



**FEDERATED
FARMERS**
OF NEW ZEALAND

Backing Kiwi Farmers

A five-point plan to double farm productivity, cut costs and improve the environment



Foreword from President

Wayne Langford

As a sixth-generation dairy farmer from Golden Bay, I'm fortunate to have spent my entire life living, working and raising a family in rural New Zealand.

Like most farmers, I've seen good times and bad, drought and flood, political cycles, boom and bust – but I've also seen what we can achieve when we're given the right conditions.

When Federated Farmers released its list of election priorities in 2023, it was set against a backdrop of record-low farmer confidence, high costs, and unworkable regulation.

Three years later that landscape has largely changed. Costs are still high, and some regulation still niggles, but rural communities are feeling a lot more positive about the future.

That's why Federated Farmers is shifting focus and launching **Backing Kiwi Farmers**, a five-point plan to **double farm productivity, cut costs, and improve the environment**.

This isn't just another list of political asks. It's a clear, practical roadmap built by farmers, for farmers – and for the good of all New Zealanders.

Farming contributes tens of billions to the economy, supports regional communities, and feeds millions of people both here and across the world.

Yet too often we've been held back by needless bureaucracy, contradictory rules, and short-sighted decisions that favour ideology over results.

This document is all about making sure farmers have the right regulatory settings to improve our profitability, increase exports, and grow the economy.

Our five-point plan is available for any political party willing to work with us this election to unlock the full potential of rural New Zealand.

This includes smarter rules to reduce the cost of farming, supporting flexible land use to grow incomes, and better use of technology and infrastructure to improve productivity.

We also have a real focus on getting local government reform right, empowering grassroots community conservation, and supporting the next generation of farmers.

Federated Farmers wants to double farm productivity, because a stronger, more profitable farming sector means more jobs, more exports, and thriving rural communities.

It is possible to cut unnecessary costs and deliver real environmental gains at the same time – but it can't be done from the top down.

It must be driven from the grassroots through innovation, local knowledge, good management, and trusting farmers are stewards who live and breathe these landscapes every day.

Farmers are problem-solvers by nature. Give us the tools, get out of the way, and we will deliver a stronger, more productive New Zealand for future generations.

Wayne Langford
President of Federated Farmers

Federated Farmers' policy priorities for the next Government

Cut the cost of farming	Enable technology & infrastructure	Empower community conservation	Support young farmers	Fix local government
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Create 10 new permitted activity standards for farming → Guarantee flexible land use in every region → Stop incentivising whole-farm conversions to permanent carbon forestry → Use farm plans to replace resource consents → Introduce no new taxes for farmers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Streamline access to new technologies → Rebalance EPA resources toward new approvals and product innovation → Provide seed funding for new water storage projects → Establish national standards for on-farm water storage → Establish national standards for small- and medium-scale solar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Use 100% of International Visitor Levy funding for conservation and tourism projects → Allocate a 10-year funding stream to control wilding pines → Permanently double funding for the QEII National Trust → Restore grazing to 500,000ha of Department of Conservation land → Ensure coordinated pest control across public and private land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Support practical and industry-led vocational training → Build practical industry experience, work-based learning and apprenticeship pathways into vocational education → Empower rural schools to teach agriculture → Review the Sharemilking Agreements Act → Include agricultural and horticultural science within the year 0-10 science curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Establish a single layer of local Government → Separate provincial areas from major cities → Remove the need for cultural impact assessments → Ensure fair compensation for overlays, like outstanding natural landscapes and significant natural areas → Remove the ability for councils to commit to joint decision-making with unelected groups



Priority 1

Cut the cost of farming

10 national standards to cut the cost of food

High cost of living is the biggest issue currently facing Kiwi families, driven largely by rising food prices.

It doesn't have to be this way – we're a great food producing nation.

Our food isn't expensive because of a shortage of land, a poor climate or growing conditions. It's expensive because we tie our food producers up in poor regulation and endless red tape.

