

BEEF + LAMB NEW ZEALAND

Regional Farmer Meetings

INSIGHTS REPORT

August 2023



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Summary

From late May to August 2023, the B+LNZ Board and Senior Leadership Team (SLT) conducted a series of 52 meetings across regional New Zealand with around 600 farmers participating. This report is based on the significant volume of feedback captured at these meetings.

The regional meetings had a clear purpose to provide a visible engagement opportunity with farmers at a local level, to listen carefully to farmer issues and perspectives and to support the rebuilding of farmer trust and confidence in B+LNZ. The methodology employed for these meetings was designed to foster an honest and open conversation, allowing farmers to express their thoughts, expectations, likes and frustrations. The meeting format consisted of two components;

1. An initial open conversation, allowing farmer participants to describe ‘what’s on my mind’ in terms of key issues and expectations of B+LNZ
2. A ‘walk and talk’ format that engaged participants through use of posters focussing on specific areas. This covered key areas of importance for farmers, preferred communications approaches, B+LNZ Farmer Council scope and functions, B+LNZ’s approach to developing policy, and climate change policy through ‘He Waka Eke Noa’ (HWEN)

The key issues identified by farmers in the opening, ‘what’s on your mind’ conversations are summarised as:

- A desperate need for fair regulations
- Restoration of confidence in B+LNZ and future outlook for farming
- Core production and profitability support and its resourcing and focus by B+LNZ
- Farmer expectations of communications and engagement from and to B+LNZ
- Advocacy and policy processes with farmers at the centre
- Success stories - hearing good news and telling farmers stories
- Navigating the sustainability conundrum of compliance vs good practice
- Supporting farmer well-being in response to adverse events and unrelenting compliance pressure

Regarding climate change policy (HWEN), farmers held varying perspectives, with some supporting improvements to pricing mechanisms, some sought B+LNZ to work together with other industries in partnership to get a better result, while others questioned HWEN’s effectiveness and suggested leaving immediately. Transparency, fair treatment, accurate reporting, and effective communication of sustainability efforts were emphasised by farmers across the country. The complexity of this topic and the varied perspectives of farmers highlighted the importance of science-led approaches that balance economic viability, fairness, and sustainability.

Farmers expressed their expectations, likes and frustrations with B+LNZ. Providing a level playing field for sheep and beef farmers with respect to regulations and policies within the primary sector, and in relation to other sectors, was at the top of the list for many. Farmers also wanted to see greater support for, and confidence in the future of farming, and certainty over the on-farm impacts of pending policy changes.

Many farmers were angry and wanted opportunities to voice their concerns, protest, for B+LNZ to take a harder line and say 'no' to illogical policies. Farmers want a more comprehensive and transparent communication approach from B+LNZ that encompasses various channels and techniques, with greater personalised and regional engagement. Many perceive that B+LNZ has become 'Wellington centric' and is at risk of losing its strong regional connection with farmers. No doubt the impact of Covid-19 in limiting direct engagement with farmers, combined with a slew of policy related pressures on-farm, has contributed to this.

Feedback on the regional B+LNZ Farmer Councils suggests that the wider farming community has variable visibility and awareness of the function and role of the Council. Some desire the B+LNZ Farmer Council to become more of a 'watch-dog' on B+LNZ direction and performance, while others seek a clear return to the Councils' original intent of identifying local needs and coordinating regional events.

Feedback from these meetings has also shed light on how B+LNZ can improve its representation of farmers' voices in policy and advocacy. Farmers firmly noted the expectation for B+LNZ to be the advocate for farmer positions to government and not the other way round. Farmers emphasised the need for transparency, ground-up engagement, collaboration with other groups, and involvement of diverse voices in policy development. They believe Farmer Council could act as a bridge between farmers and B+LNZ, raising visibility, and providing insight on regulations and requirements. The Farmer Council's perceived role in informing farmers, advocating for their interests, and building relationships with community groups was highlighted.

Many farmers expressed a desire for B+LNZ to move back towards a core focus on research, production, profitability and visible regional activity. There is a feeling that through the impacts of Covid-19 and an unrelenting flow of government policy, B+LNZ has become less connected with farmers than in the past.

The feedback and themes further detailed in this report will help develop new approaches for B+LNZ to implement on behalf of farmers. Ideas will be developed and tested in small regional focus groups before final recommendations are reported for B+LNZ consideration in October.

