

Environment plan reveals bigger picture

By Gina McKenzie.



Stepping back and viewing his farm through the lens of the Farm Environment Plan (FEP) has provided Oxford farmer, Scott Evans, with some surprising benefits.

Scott, who owns three farms with his family, says completing the plan highlighted small improvements he could make to run his farms more effectively, while also protecting the environment.

“There were some areas I drove past every day and thought I should be doing something there but you get caught up in the daily grind. The FEP gives you a process and a timeframe so you get these things done.

“When you think about it, it’s those little things that can cause a big impact on the efficiency of your farm and the environment.”

Scott credits Waimakariri Irrigation Limited (WIL) environmental manager Paul Reese for helping him through the Farm Environment Plan process.

“As shareholders, we’re obliged to do the plan and while I knew most of the answers off the top of my head it was great to have Paul there to go through everything.

“Putting it down on paper and seeing what you’re doing right and getting pointers on where you might be going wrong was really beneficial for me.”

Paul says even farms like Scott’s, which are well set up and have invested in technology, can benefit from doing an FEP.

“Scott knows these things instinctively and they’re in the back of his mind, but when you

point them out, put them down on paper and have a timeframe they get done.

“We found four small areas of improvement around track maintenance, entry and exit to the sheds, fertiliser application and fence realignment.”

A couple of the improvements surprised Scott in terms of the impact they were having on the environment.

“To be honest I was surprised about track maintenance, how having a bund on the edge of your track forces the discharge into one area. I knew it had an impact but I didn’t realise how big it was.

“Also, I didn’t really think of a stockwater race as a waterway but it actually does need its own buffer zone and needs to be protected.”

Scott advises farmers who are starting the FEP process to consider it as a “space to get to know your farm better”.

“It’s not scary at all. It’s a basis to say – ‘these are the things I’m doing well and these are the things that I need to do differently’.”

With three out of four improvements identified in his plan already completed, Scott is well-prepared for his mid-2017 FEP audit.

“It was just a half-day of work for me to do those jobs. All I have left to do is fence realignment which will be done over the next month.

“I don’t want to have a negative impact on the environment. Doing the FEP and making these small changes has made me think differently about the impact farming has on the environment. Getting it sorted has a positive benefit for both the farm and the environment.”



Scott Evans and Kain Harland with WIL environmental manager, Paul Reese.

Bucket-loads of enthusiasm for interns

By Tania Butterfield.

With buckets, a measuring beaker and mobile phone in hand, Beth Turner and Will Wright are armed and ready to tackle the day.

The university graduates were part of Environment Canterbury's summer internship programme, working with the Ashburton Zone Team, IrrigationNZ (INZ) and farming industry partners to launch a pilot project helping farmers identify areas of improvement on their farm.

INZ's "Check it – Bucket Test" application was launched toward the end of 2016 as a tool to calculate the efficiency of farm irrigation systems using data gathered from bucket tests.

Will and Beth said they saw the internship as a great opportunity to get a foot in the door and learn more about the regional council.

"Getting to know about the irrigation systems, it's becoming more second nature whereas before we'd see an irrigator and it was like looking at a foreign object," Beth said.

Will and Beth spent time with farmers asking about their irrigation systems such as the length of pivots, pressure flows and how much water they were wanting to apply and recording the data in the mobile app.

"Then with the bucket test, we measure and compare how much water they think they are putting on compared to how much they are actually putting on, and that can give them some idea of how efficient the system is and where they could improve," Beth said.

Environment Canterbury water infrastructure project leader, Dennis Jamieson, said



Beth Turner and Will Wright.

the pilot was a great start with around 150 farms being tested.

Environment Canterbury expects to offer summer internships again this year, he said.

"We will be aiming to build on the success of work this summer. It has been great having the students with a zone team to support operations and enable effective work with INZ and alongside numerous supportive industry partners," Dennis said.

And for any students thinking about applying for an internship next year, Will and Beth have some advice:

"In terms of networking, it has been pretty cool meeting people from within the industry," Will said.