Unworkable resource management rules make it almost impossible for farmers and growers to change land use or invest in infrastructure like water storage. It's just too hard.

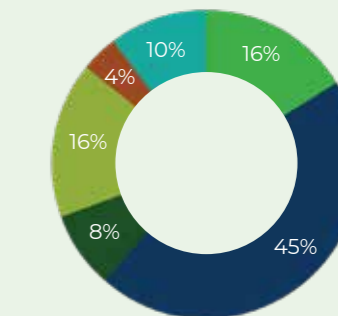
If the next Government really wants to reduce food prices for families, it needs to drastically reduce the need for expensive and uncertain resource consents.

The best way to do this is through simple and easy-to-apply national standards that permit everyday farming activities without the need to jump through hoops.

Within its first year in office, the next Government needs to deliver 10 national permitted activity standards for:

1. Farm Plans
2. Vegetable growing
3. On-farm water storage
4. Gravel extraction
5. Drain maintenance
6. Effluent management
7. Fertiliser application
8. Farm quarries
9. Wetland restoration
10. Small and medium-scale solar

What should the Government's priority be when it comes to farming?



Public poll of 1,000 people. May 2026.

Support flexible land use in every region

New Zealand's largest export sector is dairy, but it hasn't always been that way. In 1990 it was red meat; in 1960 it was wool.

Federated Farmers doesn't know what our largest export sector will be in 30 years' time – but neither does the Government, media or local councils.

Consumer preferences, markets, technology and the weather patterns will all change over time. It's important farmers and growers are able to change with them.

Changing land use has always been part of New Zealand's farming story and, in many ways, it has been the key to our success. Farmers will always adapt to new opportunities.

Unfortunately, the current resource consent rules make it incredibly difficult to change land use. Farmers are locked into a particular type of farming, which drives up the price of food.

The new resource management system must allow farmers to choose what they want to farm without the need for a resource consent.

Stop artificially incentivising whole-farm conversions to forestry

Farmers respond to incentives, but right now the incentives are all wrong. The Emissions Trading Scheme is pushing farmers away from food production and into carbon farming.

Some positive changes have been made in recent years, but major flaws in our climate policy still incentivise landowners to cover our hills in pine trees rather than productive livestock.

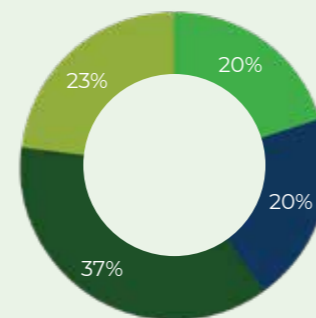
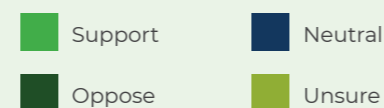
We are still losing tens of thousands of hectares of good hill country each year, which will likely never return to productive farmland. The consequences for New Zealand will be severe.

We're already seeing the impact of reduced populations for our rural communities, which are struggling to keep school buses, sports clubs and local shops running.

There are serious implications for our red meat sector too, with very real reductions in breeding stock, and in stock available for processing.

The Government needs to take a more strategic approach to food production and stop artificially incentivising conversions to forestry.

Do you support the Government providing carbon credits for conversions of farmland to forestry?



Public poll of 1,000 people. May 2026.

To double productivity and reduce food costs, the next Government needs to:

- guarantee flexible land use in every region
- stop incentivising whole-farm conversions to permanent carbon forestry.

Replace resource consents with farm plans

Farm plans can be a practical tool to help reduce the cost of farming, food production and environmental improvements – but only if they're done right.

Any farm planning system needs to be a one-stop shop that actually reduces a farmer's regulatory burden. That means replacing existing rules, rather than piling new ones on top.

There's no reason a farm plan can't be the primary compliance tool for farmers, replacing overlapping rules, duplicated requirements and expensive resource consents.