1. Objectives of the regional meetings

The purpose of the regional meetings was identified as:

- Providing a visible connection opportunity for farmers around the country
- Providing a platform for listening and engagement with farmers as part of rebuilding confidence in B+LNZ and the sector
- Providing an opportunity for farmers to describe what they think and feel, and what they seek from B+LNZ
- Engaging farmers on points arising from key 2023 AGM remits to support development of appropriate B+LNZ responses
- Capturing farmer views on the climate change mitigation approach developed with other primary sector partners (He Waka Eke Noa)
- Capturing farmer insights to support further work on farmer engagement, policy and advocacy development processes, and the review of Farmer Council's role and operation

2. Methodology

A simple, open and respectful process for these farmer meetings was developed using the following principles:

- A 'no-PowerPoint' conversation, with farmers at the centre, allowing farmer to engage easily with each other and B+LNZ
- Listening to farmers - not telling, explaining or defending
- An open, safe and respectful process that draws out all voices in the meeting
- A repeatable and scalable process, allowing for different meeting sizes, venues etc
- Simple data collection and analysis, enabling consistency of approach across all meetings
- A 2 hour session design consisting of two separate components:
 - An initial open conversation, allowing farmer participants to describe 'what's on my mind' in terms of key issues and expectations of B+LNZ
 - A 'walk and talk' format that engaged participants through use of posters focussing on specific areas. This covered key areas of importance for farmers, preferred communications approaches, B+LNZ Farmer Council scope and functions, B+LNZ's approach to developing policy, and climate change policy through 'He Waka Eke Noa' (HWEN)

3. This report

This report is based on over 8000 separate insights gathered during the meetings. Interrogation of this large dataset provides the key themes from the farmer feedback captured in the meetings.

The findings in this report are qualitative and not statistically quantified in terms of national or regional proportions of farmers holding particular views. The feedback obtained from this series of meetings will be combined with a later survey that will enable this quantification of views on key issues.

This report has been structured into two areas, each detailing outputs from one of the 'approaches' used at the meetings (see 2. Methodology above). Outputs from the opening 'what's on my mind' discussions are detailed in Section 4, while the outputs from the topic-specific 'walk and talk' component are detailed in Sections 5. Each area of reporting includes key points or themes arising from the discussions, as well as illustrative verbatim quotes from farmers captured at the meeting. These are intended to bring a clear 'farmer voice' to the reporting.

4. 'What's on my mind' – Issues important to farmers

4.1. Key points and themes

The following themes have been identified from the open 'what's on my mind' discussion that started each of the regional meetings.

- **Regulatory compliance burden:** Farmers are worn down and angry at the slew of policy changes from government and the associated compliance burden for farm businesses. Farmers emphasised the need for fair regulations and policies, particularly in relation to emerging climate/carbon policy, Regional Council decisions e.g. winter grazing, and the wider impact of regulations on their farm businesses.
- **Future outlook:** Many farmers are uncertain, concerned and lacking confidence in the future. They want to know what B+LNZ is doing to restore their confidence and address upcoming challenges, including issues related to Significant Natural Areas (SNA's), freshwater regulations, carbon emissions pricing, and market development.
- **Maintaining a core production and profitability focus:** Farmers prioritised information and support related to farm production, efficiency, profitability, and tools for sustainable farming. Many see this as 'core' business for B+LNZ to deliver, on their behalf. In this space farmers identified research, insights, and techniques that drive profitability and allow them to make informed business decisions. They also want to engage with B+LNZ on how this activity should be resourced to best serve their region.
- **Disconnected communication and engagement:** Many farmers expressed a view that B+LNZ has become regionally disconnected. Covid-19 and associated activity restrictions will have had an influence on this, but there is a strong sense that the heavy focus on policy negotiation with government and other sector bodies has come at a cost to regional connection. Farmers expressed dismay at the overwhelming volume of digital material now channelled into their in-boxes from all sources. They express a desire for effective communication from B+LNZ through various channels, including email updates, social media, short videos, and in particular, more face-to-face interactions such as the regional meetings. There was also evidence of a farmer desire back towards careful use of hard copy materials.
- **Input to advocacy and policy positions:** Farmers expect B+LNZ to advocate on their behalf, providing clarity on emerging or potential policies with an understanding of how these may impact their operations and bottom line. Farmers want to be involved in policy discussions, push back on illogical policies, and in particular, explore alternatives to the current proposed climate change policies and approach.
- **Success stories and positive news:** Farmers are weary and tired of policy related 'doom and gloom'. Many indicate a desire for success stories to be shared internally and externally, achievements, and positive developments in the farming industry.

They value showcasing the progress made and the opportunities available to them and their farm businesses.

- **Sustainability, wellbeing and community:** Farmers expressed a clear intent that they want to 'do the right things' for their land, animals, people, and community. This included interest in topics related to animal health, soil protection, succession planning, land use options, and diversification. Farmers also want support for their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of their local communities.

4.2. Verbatim quotes – 'What's on my mind?'

Detailed on pp 9-10 are verbatim farmer quotes by B+LNZ extension area in each island. These illustrate example underlying comments that contribute to the key points and themes detailed above.