"Just go for it! Don't be afraid. It's a good way to get started and put a foot forward while still having that support. It has been a fantastic experience," Beth said.

Getting sorted for new consent obligations

By Chelsea Halliwell.

This year, new environmental obligations are taking effect across Canterbury. First off the rank are farms in the Selwyn Waihora Zone, where farmers have received an information pack from Environment Canterbury outlining requirements for those needing a consent to farm.

Senior Manager Operational Support, Nadeine Domnisse, said the information

provides farmers the immediate support they need to identify and complete their 2017 consent obligations.

"We know that the majority of farmers in Selwyn are already taking good care of their land, because it makes good business sense, and are well on their way to receiving their resource consent to farm by the due date of 1 July," she said.

"For those who are not yet across the requirements, the information they received in

February helps them to get underway. It's not too late, but farmers will need to make a start on their Farm Environment Plan and nutrient budgets now in order to meet the deadline."

Environment Canterbury has teamed up with industry partners to offer support and a series of Selwyn workshops, as well as free pre-application sessions with consent planners.

For further information, please visit canterburywater.farm

Former New Zealand Cricket employee in the zone in new role

By Tania Butterfield.

It's a little over a year since Michaela Rees first began working as the Selwyn Waihora Zone Manager and she's excited about what her second year holds.

"I really want to be able to showcase the work that is being done in our zone – and not just by Environment Canterbury, but other organisations as well.

"Close to 400 farmers already have an action plan for improving the impact their farm has on the environment and we've contributed \$70,000 towards biodiversity projects in the past year.

"We've also been working closely with high country farmers to preserve areas with significant natural value.

"We're all in this together," she said.

It's an attitude she's maintained since taking on the Selwyn-based position which was established as part of a move by Environment Canterbury to implement on-the-ground actions to achieve the community's goals for water management.

Michaela traces her passion for the environment, and for Canterbury in particular, back to growing up on the outskirts of Kaiapoi.

Her best friend lived on a pig farm, and the duo would spend their spare time on outdoor adventures, discovering new places.

"I love being in the outdoors. Just the openness of it all – the imagination. As a kid, you could go anywhere. You'd wake up and it was what could you explore on the farm that day."

But working in the environment was never really something she pursued.

A natural athlete, Michaela completed a certificate in Sports and Recreation Centre Management, before landing her first full-time job as a lifeguard and swim coach at Rangiora and Kaiapoi pools.

"It was one of those things where I thought I want to start in a small centre and get the work experience, then move up into more of a leadership role. But when you're that young,

you don't really know what you want to do."

In the years following, it was a passion for events management, and specifically sports events management, that led Michaela to start her own business.

"I did that for a couple of years, then I realised I really couldn't work by myself – I needed to be in a team atmosphere. I just thought I need to be in a job with people otherwise I'll go crazy by myself. That's the hard thing about having your own business."

But as fate would have it, her dream job was just around the corner.

"I was having morning tea one day with some friends, and I said to them 'I think I'm going to get out of this' and they said 'Well what's your dream job? And I said 'Working for a sports organisation in Christchurch – but that does not exist'.

"But then I went home and looked on SEEK and saw New Zealand Cricket were hiring for an event manager in Christchurch. I couldn't believe it. I applied for it and got that. That was like a dream to me at that point – bringing sports and what I was good at, and interested in, together."

Michaela worked as the events and hospitality manager for New Zealand Cricket for four years. During that time, she was also contracted out to the International Cricket Council (ICC) for stints in both India and Sri Lanka.

"I really did think I'm going to be a 'lifer' [at New Zealand Cricket] because I really loved it."

She moved to Melbourne to work for the ICC as their lead for the Cricket World Cup 2015, but ultimately home was where the heart was.



Michaela Rees.

"I wanted to come back to Christchurch. I love living in Christchurch and being in Canterbury and I really think the outdoorsy stuff is just so easy here and I had really missed all that."

"Looking for jobs. I wanted to do something different.