We are concerned that what began as a good idea risks being derailed. If farm plans just add more red tape rather than replace it, they won't be supported by farmers.

Federated Farmers has four firm bottom lines when it comes to farm plans:

1. They should replace regulation, not add to it.
2. They should be proportionate, practical and scale to risk.
3. They should be auditable, but not every plan should be audited.
4. Existing farm plans should be recognised.

No new taxes

Farmers pay significant amounts of tax, so it's no surprise that whenever we poll our members, concerns about tax sit near the top of the list.

Between income tax, GST and council rates, there's no shortage of tax dollars flowing out of farming businesses – often for services or infrastructure that never reach rural communities.

Yet every election we find ourselves responding to proposals that unfairly target farming: methane taxes, water taxes, wealth taxes, land taxes, or capital gains taxes. The constant threat of new taxes completely undermines farmers' confidence to invest in our businesses to increase productivity, efficiency and sustainability.

New taxes on farming will achieve little more than increasing the cost of food, undermining the viability of rural communities and reducing New Zealand's export income.

To cut the cost of farming and food production, the next Government needs to:

- replace resource consents with farm plans
- commit to no new taxes on farming.



Priority 2

Enable technology & infrastructure

Streamline access to new technologies

New Zealand farmers have always been quick to adopt new technology to cut costs or grow productivity – it's our number 8 wire mentality.

In the past it was the use of electric fences and artificial insemination, but today it looks more like the rapid adoption of virtual fencing and wearable collars to improve farm management.

When new tools become available – whether that's technology, chemicals, cultivars or techniques – farmers want to move fast to maintain our competitive edge.

Unfortunately, Government approvals and regulation don't always move at the same pace, and that comes at a very real cost.

Too often Kiwi farmers are unable to access the same tools available to our overseas competitors because our domestic approval system is too slow, complex and cumbersome.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has been a constant thorn in farmers' sides, putting up needless barriers instead of enabling innovation. Reform is long overdue.

The recommendations of the agricultural and horticultural products regulatory review are a step in the right direction, but more work needs to be done.

To ensure Kiwi farmers have access to the tools we need, when we need them, the next Government needs to:

- implement the recommendations of the recent regulatory review
- rebalance EPA resources toward new approvals and product innovation
- streamline new chemical approval processes with clear performance targets.

Provide seed funding for new water storage projects

Water storage is a strategic enabler of growth for New Zealand's primary sector, unlocking significant economic opportunities for farmers and rural communities.

Access to water can help farmers increase production, build resilience, or open up new opportunities to shift land use to grow a more profitable crop.

A new irrigation scheme can add hundreds of millions of dollars to the local economy of small rural communities, grow exports, and support farming families.

For example, the Central Plains irrigation scheme generated \$400 million for Canterbury's GDP in 2025 and supports more than 2200 fulltime jobs.

Once up and running, water storage is easily self-funded by water users, but there are significant risks associated with the early stages of new projects.

Uncertain resource consenting processes mean it's often hard to secure private sector investors to fund projects in the beginning.

That's why Government support in the form of seed funding is so important to get projects off the ground and keep our economy growing.

Establish national standards for on-farm water storage

On-farm water storage presents a significant opportunity for farmers – and it doesn't always require large-scale investment.

In 2025 the Government consulted on a national permitted activity standard that would make it easier for farmers to build their own on-farm water storage to increase productivity.

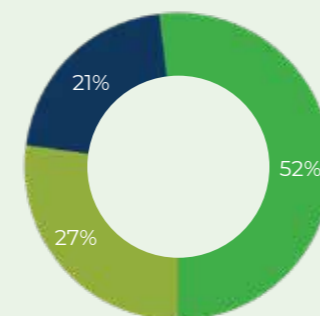
A commitment was made to make on-farm water storage a permitted activity, but this commitment has not yet been delivered.

To enable more water storage and grow productivity, the next Government needs to:

- provide seed funding for a series of new water storage projects
- fast-track approvals for new water storage projects
- deliver RMA reform that better enables community water storage and managed aquifer recharge
- develop a national standard for on-farm water storage.