Verbatim Quotes - "What's on my mind" Issues Important to farmers



North Island - selected quotes to provide a sense of farmer views at the meetings

Northern North Island:

"We are overwhelmed – I will not do anything till I absolutely have to. It might change"

"Regulation - the burden of regulation is like a parasite - seems to want to kill off farming"

"All of our industry - dairy as well - feels the challenge of social licence. We need to adapt or die"

"Urban lack of understanding – B+LNZ could explain farming to them"

Mid Northern North Island:

"I don't want to feel like a bad person for being a farmer"

"Farmers views to government - not the other way around"

"Emissions pricing feels like we're being sold down the river"

"Engagement - sick of policy talk, it's just too much"

"Can't negotiate with a government that won't budge"

Eastern North Island:

"Gabrielle - was worse than Bola for some"

"Is B+LNZ in danger of 'referendum focus' – and not consistent performance?"

"B+LNZ is overly focused on Hawkes Bay and Gisborne not East Coast"

"Forestry is a huge problem for everyone"

"We need more mental health awareness and support"

*"2024 - is going to be a *** fight"*

Western North Island:

"We all want a premium and will move if it's provided, we need incentive, not enough just to tell people to do stuff"

"Does urban New Zealand understand us and what we do? Misinformation is a real problem (especially environment)"

"Need government to take notice - different ways to do things (Groundswell vs B+LNZ etc) - can be complementary, but is not at present"

"B+LNZ has a role in urban/rural divide - more important than TPN"

"Afforestation – 'someone else's problem' - people taking the money in this doesn't sit right - what happens in 30 years?"



Verbatim Quotes - "What's on my mind" Issues Important to farmers



South Island - selected quotes to provide a sense of farmer views at the meetings

Northern South Island:

- "I'd rather give my money to a marketer than an advocate"*
- "B+LNZ need to process feedback showing they're open, listening, responding. If people don't feel listened to they switch off"*
- "I think there is now a mandate for B+LNZ to push back harder"*
- "Industry groups should get out of advocacy"*
- "The assumption was we would be in ETS, now climate Commission saying agriculture shouldn't be in ETS ..."*
- "Your extension work, research work is great. You don't hear farmers concerned about that work."*
- "Farmers are in two camps, either given up or angry"*
- "I'm much better planting my property in trees and walking away"*

Central South Island:

- "Feels like B+LNZ is getting farmers to comply with Govt regulations. We want you to take us to the government NOT the other way around"*
- "I used to be a big supporter of B+LNZ, now not sure of your purpose - Climate change policy doesn't make sense. Our sheep/beef numbers are halved, we are a dying industry"*
- "Looks like B+LNZ has been bullied - farmers don't like being bullied"*
- "I am gutted. 100 turn up to field day but only a handful turn up to talk about the biggest issue confronting farming in a generation. This is damning for B+LNZ. You are failing in your job"*

Southern South Island:

- "Farmers feeling disenfranchised"*
- "Tax without mitigation is unreasonable"*
- "Industry is at a tipping point"*
- "B+LNZ supposed to have farmers backs and think we've been missing over the last few years"*
- "Getting arses kicked in the media"*
- "If ruminant methane is taxed, then it will be the end of the livestock industry"*
- "There's lots of good stuff you do, but you have lost some of the trust"*

5. SPECIFIC TOPICS EXPLORED DURING REGIONAL MEETINGS

Following the initial open discussion and consideration of ‘what’s on my mind’ for farmers at each meeting, the meeting process transitioned to a ‘walk and talk’ format that encouraged participation through use of posters and conversation focused in specific areas.

These areas covered:

1. Climate change policy through ‘He Waka Eke Noa’ (HWEN)
2. B+LNZ’s representing farmer in policy and advocacy positions
3. B+LNZ connecting with farmers
 - The identification of key areas of importance for farmers
 - Preferred communications approaches
4. B+LNZ Farmer Council

The posters used in the meetings and detailing the questions/prompts used to encourage farmer feedback with respect to climate change policy and HWEN are shown in Appendix 1.

5.1. Climate Change Policy (He Waka Eke Noa - HWEN)

Key points from the HWEN discussion were as follows:

- The feedback from farmers on climate change policy (HWEN) captured during the farmer meetings reflects a wide range of perspectives and concerns.
- Opinions on HWEN vary, with some farmers working together to get the best results and opposing leaving HWEN, while others question its effectiveness, the science behind it and suggest leaving immediately.
- Farmers stress the importance of transparency, fair treatment, and independence. The need for accurate reporting, including soil carbon, and effectively communicating the farming industry's sustainability efforts were also highlighted across the country.
- Some farmers emphasised the need for robust modelling of sheep and beef sector impacts before implementing pricing policies and also expressed concern about delaying climate change actions through leaving HWEN, suggesting that would make the impacts worse in the longer term.
- Others call for B+LNZ to promptly exit He Waka Eke Noa (HWEN), with dissatisfaction being expressed. Distrust in current climate science and research were also expressed by some.
- Farm conversions to pines and forestry for carbon sequestration credits are seen as significant threats to the sheep and beef sector. The importance of informed decision-making through modelling of impacts and outcomes was emphasised.
- Farmers had divided opinions on HWEN's validity and its impact on different farming businesses. The importance of accurate measurement, recognition of pre-1990 plantings, and fair treatment with others pulling their weight for all of New Zealand, were discussed. Farmers expressed the need for certainty, flexibility, and support in any practice change from potential carbon regulation. Concerns about administrative costs and burden of farm-level reporting, and potential waste of investments due to changing rules were also raised.
- Overall, the feedback highlights the complex and varied perspectives of farmers regarding climate change policy. Some simply want B+LNZ to disengage or 'make it stop' while other recognise an unstoppable momentum in this space and want to ensure the best (or least negative) outcomes for farmers. Others note the risk of delay potentially creating more difficult and significant impacts at a later stage. There is a desire for effective, science-based approaches that balance economic viability, fairness, and sustainable practices.