"Environment Canterbury was looking at these zone manager roles in a very different way. There's a lot of technical knowledge already in the organisation, but they were now thinking about how to get people in who can look at things differently."

And so far, the position is working out well.

"I'm passionate about the Selwyn Waihora zone and for us as a team to get in there and get stuff done. Ideally I'll stay involved as long as I'm allowed."

"It doesn't matter how long you're involved, as long as when you're involved, you're passionate about it and trying to make a change."

So what does the ultimate success look like for Michaela and the Selwyn Waihora Zone Team?

"If I think about our team, my goal is for us to be as open as possible – that people think of us as a team to come to for advice, and that we've added some value to their lives. Even if we're going on site to do monitoring or one-on-one visits, or checking on a biodiversity project – during that time, my goal is to ensure we've added value," she said.



Farmers discuss irrigation efficiency at a field day in Cheviot.

Cheviot irrigators' group is ground-breaking

By Penny Wardle.

Members of a new Cheviot Irrigators' Group who complete farm environment plans will not require a resource consent to farm.

Chairman Robb Macbeth said the group was farmer-led but worked under an Environment Canterbury-approved Environmental Management Strategy. Members must complete a Farm Environment Plan, nutrient budget and commit to independent auditing of progress towards achieving environmental goals.

Membership was voluntary but farmers who chose not to join would probably spend more time and money on compliance, Mr Macbeth said. For them farming would not be a permitted activity, so they must apply for a resource consent.

Thirty farms are eligible to join, in the lower Waiau, lower Hurunui and Jed catchments where properties hold consents to pump river and groundwater outside any irrigation scheme.

Operating within Environment Canterbury rules would pave the way to influencing any revisions of the Hurunui and Waiau River Regional Plan which set objectives, policies and rules for water use in the area, Mr Macbeth said.

"It is also better to work as a group when engaging with regulators," he says.

Irrigation New Zealand national projects manager Steve Breneger described the group as ground-breaking.

"This is an opportunity to own your own process," he said. "You have two to three years to do this or you may lose the privilege and regulators will step in."

Farm Environment Plan auditors would follow up on whether good management practices were being achieved on members' farms, said Mr Breneger at a Cheviot Irrigators' Group field day. For example, when asked, "have you undergone training in irrigation?" they must be able to show a pathway to gaining knowledge.

"It will not be enough to claim, 'I talked to my neighbour who irrigates every Tuesday and grows good crops'. The public want confidence that all irrigation systems are informed, monitored and measured."

Farmers and the environment would benefit from efficient use of water. For example, turning irrigators on later in the season and off earlier would save operating costs as well as water, Mr Breneger said.

Environment Canterbury senior land management advisor, Michael Bennett, said auditors would need proof of good practice such as regular servicing of irrigation machinery, understanding of key concepts and carry-through into management.

Irrigators' group farm audits should be halfway through by November this year and completed by late 2018, Mr Bennett said. Top farms would be given A grades and not re-

visited for four years. Those making progress would be graded B and the rest C or D, with annual audits required.

"At the end of the day it will be in farmers' best interests to be an A rather than a D," Mr Bennett said. "The audit is an opportunity to present your farm positively."

IRRIGATION RELICS A REMINDER OF SIMPLER DAYS

Irrigation pipes lying under farm shelter-belts are evidence the Cheviot area has been irrigated since the 1950s and 60s.

"These systems were hardly more sophisticated than hoses," says Cheviot Irrigators' Group member Ben Ensor.

Spilling water pumped from springs and aquifers onto home paddocks, relic pumps and pipes were a reminder of simpler days when there was no such thing as a resource consent.

The last five to ten years had seen more sophisticated systems built, initially by settlers from water-short areas attracted to the Waiau-Hurunui district by its relatively untapped rivers, streams and aquifers.

Today the Cheviot area was a healthy mix of dryland and irrigated sheep and beef farming, cropping, six dairy farms, vegetable growing and viticulture, Mr Ensor said. This variety was good for the community, creating income and more jobs.