Do you think the Government should enable more water storage for the irrigation of farmland?

■ Yes ■ No
■ Unsure



Public poll of 1,000 people. May 2026.

Unleash the potential of solar energy

Solar energy presents a unique opportunity for farmers and rural communities to cut costs, increase resilience, improve environmental outcomes, and even diversify income streams.

Rising prices for fuel and electricity have seen what was once considered an environmental niche quickly become a mainstream option. The economics now make sense and there is huge demand.

Solar isn't just an opportunity for rural communities; it's a huge opportunity for New Zealand Inc. On-farm solar could effectively become the country's largest and most sustainable power plant.

Establish national standards for small- and medium-scale solar

Solar technology has moved quickly, but unfortunately the regulatory system hasn't kept pace – and that's become a huge point of frustration for farmers.

Farmers investing in solar often face expensive, unnecessary and unjustified resource consenting costs that could easily be avoided.

Establishing a national standard for small-scale to medium-scale solar arrays would go a long way in reducing consenting costs and other headaches for farmers.

Level the electricity playing field

Another concern for many farmers who have installed solar is the difficulty they face selling electricity back into the grid at a fair price. To put it bluntly, they're getting a raw deal. Power companies pay farmers only a fraction of the price they later sell that electricity for, while pocketing the difference.

The Electricity Authority has recently looked into rules that would allow solar panel owners to have multiple trading relationships. That would mean a farmer could sell surplus electricity to the highest bidder, rather than being locked into selling it back only to the company supplying power to the farm.

Meanwhile, peer-to-peer trading would allow farmers to sell electricity directly to other buyers – or even between different parts of their operation if their property has multiple grid connections.

Allowing multiple trading relationships and peer-to-peer trading would also improve the returns from on-farm solar investment.

To unleash the power of solar energy in rural New Zealand, the next Government needs to:

- develop a national standard for small- and medium-scale solar investment
- progress code changes to enable multiple trading relationships and peer-to-peer trading.



Priority 3

Empower community conservation



Permanently double funding for the QEII National Trust

The QEII Trust is a charity that partners with private landowners to permanently protect native bush and wetlands through legally binding open space covenants.

Founded in 1977, the trust now has over 5,300 covenants registered, covering over 180,000 hectares – an area equivalent in size to an average national park.

Unfortunately, QEII suffers from insufficient and insecure funding. This has severely reduced the number of new covenants it can help create, despite huge demand from landowners.

While funding boosts have been given in the past, these have tended to be short-term commitments, leaving the organisation in a constant state of funding uncertainty.

This is incredibly shortsighted – and we think it's disgraceful. Supporting QEII is the best bang-for-buck conservation the Government could ever fund because farmers carry most of the cost.

It's also much cheaper and easier to protect existing areas of native biodiversity in rural New Zealand than trying to create new ones from scratch.

The QEII Trust's annual baseline funding should be increased from \$4.3 million to \$8.6 million.

Use all International Visitor Levy revenue on conservation and tourism projects

Community groups have long been the driving force behind conservation efforts across New Zealand, but their work is being hampered by insecure and insufficient funding.

Grassroots conservation projects that truly make a difference, like catchment groups and the QEII Trust, are severely underfunded – but it doesn't have to be this way.

In 2019, the Government introduced an International Visitor Levy (IVL) to fund conservation and infrastructure used for tourism. This levy raises \$240 million each year.

Unfortunately, only \$55 million of that is actually spent on conservation projects, and only \$35 million on infrastructure projects.

The remaining \$139 million effectively goes into the general government coffers, diverted and swapped out to cover baseline funding for DOC and MBIE.

The Government must commit to investing 100% of the IVL money into its intended purpose, which is to fund tourism and conservation projects like controlling wilding pines.



Get on top of exploding pest numbers

We have a serious pest problem in New Zealand, with deer, pig, goat and wallaby numbers rising at an alarming rate.