Example verbatim quotes by B+LNZ extension region are shown the following pages.



North Island - selected quotes to provide a sense of farmer views at the meetings

Northern North Island:

"Stay with-it, more discussion needed, be harder on behalf of farmers"

"Methane targets are now detrimental to farmers"

"Change the narrative to protect our social licence, farmers are prepared to adapt. They need the science and leadership"

Mid Northern North Island:

"Will B+LNZ leave HWEN if bottom lines are not met?"

"Not every farming business will be prepared to innovate and change - we need to be prepared to lose some"

"Every bit of sequestration captured"

"Cannot leave HWEN, must work together"

"Lumped in with the dairy industry, without sheep and beef they look really bad. We have reduced they have gone up in emission"

"Is this an impossible proposition?"

Eastern North Island:

"Mitigations must be commercially viable"

"Has it been unfair to sheep and beef farmers?"

"Robust science needs to back it"

"Why are we being 'smashed' when we are an efficient food producer?"

"Paris accord states food production not to be hindered."

"People feel it's the thin end of the wedge"

"Remember we will live with these consequences"

Western North Island:

"Make it simple"

"There are two choices with HWEN, pull out or structure it from within."

"Stay in HWEN but 'make it work' - be brutal in the discussion"

"Farmers are really confused"

"Farmers don't understand financial implications, they are so complex - put money to the number - take farmers with you"

"We have to be seen to be doing something about global warming"

"Need shared burden across all of New Zealand, not just on primary industries BUT sheep/beef can't be the easy out for NZ Inc!!!"

"Win the battle on methane - how it is counted"

"Support farm-local reporting BUT we need to measure all the sources and sinks, not just the socially acceptable ones"

"Get on with it!!!"



South Island -- selected quotes to provide a sense of farmer views at the meetings

Northern South Island:

"If we are going for a methane target review how do we pitch it? - What does net zero look like in context of zero carbon bill?"

"Politically there needs to be collective effort and representation, but collective advocacy doesn't mean all sectors need to be treated the same"

"My observation is that B+LNZ has played fairly and not with self-interest"

"If the answer is trees, the impact is on sheep and beef"

"Cumulative impact report a good thing"

"Use available science to show methane completely irrelevant to agriculture emissions and drop it"

"Better to be in the room than on the table. To maintain market access."

Southern South Island:

"Biogenic emissions are not an issue"

"Making sure voice is heard"

"Looking at the different impacts - extensive farms vs intensive systems"

"Ball is in the government's court - wait until they respond to our demands"

"Don't be scared to say no"

"We are not end users. Tax the food"

"Need to accept that there may be a point where need to break off negotiations"

"Calculator perceptions. Food production – required"

"Paris accord - not to sacrifice food production"

"There's lots of good stuff you do, but you have lost some of the trust"

Central South Island:

"Don't just delay it - sort it! - What about 2026? What then?"

"Don't let the dairy industry use us - show us"

"On the past AGM remits – leave HWEN Immediately was not passed by much "Make pricing better" was more clearly supported"

"B+LNZ won't support a package that puts an unequal burden on sheep and beef farmers or threatens farm business viability – Agree. Good!!"

"Totally against the whole HWEN concept - the science is all wrong. I truly believe we are already carbon neutral!"

"NZ can go out and lead the world but not at the expense of us!"

"It's a dog. No one seemed to know about it till it was too late"

5.2. B+LNZ representing farmers in policy and advocacy positions

Key points from the policy and advocacy discussion were as follows:

