



Media information

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Wairarapa irrigated land use options studied

Land use options enabled by water have been tested on three Wairarapa dryland farms as part of the region's feasibility investigations into water storage for irrigation and community uses.

Results of a series of eight case studies were presented to local farmers yesterday at the first of three field days being held on the farms involved in the study.

"The case studies tested just some of the options that water provides to highlight the opportunities and challenges, and provide a starting point for farmers to consider whether irrigation could work for them," Water Wairarapa project director Michael Bassett-Foss said.

Two schemes that aim to provide stored water to be used in ways that boost regional prosperity, and support environmental and support community uses are being considered.

The case studies are designed to inform local farmers of possibilities for irrigation ahead of an independent survey in mid-2016 that will influence scheme feasibility and ownership structure.

Eight different scenarios under irrigation were assessed by industry experts for financial viability, environmental impacts, and the management and lifestyle implications of changing from the current dryland use.

Sheep milking, dairy farming, apple orcharding, livestock finishing, and a mixed use of livestock, specialist seeds and cropping were chosen for the study because they were already successfully established in Wairarapa.

The sheep milking operations modelled on two of the properties, and an apple orchard tested on one, would provide attractive financial returns but would all require high capital investment and lifestyle changes for owners. Environmental impacts from nutrient losses of these operations were minimal.

The mixed use of livestock finishing, cropping and specialist seeds tested on all three properties provided similar financial returns but had varied environmental impacts due to differing soil types and assumed farming systems.

The livestock finishing scenario was the least financially viable option, compared with dryland use, due to timing of pasture production in relation to seasonal fluctuations in lamb and beef prices.

The dairy farming operation modelled on one property was financially viable at the six-year average price in late 2015 but not at today's milk prices.

Mr Bassett-Foss said the financial farm surpluses presented in the case studies did not include the cost of water because more work was needed to establish what any scheme would need to charge for water. "The cost of water to users will not only be influenced by scheme construction costs, but also scheme ownership structure and the rate at which users take up the water."

The independent survey of farmers aims to gain a broad understanding of collective farmer interest in accessing scheme water, when they would want it and interest in scheme ownership.

"The survey will not ask farmers for any form of commitment, rather an indication of what they collectively want to ensure they have options to access stored water in future."

Subject to results of the current feasibility work programme, which includes geotechnical drilling, gauging of rivers and streams involved and financial modelling, a new entity will be formed to raise capital and apply for resource consents.

The new entity's shape and ownership will be influenced by the current work feasibility study, particularly the interest of farmers and other large users that could include local bodies.

Water Wairarapa's current phase of work will be complete by early 2017 when a decision will be made on whether to proceed with one of the proposed schemes.

Summaries of the land use case studies can be found at www.wairapawater.org.nz/Farmer_info