The Ministry for Primary Industries estimates there are now more than 1.8 million feral deer. Unless we act very quickly, we're going to lose the battle.

Pest control and lost production are costing farmers almost a quarter of a billion dollars each year, yet successive Governments have done little to address the problem.

Things are now at crisis point. Recreational hunters are a great tool, but they alone are not the solution. We need a much more coordinated and strategic approach to pest management.

The Government has a major role to play in this, including more funding to control pests in the Department of Conservation estate and other public land.

Properly fund wilding pine control

New Zealand's iconic landscapes are under threat and the battle against wilding conifers is being lost, particularly in the South Island.

It's no exaggeration to describe this as an ecological crisis. Wilding pines are overrunning productive farmland and ruining our unique native biodiversity.

Recent funding increases have been warmly welcomed and will make a big dent in the problem, but what's urgently needed is sustained long-term funding.

Federated Farmers is calling for the next Government to take a long-term strategic approach and allocate a 10-year funding stream to control wilding pines.

Manage pests and weeds through managed grazing

Vast areas of land have been retired from grazing by the Department of Conservation in recent decades, through large-scale tenure review and land purchases.

Unfortunately, when that grazing stopped, so did the constant human presence that had kept pests, weeds and erosion under control.

If you take stock out completely, you don't get an untouched alpine paradise; you often get more weeds, more fuel for fire, and less diversity.

Most of that once-pristine land is now in much worse shape than when it was actively farmed, creating huge costs for the taxpayer to manage it. It makes no sense.

Low-impact farming should be returned to public land through grazing leases to help grow the economy and control weeds and pests.

To empower community conservation, the next Government needs to:

- use 100% of the International Visitor Levy money on conservation and tourism projects
- allocate a 10-year funding stream for wilding pines
- permanently double funding for the QEII Trust
- return 500,000 hectares of DOC land to grazing leases
- formally recognise managed grazing as an essential conservation tool.

Priority 4

Support young farmers



Empower schools to teach agriculture

The future of farming in New Zealand requires clear pathways for the next generation of farmers – and that starts in the classroom. The new school curriculum needs to empower rural schools.

It's incredibly positive that the Government has walked away from proposals to cut agricultural and horticultural science as standalone subjects in the secondary school curriculum.

But the new draft year 0–10 science curriculum is completely silent on agricultural and horticultural science, despite these industries being the backbone of our economy.

Year 0–10 science is an opportunity to engage young people in these topics and help all Kiwi kids understand where their food comes from.

Make sure vocational training is practical and industry-led

Farmers need access to a skilled workforce to run their businesses, but too often vocational training has become disconnected from what the industry actually needs.

The vocational education system has been through significant structural change in recent years, with a new industry-led training establishment in development.

This presents a prime opportunity for farmers, growers and the wider primary sector to help shape the future direction of vocational education.

Federated Farmers has consistently advocated for practical, industry-connected and regionally delivered vocational training to help meet our workforce needs.

We must get this right to ensure we have a strong pipeline of future talent for the primary sector.

Review the Sharemilking Agreements Act

Sharemilking is a critical progression pathway for Kiwi dairy farmers, but the Sharemilking Agreements Act hasn't been updated since 1985.

A lot has changed in the last 40 years, including the emergence of contract milking as a popular business model for young farmers taking their first step into self-employment.

Unfortunately, the current legislation hasn't kept pace with the industry and doesn't include specific protections for contract milkers.

Federated Farmers wants to see this reviewed to modernise our dairy sector, protect young farmers, and reduce legal disputes between contract milkers and farm owners.

To secure the future of farming, the next Government needs to:

- include agricultural and horticultural science within the year 0–10 science curriculum
- ensure industry-led vocational training standards and delivery
- build practical industry experience, work-based learning and apprenticeship pathways into vocational education
- review the Sharemilking Agreements Act.