- Feedback highlighted several concerns and also suggestions from farmers as to how B+LNZ can improve its engagement and representation of farmers' voices in its policy and advocacy work. Farmers expressed the need for B+LNZ to understand and demonstrate that they represent farmers and not the government, urging transparency and clarity in distinguishing B+LNZ's position from government positions or policies. They emphasised the importance of listening to farmers from the bottom-up, seeking their opinions before formulating positions, and building trust with the farming community.
- Farmers called for B+LNZ to consider the impact of policies on all farmers, regardless of size or experience, and to empower other farmer advocacy entities rather than being the sole advocate or voice. There is a desire for greater farmer input into policy development, including B+LNZ executives visiting regions and farms and considering diverse voices.
- The importance of collaboration with catchment groups, community partnerships, and aligned parties was stressed. Farmers recommended utilising a variety of tools such as B+LNZ Farmer Council representatives, and other farmer reference and advisory groups to solidify ideas and gain diverse perspectives. They suggested using methods such as surveys, face-to-face meetings, and online platforms to gather farmer input and feedback on policy and advocacy positions and to keep them informed about B+LNZ's activities. They also sought engagement with processors to gain market context
- Transparency, avoiding duplication, engaging with local community groups, and generating media coverage beyond the farming sector were also seen as important in the policy and advocacy area.
- Some urged B+LNZ to be more assertive in advocating for farmers, standing up to government pressure when necessary. The need to support and mentor younger farmers, engage with farm leaders, and motivate the unengaged was emphasised.
- To improve advocacy development, farmers called for full engagement, transparency from the start, alignment with the sector's vision of success, and checking emerging positions against what is considered beneficial for the industry. Farmers also expressed the need for advocating for genetically engineered (GE) options, promoting wool, and addressing climate change damage in a cost-effective manner.
- Overall feedback from these meetings underscored the importance of active and inclusive engagement with farmers, seeking their input, and advocating for their interests in a transparent and collaborative manner. Farmers expect B+LNZ to walk the difficult line of effectively representing their diverse perspectives and delivering on their concerns.



Verbatim Quotes - representing farmers in policy and advocacy



North Island -- selected quotes to provide a sense of farmer views at the meetings

Northern North Island:

"Groundswell let's us "vent""

"Go to the sale yards to talk with farmers"

"Engagement - don't reinvent the wheel on engagement"

"Keep us updated and ask us more often and if we disagree with your direction - push back on our behalf – HARD"

"Face-to-face feedback meetings are good. Not all farmers are comfortable with technology"

Mid Northern North Island:

"Use the farmer council representatives to attend community events and have informal discussions"

"Transparency - lack of transparency with farmers during creating policy"

"This is Feds' job?"

"Stand up to government pressure when they're clearly out of line!"

"More director engagement with farmers through regular woolshed meetings"

Eastern North Island:

"Listen first, speak later"

"Clarity around what the end goal is"

"Want to see a win - positive results"

"Get the good ideas from the grassroots and feed up - use these ideas to help shape policy practically"

"Silence does not mean we are OK with it"

"Don't underestimate power of having farmers behind you"

"Give us a space to develop options not just option A or option B"

Western North Island:

"We want a lot stronger leadership. Put some strong stakes in the ground, your farmers will back you if you back them"

"This was the top session - talk to farmers!"

"Don't 'talk at' us – HWEN especially"

"Smaller local meetings"

"Ensure we understand the implications"

"Spell out the issues (policy) - joint meetings with Feds"



Verbatim Quotes - representing farmers in policy and advocacy



South Island - selected quotes to provide a sense of farmer views at the meetings

Northern South Island:

"Stop watering down our answers to make them politically palatable"

"There was no second chance to follow up after HWEN roadshow - I might look like a fool in front of 100 people in the moment - can digest and reflect and get my thoughts together"

"Roadshow is good but loudest voice ends up = message - loudest voice doesn't always represent the view of the room"

"We haven't nailed our mandate from constituents - Directors are elected but still need to understand the view of the wider collective"

"Groundswell, makes it simple - one click only"

"A whole of farming approach is very beneficial - good to hear that you are working with DairyNZ and Feds closely"

"We want a lot stronger leadership. Put some strong stakes in the ground, your farmers will back you if you back them"

Southern South Island:

"Find a way to build trust"

"New Zealand public is not against us - they just don't understand"

"Need to fight for our existence"

"Ground up, not top down"

"Asking not telling"

"Found out more information from others rather than (B+LNZ)"

"More involvement from Farmer Council members in communities. We don't know our local FCM. They could help relay updates on regulations if people resources are short"

Central South Island:

"Listen to us, as have felt in past that decision was made before the meeting"

"B+L needs to be more adversarial"

"You B+LNZ, represent farmers not government! Sometimes we wonder who you are working for and why we pay levies!"

"Empower catchment groups. Autonomy to get practical results"

"How might we get officials who are writing the rules on the farm?"

"Keep engaged in technology and science but empower farmer advocacy rather than being the advocate."

5.3. B+LNZ connecting with farmers

Key points from the policy and advocacy discussion with respect to **what farmers want from B+LNZ** were as follows:

- Feedback highlighted several key areas that farmers want to hear about from B+LNZ. Farmers emphasised the importance of a level playing field in terms of regulations and policies, and they want B+LNZ to showcase the positive stories and success of the farming industry to win over urban communities. They also expressed concerns about various plans and initiatives, such as SNAs (Significant Natural Areas), and freshwater regulations.
- Farmers are interested in market insights, government discussions, and policy positions that are easily accessible and understandable for time-constrained farmers. They want to hear about production and efficiency ideas, soil science, animal welfare, compliance reporting, and alternative approaches to the current climate change policy (HWEN).
- Farmers want to hear about the positive future of farming, including succession pathways, diversification, genetic advancements, land use options, and additional income opportunities. They wanted B+LNZ to communicate through existing and new channels and provide support for learning and education.
- Meeting feedback shows farmers seek connection with B+LNZ around policy changes, including the real impact of regulations on farming operations and their profitability. In addition, other areas include the industry's future, support for informed decision-making, and farmer ability to protest illogical policies.
- In summary, farmers identify a broad spectrum of things they wish to connect with B+LNZ on. They want B+LNZ to provide information and support on topics that traverse production, profitability, policy changes, market insights, animal health challenges, sustainability, and the future of farming.

