



# Healthy Farms Healthy Rivers

# NEWS

## Farming practices at your fingertips



Farmers can now assess the costs and benefits of various farming practices to improve water quality at the click of a mouse.

Interactive online versions of a set of 'menus' of farming practices released as booklets last year are now available at [www.farmmenu.org.nz](http://www.farmmenu.org.nz).

The menus assess a range of practices for cropping land, and dairy and drystock farms that improve nutrient management and reduce impacts on water quality.

Farmers can use the menus on their home computer, tablet or smart phones to sort practices on the basis of:

- likely water quality benefit in terms of

reducing nitrogen, phosphorus, sediment or micro-organisms

- cost and benefit to the farm business.

Development of the menus was prompted by farmers asking Waikato Regional Council what they could do to improve water quality in rivers. So Waikato Regional Council worked together with eight industry partners for 18 months to develop booklets of menus of practices for dairy, drystock and cropping.

Since their release last year, over 2000 of the booklets have been distributed to farmers and rural professionals

The web menus make decision making information even easier to access. Farmers can cut and paste farm management practices straight into their environmental farm plans. The menus link to other industry websites for more information. They will be continually updated and online videos added in the future.

## Local solutions to improving water quality

Stakeholder representatives on the Healthy Rivers/Wai Ora project have experienced firsthand the importance of local solutions to improving water quality.

The Collaborative Stakeholder Group (CSG) visited a dairy farm in June followed by a visit to a community project working to improve water quality in July.

During the field trip to Tokoroa dairy farmer George Moss's farm, the CSG heard about the environmental outcomes of his farm system. George spoke about the farm's stocking rates and pasture and effluent management.

The next field trip was to the Mangapu River, where local school students were planting trees as part of a local project to fence 5.5km of riverbank and plant 10,700 native trees and plants over three years.

CSG chair Bill Wasley said: "It's important we see what's happening on the ground and find out from local people what's

likely to work. They're very much part of the solution, and we're very open to ideas.

"There is no 'one size fits all' approach for dealing with farming's impact on water quality. In developing solutions, the group needs to be highly aware of the geographic, as well as the social and cultural diversity in the Waikato and Waipa river catchments.

"The 25 CSG representatives will be working with farmers, land users, local communities and the wider general public from mid March to mid May 2015 to develop the policy. There'll be a number of 'out and about' days where we'll meet people on their own patch so we can understand the on-the-ground realities. There'll also be public events around the catchments and surveys."

To experience and understand the catchments firsthand, the CSG will continue to hold workshops in different parts of the catchments. Future field trips include a sheep and beef farm, tourism and recreation and energy.

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Healthy Rivers:  
Plan for Change/  
Wai Ora: He Rautaki  
Whakapaipai is  
working with  
stakeholders to  
develop changes to  
the regional plan  
to help restore and  
protect the health  
of the Waikato and  
Waipa rivers, which  
are key to a vibrant  
regional economy.

## Introducing George Moss

**Tokoroa dairy farmer and  
dairy sector representative on  
the Healthy Rivers: Plan for  
Change/Wai Ora: He Rautaki  
Whakapaipai project's  
Collaborative Stakeholder  
Group**



There are a number of farmers  
on the Collaborative Stakeholder  
Group grappling with the

difficult task of setting water  
quality limits and targets and  
how they can be achieved. We  
recently asked George about  
his work with the Collaborative  
Stakeholder Group.

**What do you see as the  
challenges ahead for the  
Collaborative Stakeholder  
Group?**

“Getting the balance right and  
reaching a solution that starts  
to meet the aspirations of the  
Vision and Strategy for the  
Waikato River while still allowing  
rural business and communities  
to prosper.”

**Where is this likely to take us?**

“Some form of restriction  
on the amount of nutrient  
and contaminants a property  
discharges. I see this leading to a  
change in mindset and the way  
we view our property and the  
way the property impacts on the  
wider environment.”

**What can farmers do now?**

“I think the best thing is to  
understand the impact of our  
own farming system particularly  
around nutrient efficiency and  
consider the options that will  
lead to improvement.”

 For more information, and to subscribe to an e-newsletter visit [www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/healthyrivers](http://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/healthyrivers).

## Maize silage a good complement to spring grown grass

Feeding maize silage on dairy farms can  
dilute the high nitrogen protein levels of  
spring grown grass.

Spring grown grass has more nitrogen  
than a milking cow needs. So as the cow  
excretes this unwanted nitrogen in its  
urine, there is an energy cost to the cow.  
But it also has environmental impacts as  
the nitrogen is concentrated in urine spots.

The pasture under a urine spot picks up  
and uses some of this nitrogen. What  
remains unused eventually moves down  
through the soil profile with drainage water  
and ends up in groundwater and then finds  
its way to surface water.

Feeding maize silage will dilute high  
protein levels found in spring grown grass.  
Maize silage is low in nitrogen (protein 7  
to 8 per cent) and high in energy. In the  
first spring grazing round, feed demand  
is higher than grass growth and so maize  
silage has an important place in meeting  
any possible spring feed deficit.

If maize silage is available it is most  
probably a better environmental alternative



than grass silage. The *Menu of practices to  
improve water quality: dairy farms* suggests  
the likely water quality benefit of using  
maize silage as a diet substitution is  
medium (10 to 25 per cent) with medium

cost (feed pad included) and low or little  
change to the farm profit. Also check out  
the farm practice ‘Grow maize on effluent  
block’ in the web menu as another way of  
mitigating nitrogen.

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