**Hawke’s Bay Future Farming Trust**

**Annual Report – 30 June 2020**

The first substantive meeting of the Trust was held on 19 September last year, and the Trust finalised its present composition at its 17 December meeting, topped off with the Council’s appointment of CHB Councillor Will Foley as its representative.

Other Trustees are John van der Linden (chair), vice-chair Phil Schofield, treasurer Scott Lawson, Liz Krawczyk, Greg Hart, and Tom Belford. Backgrounds of all Trustees are furnished in the Trust website: [www.hbfuturefarming.org](http://www.hbfuturefarming.org)

The Trust also maintains a Facebook page at: [www.facebook.com/HBFutureFarming-104458421275553/](https://www.facebook.com/HBFutureFarming-104458421275553/)

Since February Trustees have been meeting monthly, completing the usual organising tasks like building a website, getting our accounts in order, finding our way onto the same page as a group, and agreeing on our mission, which is simply to:

“Promote, inspire and celebrate profitable farming systems that enrich the environment and the community.”

Most importantly, we have reached some basic strategic and funding decisions.

We see our work as falling into two categories – communications and evidence-building, the former to receive roughly 25% of our resourcing, the latter, 75%.

**Communications**

From a communications standpoint, we want to recognise and celebrate all sorts of initiatives Hawke’s Bay farmers and growers are making to improve – which means lessen – their environmental footprint. Those could range from riparian planting or establishing wetlands to improving water efficiency or planting erosion-prone hillsides.

We plan to compile these examples, produce case studies and videos on them in select cases, and feature them on our own website and in other media. And organise appropriate farm days and other face-to-face learning opportunities.

We presently have two video projects underway, one featuring dairy farmer Willie White in CHB, the other organic/regen farmer John Kamp in Patoka.

**Evidence-building**

More fundamentally, we want to establish to farmers and growers – using evidence we develop here in Hawke’s Bay, that more beneficial environmental practices and better financial performance go hand-in-hand.

To do that, we plan to work with leading edge farmers and growers, documenting the success of their overall farming systems and – hopefully – making their practices irresistible to others who are watching expectantly or sceptically from the sidelines.

Our Trustees are united in the belief that our long-term focus must be on healthy soils, and the land, plant and animal management practices – label them however you like – that yield healthier, carbon-enriched soils.

To that end, we have committed limited funding to two initial projects.

**Soil carbon.** The first is designed to measure with scientific rigour the ability of farm practices to increase soil carbon. We’re measuring soil carbon across three properties at various stages of organic/regenerative development owned by farmer John Kamp in Patoka. These farms were formerly high chemical input dairy operations.

Our carbon measurement methodology utilises the approach ‘blessed’ by MPI for nationwide application. In our view, soil carbon is a key indicator of overall soil health, which we regard as the prime driver of farming success. Additionally, as is well-known, the current Government has an interest in assessing whether carbon sequestered in soil (and potentially increased) can eventually be factored into its carbon neutrality objectives.

This project is nearing completion, with soil samples currently being analysed by Landcare Research.

**Economic/environmental assessment.** The second project is targeting ten dairy and sheep & beef farms across Hawke’s Bay. We are selecting farmers who are committed to change – who want to improve both their environmental and economic performance, measuring both with greater rigour to establish the ‘evidence base’ mentioned earlier.

The first phase of this project is to complete a holistic economic and environmental assessment of the overall farming system for each farm, measuring all inputs and outputs, modeling how various interventions might improve performance, and then monitoring the outcomes from changed or alternative practices. This will be a multi-year project, and hopefully expanded to additional farms as resources permit.

At this point we have identified our initial prospect farmers and are recruiting them into participation. A number of them are drawn from a group organised by Beef + Lamb around their Red Meat Profit Partnership project, and we expect B+L to participate in the project. In the interest of transparency, two participants in this project will be trustees Will Foley and Greg Hart.

Once we have established our baseline benchmarking for these farms, we will move on to measure and monitor soil carbon and other soil health indicators.

In this work, the Trust not ‘selling’ a solution. But that said, we fully expect that the practice changes that will be indicated will fall in the category currently labelled ‘regenerative farming’.

The Trust recently helped sponsor two forums on ‘regenerative farming’ in Hawke’s Bay attended by about 300 farmers. The positive experience of regen farmers in New Zealand is becoming more and more compelling and we will be looking to demonstrate – certainly to test – the efficacy of these practices here in the region.

Building healthier soils in Hawke’s Bay should be central to the mission of the Regional Council, given its concerns with mitigating nutrient loss, improving farm resilience in the face of predicted drier climates, and improving water security by making the most efficient possible use of existing rainfall.

**Water security.**
The Trust is confident our work will lead to land management practices that are proven to greatly enhance water security. For example, the most conservative estimates suggest that every 1% increase in soil organic matter would increase soil water holding capacity by 150,000 litres per hectare.

Given that HBRC has allocated $27 million to ‘water security’ infrastructure, the Trust aims to demonstrate that using soil carbon-friendly farming techniques results in better production, resilience and environmental outcomes that also give a significantly better return on investment when compared to expenditure on ‘water security’ infrastructure.

For this reason, the Hawke’s Bay Future Farming Trust would suggest that, as the data comes in to support the opportunities to improve soil function and resilience on-farm, the Trust will gain further funding to build robust evidence and then promote the uptake to farmers and growers across the region, ultimately saving many millions of dollars.

The Trust will engage further with Council about those priorities when councillors seek advice on HBRC’s forthcoming long-term plan. And in that context, the Trust stands ready to organise presentations or field trips to demonstrate the on-farm practices that we see as the way forward – and believe HBRC’s Integrated Land Management teams should evolve to propogate, alongside a greater commitment to extension services.

**Financials**

The Trust’s financials fiscal year through 30 June 2020, prepared by BM Accounting, are attached.

**Next Steps**

As we have been focused first on getting our own house in order and priorities established, we have just begun the process of forming relationships with other relevant players in the sector – Beef+Lamb, MPI, LandWise, Landcare, the appropriate teams here at HBRC and so forth. But we are fully committed to doing so; we are mindful of the need to leverage our own resources and outreach to farmers/growers. In the meantime, through our excellent Trustee networks, we closely monitor to efforts around NZ aimed at promoting more sustainable farming practices.

In the coming months we will also review Trust composition. In particular, we are committed to appointing a Maori representative to the board, and to involving Maori landowners in our mission.

Submitted by:

John van der Linden (Chair) and Scott Lawson (Treasurer)

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