Key points from the policy and advocacy discussion with respect to **how farmers want B+LNZ to connect** with them on their topics of interest:

- Feedback on this question reveals several preferred methods for B+LNZ to connect with farmers on their topics of interest. Farmers noted that they are feeling overwhelmed with unsolicited information from an increasing number of sources. They want B+LNZ to respect their capacity to process messages while continuing to run a farming business.
- Overall farmers expressed their appreciation for short and concise messages, and updates from the CEO and Chair and through the E-diary. They suggest utilising various channels such as social media platforms, short YouTube videos, text reminders, and print media to effectively reach them. Farmers also greatly value in-

person interactions, including field days, community events, and meetings with the B+LNZ team and B+LNZ Farmer Council representatives.

- There was a call for coordination and partnership with other groups to amplify the message and facilitate information sharing and connection with them. Farmers highlighted the importance of accuracy in the information provided and suggested utilising different formats like factsheets, videos, articles, and podcasts. They appreciate weekly updates, and some suggested establishing good relationships with locals by giving informal updates at community events.
- Farmers emphasised the need for a multi-faceted approach to connect with them, acknowledging that different individuals prefer different communication channels. They emphasised the importance of maintaining a balance and not overwhelming them with excessive emails.
- Feedback emphasised the value and significance of face-to-face interactions, public meetings, and industry summits to discuss and advocate for farmers' interests. There was a desire for bringing farming leaders together in forums to address contentious issues and foster collaboration. Many spoke of the value of conducting regional meetings for connection between farmers and B+LNZ leaderships, such as those conducted through this current meeting process.
- Overall, farmers seek a challenging and comprehensive approach to communication and engagement from B+LNZ, combining digital platforms, in-person events, personalised interactions, and collaborative forums to effectively connect with them on topics of interest.



Verbatim Quotes - B+LNZ connecting with farmers



North Island - selected quotes to provide a sense of farmer views at the meetings

Northern North Island:

- "What's the harm in telling me too much?"*
- "I want regulations etc to stop. I know how to farm!"*
- "Encourage our young guys and gals with agriculture!"*
- "That farming/agriculture can be a career option for young people, because it is attractive, profitable and accessible"*
- "Stop this government's idealism"*
- "Rural communities are places that people want to live because they're communities not overrun by pine trees"*

Mid Northern North Island:

- "The important stuff, stuff that affects my business, money, my ability to do business"*
- "I want to know that our industry has a future"*
- "Want to see both sides of an argument to allow an informed decision"*
- "Spreading more success stories, what has been achieved rather than just what we need to do"*
- "Two parts that are interlinked, on farm production and policy or rules that enable farming, intergenerational succession, want to know about it all"*

Western North Island:

- "Future farming in New Zealand. The regulations that are coming"*
- "Bullet pointed, simplified information versus pages of information"*
- "Rules and regulations - some farmers bury head in sand. Need to make it simple"*
- "Promote New Zealand farming "good news" stories regularly - counter on the factually inaccurate stories"*
- "Good application of science topics "on farm""*
- "Is there a future in farming for the next generation? Combat costs and regulations making investing difficult"*
- "Non-biased information – "no-spin" good statistics"*

Eastern North Island:

- "Science, facts, new technology. That you are listening to the best science"*
- "Values of rural New Zealand and farmers - we respect and value livestock. Remind New Zealand why we eat meat"*
- "Finding info in the website is really difficult – make it easier and more accessible"*
- "Mental health of farmers. Training career path. Succession planning"*
- "Domestic issues are killing us - killing confidence. Eliminate the red tape"*
- "What's going to motivate young and new farmers to engage? Engage next generation"*



Verbatim Quotes - B+LNZ connecting with farmers



South Island - selected quotes to provide a sense of farmer views at the meetings

Northern South Island:

"Depends where you are in your farming journey - starting out vs established"

"Productivity and profitability - on farm issues just have less impact on our business viability than some of the regulation and policy"

"Up to date science in agriculture"

"Future solution for problems - ideas for problems"

"Cheat sheet of facts without the detail"

"Woolshed meetings/zooms to develop policy vs surveys"

Central South Island:

"Win townies over - we need a level playing field. Showcase our story"

"B+LNZ used to be all about production, now it seems more about regulation"

"Still very keen to hear about production and efficiency ideas and soil protects science"

"Break down the policy for tired farmers with little time to read!"

