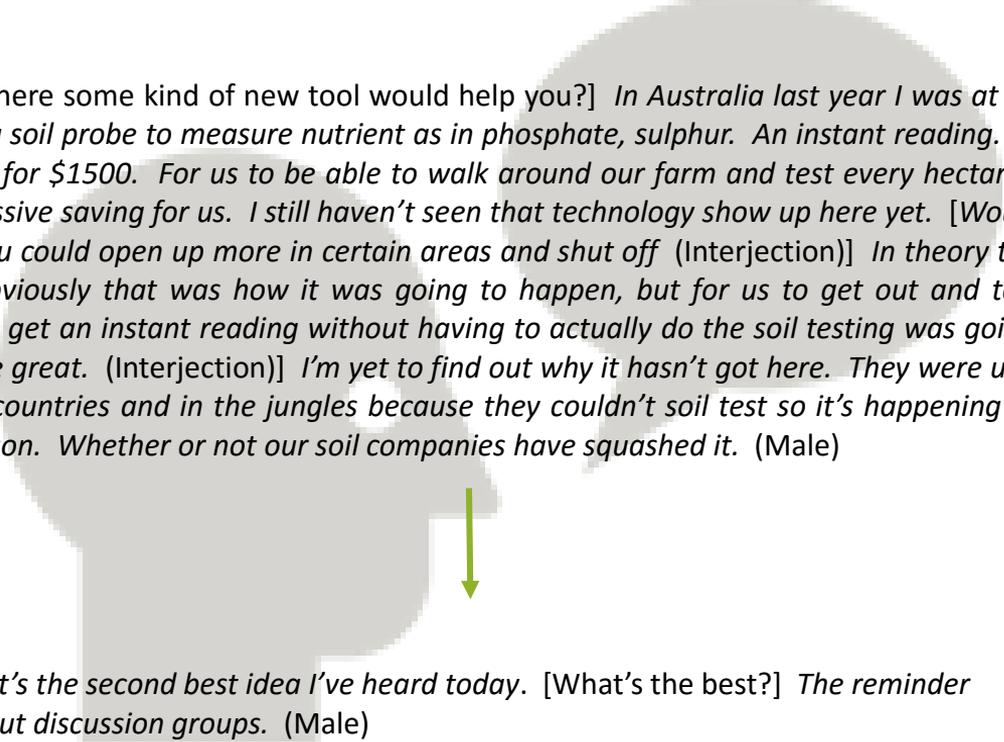
[This idea of having a scanner in the gateway, is that happening?] *They were talking about rolling out a mat as big as this. It counts how many feet and senses the weights and does the maths. You just roll it out through a gateway and chase the stock through it, or in the middle of the paddock. However many went over it, it figured it's got to be 20 animals. [It would still only give you an average. (Interjection)] Yeah but most commercial operations are farming mobs – especially to do with sheep. Cattle in yards you can obviously do it individually. (Male)*

# New Technologies

- 🐄 Soil testing probes with instant results
- 🐄 Commercial DNA testing/ sex selection
  - 🐄 Making it more cost effective and efficient
- 🐄 Real time monitors around the farm
  - 🐄 Pasture growth
  - 🐄 Soil temperature and moisture
- 🐄 Improved weather prediction models
- 🐄 Debates on genetic modification
  - 🐄 Supporters feel that only serious gains will come from GM
  - 🐄 Opponents have concerns about how it could be used against New Zealand farmers and tarnish our competitive advantage (safe producers of food etc.)

# New technology: Instant soil testing probe - verbatim

[What are the gaps where some kind of new tool would help you?] *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. [Would that load into like a fert plan and you could open up more in certain areas and shut off (Interjection)] In theory that was the idea behind it. Initially obviously that was how it was going to happen, but 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. They were using it in a whole lot of farms in Asian countries and in the jungles because they couldn't soil test so it's happening but it hasn't got here yet for some reason. Whether or not our soil companies have squashed it. (Male)*



*That's the second best idea I've heard today. [What's the best?] The reminder about discussion groups. (Male)*

# Other technology: Commercial DNA test/ sex selection - verbatim

*Then the other thing that would be really good is once you've identified those ewe lambs, ensure that they have females so some sort of – it's not semen selection but some sort of injection you could give mum or dad so that they'd then have the females on the farm doing the reproduction thing flat out, hard and fast, and the ones that weren't up to the mark, the non-replacement mob, could just have male lambs that were grown for growth rate and meat. What would that do for productivity? [You can do that with ... now. (Interjection)] (Male)*

*The other one, which might allude to ewes and progeny, if we could really work on some way of getting the cost of DNA technology down so you can actually do pedigree match-maker and that sort of thing. Like over 1000 ewes at the moment it's \$27 a test or something. If you could do that for \$4 or \$5 you'd make some real advancements there. (Male)*

*[How far away is individual identification?] It's there now. It's probably not cost-effective in anything other than a smaller stud sort of operation, but if it can be commercialised and at the moment you'd have to do a DNA selection to link back to a tag number probably because no-one wants to go out into a lambing paddock and do the recording that a stud farmer might have done or might do. So there's got to be some simple way of doing it on large scale numbers and extensive hill country. If that nut can be cracked, I think everything else is there in one form or another. It's just got to be put together. (Male)*