Priority 5

Fix local Government

Remove the need for cultural impact assessments

Requiring farmers to obtain cultural impact assessments for basic farming activities adds unnecessary cost, complexity, uncertainty and delays.

These kinds of rules can be impractical, excessive and totally unworkable – yet the RMA allows councils to assess resource consents against a wide range of cultural values.

Federated Farmers has no issue with cultural values being considered at the appropriate level, but the definition is clearly too broad if it's capturing minor and low-risk activities at the farm level.

We're also concerned the RMA definition of an 'effect' can include spiritual effects. Environmental law needs to be strictly limited to the physical environment.

Councils shouldn't be assessing consents against things like mauri (life force), wairua (spiritual connections), whakapapa (relationships between all life forms), or atua (deities).

Unfortunately, instead of narrowing the scope of these requirements, the legislation drafted to replace the RMA currently repeats this same mistake.

Ensure fair compensation for overlays

Under our current resource management laws, councils can place overlays on farmers' private property, which restrict what they can do with their own land.

These overlays include Outstanding Natural Landscapes, Significant Natural Areas, and Sites and Areas of Significance to Māori.

The Government has committed to ensuring farmers are compensated for loss of land value from restrictive overlays, and the new Planning Bill provides a pathway for this.

However, the inclusion of a 'significant impact on the reasonable use of land' test creates needless uncertainty for both farmers and councils.

This test needs to be removed entirely or clarified with clear national direction to ensure fair compensation for overlay restrictions placed on farmers' private property.

Protect local democracy

Federated Farmers is a strong supporter of local democracy, where important decisions for the community are made by elected officials who the public can vote in or vote out.

We are concerned about the increasing number of agreements between councils and iwi that allow for co-governance or co-management of natural resources.

Under the current RMA, local councils can form Joint Management Agreements and Mana Whakahono ā Rohe agreements with iwi.

This can mean co-governance of waterways, joint decision-making on notified resource consent applications, and even joint decision-making on RMA planning documents.

We're all for councils and iwi working together constructively and having good relationships – but there need to be clear boundaries and limits.

Some of these agreements are going beyond consultation and handing significant decision-making power to people who aren't democratically accountable to their community.

We are concerned that future councils could find themselves bound by agreements they didn't negotiate and can't get out of.

If a future council or community decides an agreement isn't working for them, they may have very limited ability to change it.

Establish unitary councils

New Zealand's local government system is badly broken, with sky-rocketing rates bills, reduced services, and communities quickly losing confidence in their local council's decision-making.

For farmers to succeed, we need local councils that are well set up to effectively deliver our roads, flood protection schemes, civil defence, and planning for population growth.

That's why Federated Farmers welcomes the major reforms currently underway – but it's important the end result is a system that works better for farmers than the current one.

The number and type of councils – and the logic behind their boundaries – can really make or break their ability to deliver quality services at a reasonable cost.

We think the best option is a unitary council model, with councils based on strong communities of interest that separate provincial areas from major cities.

Metropolitan councils should be established for urban centres with populations of over 50,000 people. Provincial councils could be created by consolidating provincial district councils.

For example, separate unitary councils should be put in place for Wairarapa and urban Wellington, and rural Canterbury and Christchurch city.

It's important that representation is based on genuine communities of interest, recognising that

the services urban communities need are very different from those in the provinces.

A stocktake and redistribution of current local government functions would also ensure councils are both more effective and accountable to their ratepayers.

Federated Farmers will strongly oppose the formation of new unitary councils if they cover super-regions, where major cities like Hamilton, Christchurch and Wellington dominate rural communities.

To increase farm productivity, cut costs and improve the environment, the next Government needs to:

- establish a single layer of local government, based on genuine communities of interest
- remove the ability for councils to commit to joint decision-making with unelected groups
- remove the ability of councils to require cultural impact assessments
- narrow the scope of the resource management system to ensure farm activities aren't subject to cultural impact assessments
- ensure fair compensation for overlays, either through legislative change or national direction.





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