"Farmers are more savvy around genetics. Still heaps of exciting things happening opportunity to showcase"

"Boots on farms - interaction with other farmers is really valuable - farmers want to get out on farm"

"Who will be farming in 2030? i.e., succession pathways"

Southern South Island:

"Print media is not dead- we like it!"

"Singing farmers praises - about how awesome farmers are"

"Social media transforming farmers"

"Corporate future - good or ba."

"Discouraged by too much regulation - we have mortgages to pay"

"Methane eating bacteria – research and information"

"How do we get out of trees and back to sheep and beef farming?"

"Where is funding going - right place? - Fighting political sh#"*

5.4. B+LNZ Farmer Council

Key points from the discussion with respect to B+LNZ Farmer Council were as follows:

- Farmer feedback collated from the regional meetings provided insights into the wider farming community perception of B+LNZ Farmer Council. This included thoughts from farmers on the purpose and scope of B+LNZ Farmer Council, as well as comments on how it may be enhanced.
- Farmers widely emphasised the need for improved visibility of the B+LNZ Farmer Council. Some expressed a lack of awareness of the Council and called for more promotion of the Council's role and functions. They suggested raising the profile and making it clearer to a wider audience how farmers can connect with B+LNZ Farmer Council as one of the channels to engage with B+LNZ. Some wanted volunteer Farmer Councillors to be more accessible to farmers. Farmers expressed a desire for the Council to act as a bridge between them and B+LNZ, translating information and canvassing local farmer opinions.
- Clearly defining the purpose and roles of all B+LNZ regional functions including Regional Extension Managers, B+LNZ Management, B+LNZ Directors and volunteer B+LNZ Farmer Councillors would be useful to avoid overburdening volunteer farmers and recognising that while B+LNZ Farmer Council is a strong vehicle for regional connection, it should not be regarded as the sole regional 'face' of B+LNZ.
- Many farmers who were aware of the B+LNZ Farmer Council valued the Council's role in coordinating locally relevant extension for them, facilitating discussions, and providing a platform for their feedback.
- Across the country there were a range of views with several calls for B+LNZ Farmer Council to be more farmer-focused rather than the current perception, that it has become B+LNZ 'organisation'-focused. Many perceive that actively seeking farmers' opinions is a key activity for the B+LNZ Farmer Council. In contrast some urge the Council to return to focus solely on production and profit. Others seek this, plus a stronger function in communicating 'grass roots' farmer positions on policy up to B+LNZ to ensure a clear mandate for B+LNZ positions based on farmers' needs and wants. There are also clear calls for the B+LNZ Farmer Council to be more assertive in providing blunt feedback, where required, to B+LNZ.
- The importance of clear communication, building relationships and partnering with other community groups (e.g. catchment groups) was highlighted. Farmers stress the need for the B+LNZ Farmer Council to represent their interests and ensure that their views are effectively conveyed to B+LNZ. The B+LNZ Farmer Council's role in informing farmers about relevant issues, advocating for them, and providing accurate information on regulations and requirements was emphasised.
- Overall this feedback stresses the importance of a visible, communicative, and farmer-centric B+LNZ Farmer Council. However, the feedback also illustrates the 'mixed bag' of expectations of the B+LNZ Farmer Council.



Verbatim Quotes - B+LNZ Farmer Council



North Island - selected quotes to provide a sense of farmer views at the meetings

Northern North Island:

"Be out there: i.e., show up at shows, sales, talk to people. Push back harder against regulations!"

"Empower Farmer Council to get involved in advocacy - particularly management engagement with Farmer Council"

"Keep up those emails and links that help me meet the challenges with my land - you have a great team in the north"

"Small group learning - driving action groups - relationships valuable"

"I don't hear about the Farmer Council in our region - who are our members?"

"Keep up your field days and inviting NRC & MPI and others to tell us what practical help is available e.g., fencing streams, planting natives"

Mid Northern North Island:

"Translate information between farmers and B+LNZ. Need to know who they are - and what they do e.g., extension"

"Farmer Council B+LNZ - organise events of your choice - guest speaker from B+LNZ about advocacy role"

"Didn't know it existed until a few months ago - probably need it as a conduit between levy payers and directors"

"How do farmers want to receive information? How do farmers want to communicate with their local Farmer Counsellor?"

"Farmer Council need to be able to be blunt in their feedback to B+LNZ"

"Keep farming for profit. Both facilitation and active doing. Open lines of communication between farmers and Beef and Lamb NZ."

Western North Island:

"Unsure of what it does. How do we contact them? Who should we contact with questions?"

"The Board should use and listen to the Farmer Council more. Workshop fatigue is real - need real impact."