# Other technology: real time monitors -verbatim

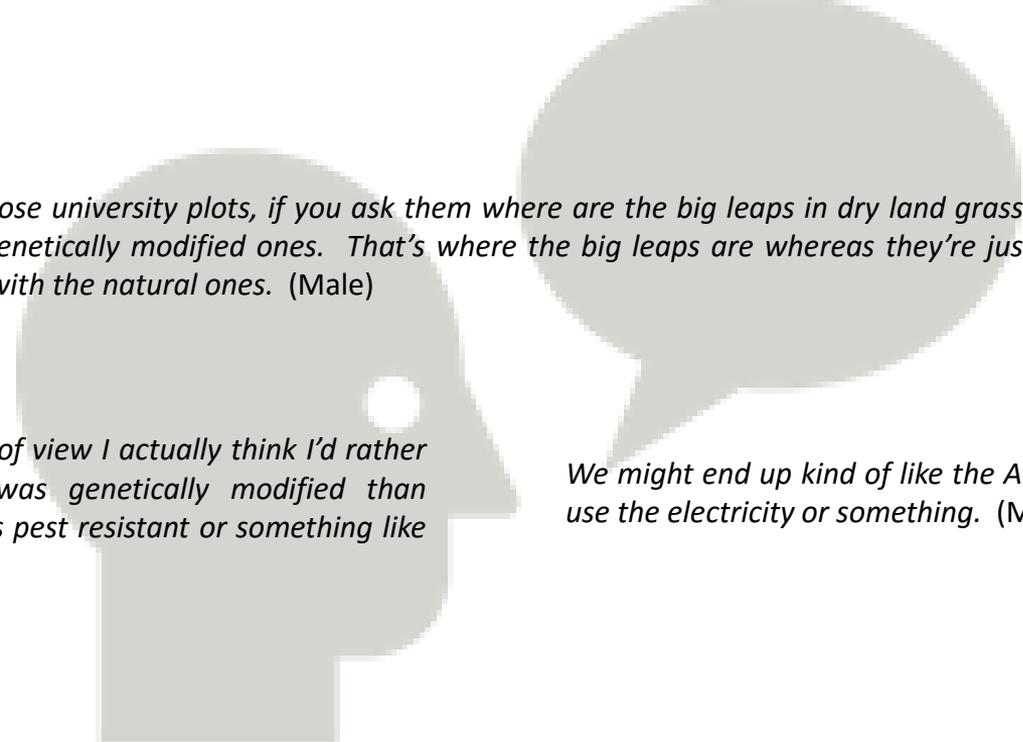
*Real time growth as well. Cameras you can stand on in the paddock that are pushed into the pasture and it will measure actual growth back to a computer. It was logging soil temperature, moisture and growth. It's not far away. I don't know why it hasn't shown up yet. [You'd get onto that as soon as it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

# Other technology: improved weather prediction models – verbatim

*Coming on that feed budgeting thing like we run lots of feed budgets but the massive variable we don't have is the weather forecast. Had interesting presentations from the NIWA guys about 2008... they're using North American to Australian weather predicting models that are designed for that zone and trying to say what it might do way down here, so whether those NIWA people know what it would cost to actually develop decent models that would predict New Zealand's weather rather than – piggybacking off a whole lot of other people's info. You can get as accurate or inaccurate a report from like a Danish met service website as you can from the New Zealand one. The key thing for us as an industry – if we knew what the weather was truly likely to be, it would make a vast difference to how we all behaved. [A massive difference. (Interjection)] Whereas it's all this guessing game that everyone's doing of dumping lambs or keeping them. I mean a lot of the lamb dumps might not happen if people actually had a bit of confidence that it was going to start raining again in three weeks. [And they could be that accurate?] I don't know. I think the weather forecasting for other – the El Nino forecast this year was a dead ringer for Australia and probably North America where they're in that Pacific belt but the NIWA guys said we're on the fringe. All their energy's put into looking at that, but we're on the fringe of a big effect. They reckon there's an unstudied – this sort of southern ocean mix with it. But they haven't got the money to develop decent weather models to actually do our own stuff so they're guessing. (Male)*

[One area you would like more information on] Weather, predicted growth. [Better weather forecasting] Yes. (Male)

# Other technology: genetic modification supporters – verbatim -



*The scientists at those university plots, if you ask them where are the big leaps in dry land grasses, the gaping jumps are in the genetically modified ones. That's where the big leaps are whereas they're just fiddling with shades of nothing with the natural ones. (Male)*

*From a personal point of view I actually think I'd rather eat something that was genetically modified than covered in spray. If it's pest resistant or something like that. (Male)*

*We might end up kind of like the Amish, refusing to use the electricity or something. (Male)*

# Other technology: genetic modification opponents – verbatim -



*If those non-GM people in New Zealand all of a sudden start making a ruckus it's just going to be huge overseas and made a huge big deal of and it gives them something to grasp hold of and find another reason not to trade with us. (Male)*



*I still think we should wait because I think it's too dangerous from purely a marketing point of view. (Female)*

# The End.