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Seven land uses under irrigation studied

Uses for farmland in the Wairarapa valley are the focus of a new study to assess the viability and effects of irrigation as part of the Wairarapa Water Use Project's feasibility study.

To help understand irrigated land use options in Wairarapa, case studies involving three Wairarapa farming operations have begun. Seven irrigated land uses on three soil types were being assessed – arable/seeds, dairy conversion, livestock finishing, apples, free-range pig farming, sheep dairy and a mixed use of livestock, arable and market gardening

“The Wairarapa valley has many different soil types and each of the three farms has a mix of these,” project director Michael Bassett-Foss said. “We’re looking at land use scenarios that have already been successful in Wairarapa, although a few, such as sheep dairy and apples are currently on a relatively small scale.”

Each case study was assessing financial viability under irrigation, on-farm nutrient impacts, and the management and lifestyle implications of changing from current un-irrigated land uses. Assessments would be based on actual market conditions for farm produce.

“We’re using real dryland farming operations because they will provide local information and data that will be useful to local farmers when considering whether irrigation could work for them, whether on all or part of their farms. The idea is that future customers of an irrigation scheme can identify with at least one of the subjects.”

Data and information gained from the case studies, available by March next year, would provide a basis for discussions with businesses at supply, processor and consumer levels about opportunities to add value to the primary produce.

The case study programme is supported by Grow Wellington as part of its Primary Sector Strategy which aims to enable market-led sector profitability.

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