"Farmer Council need to liaise with locals more. The Farmer Council can be your best friend or your worst enemy - your most valuable resource"

"Fields days as a two-way conversation. Do upskilling and education. Appeal to farmers for field day ideas"

"Who are they? Should have a key group of farmers to look after. Be the conduit for BLNZ policy/information etc. AgInnovation Conference is excellent"

"I don't know who you are. Know who the team are. Change Farmer Council, get more people involved. How do we make it attractive to be on Farmer Council? Succession planning"

Eastern North Island:

"Farmer Council need to engage more regionally. Be the person-to-person conduit between Wellington and farm - in policy talk, not just extension"

"Community is more than 'just farmers'. Connection with catchment groups. Communities need to be leading the change it works for their community"

"Farmer Council to feed local views into B+LNZ and Board. Local representation is valuable"

"Face-to-face is most valuable. Two ways of communication. Isolation in Wairoa region - feel under-represented"

"Don't know what Farmer Council is. How do we find out about them? "

"B+LNZ to make sure the Farmer Council has a meaningful voice. Use people that have the experience and the time - make more use of successful experience"



Verbatim Quotes - B+LNZ Farmer Council



South Island - selected quotes to provide a sense of farmer views at the meetings

Northern South Island:

"Provide extension support. Provide a sounding board and info for B+LNZ"

"Farmer Council are not the communicator for B+LNZ"

"Work with DairyNZ to share ideas and discussion groups. Connect with dairy farmers"

"Never heard of it. Come introduce yourself to me."

"Don't know who is on, or who they are? Farmers need to know there is a way that this feeds back to the organisation"

"Covers a lot of the area - token. More on farm days. Farmers love farming and like seeing other farms e.g. Farm4Profit"

"On farm meetings, discussions on pressing issues. Woolshed meetings - come to Golden Bay please"

Central South Island:

"Don't do directors jobs for them - they need to speak with farmers"

"Who and what is our Farmer Council?? We have no idea what they do!"

"Does the FC feed farmer 'mood' back to B+LNZ?"

"F.C. support has been lacking recently. Recent drought there was no support"

"A flyer on who your local F.C. Rep is. Knowing the contact is really important"

"Farmer Council has done a really good job around field days"

"Need a moderate, effective well-funded, connected body - God forbid Groundswell"

Southern South Island:

"Not known by community. Hard to contact"

"Profile not high. Lack of knowledge on who is Farmer Council"

"Better awareness of who they are plus role"

"I don't know much about it. I wouldn't necessarily go to them on political issues"

"What are Farmer Councils actually doing? Not enough on-farm"

"Knowing your local Farmer Council rep. Potential to get to discussion groups"

6. What happens now?

The following 'next steps' are being actioned by Primary Purpose to turn this farmer feedback into actionable recommendations on change that B+LNZ can consider and implement:

1. Primary Purpose will provide feedback from the regional meetings to the third party supporting delivery of an independent review of B+LNZ policy and advocacy processes
2. From the farmer feedback captured in this report, Primary Purpose will be developing draft recommendations for change and testing with:
 - Regional farmer focus groups (8 focus groups to be held across the country)
 - B+LNZ Farmer Council
3. Primary Purpose will be conducting a robust national survey of sheep and beef farmers to test and quantify feedback on potential changes in B+LNZ activities and connection with farmers, including the future function and role of B+LNZ Farmer Council.
4. Primary Purpose will be reporting to the B+LNZ Board with change recommendations, validated through steps 2 and 3 above will be completed during October 2023


Appendix 1: Meeting posters/worksheets

Date:
Location:

Climate change policy – He Waka Eke Noa (HWEN)

Write your thoughts, comments, agree/disagree perspectives on these B+LNZ position statements – use post-it notes and add to this sheet

- On the passed AGM remits:
 - “Leave HWEN Immediately” was not definitive
 - “Make pricing better” was more clearly supported
- B+LNZ are on record as calling for no pricing in 2025
- B+LNZ are on record as calling for introducing farm-level reporting as a first step
- B+LNZ won’t support a package that doesn’t deal with all of the issues – sequestration, equity, governance, emissions leakage etc.
- B+LNZ won’t support a package that puts an unequal burden on sheep and beef farmers or threatens farm business viability
- B+LNZ’s will continue to negotiate to achieve the best result for sheep & beef farmers
- B+LNZ’s position is that methane targets need to be amended based on warming




Date:
Location:

B+LNZ representing farmers

Write your thoughts, comments, agree/disagree perspectives on post-it notes and add to the sheet

What could we do better to hear your voice on policy/advocacy?



B+LNZ connecting with farmers

Date:
Location:

Write your thoughts, comments, perspectives on post-it notes and add to the sheet


①

What do you want to know about, what is important to you?

②

How do you want B+LNZ to connect with you and discuss these topics?

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B+LNZ Farmer Council

Date:
Location:

Write your thoughts, comments, perspectives on post-it notes and add to the sheet

How can the B+LNZ Farmer Council in this region better support you and your farm business?

B+LNZ Farmer Council is a group of volunteer farmers from your region that help connect B+LNZ and farmers to help meet regional needs.

