

Secure the future of your farm with a property plan

Introduction

Taranaki farmers - here is an opportunity to secure the future of the farm, in more ways than one.

Research shows that there are limits to the ability of our land to sustain some farming practices. Steeper slopes in the eastern hill country are susceptible to soil loss by erosion when protective tree cover is removed or when pasture cover is depleted. Unstable pastoral land does not retain topsoil - and is therefore unable to sustain high levels of sheep and beef production.

In the frontal hill country and on the ringplain, the countryside is not so steep, but different problems exist. On the banks of rivers and streams, where tree and shrub vegetation has been removed, bank erosion and poor water quality often result. Where boggy ground has been drained for pasture development, soil can be pugged by heavy grazing in winter, depressing pasture growth in spring.

On sandy coastal soils, gales, salt spray and grazing pressure deplete grass cover, causing sand blows which bury good pasture to windward.

There are potential solutions to these issues, that the Taranaki Regional Council invites landowners to consider. The Council offers a wide range of advice on how land can continue to be farmed in a sustainable way. Because this service has been developed as part of the Council's legal requirement to promote the sustainable management of natural and physical resources, it is offered at no cost to the landowner.

Different plans for different needs

Using this service, property owners can ask the Council to develop any one of four plans that best meets individual requirements:

Conservation plans aim to deal with individual, site-specific problems that do not require long-term input and planning activity. Examples include gully stabilisation, advice on shelter belts, and sand drift control.

Riparian plans promote the retirement of land along the banks of rivers and streams, with the aim of enhancing water quality.



The Council's property plans promote sustainable land management.

Agroforestry plans make recommendations for commercial afforestation on a property, while working within the farm's physical and financial constraints.

Comprehensive farm plans look at all facets of a farm's operation to promote control of soil erosion and sustainable land management. If forestry is seen as part of the property's future viability, this plan also includes an agroforestry plan.

Separate one-page information sheets summarise exactly what each plan contains. Reading them will help decide which kind of plan best meets individual needs.

Commissioning a plan

When a landowner expresses interest in having a plan, one of the Council's Land Management Officers will visit the farm. The type of plan prepared is usually determined by consultation, to make sure it is suitable for the property, and will be feasible for the owner to implement. The Land Management Officer will thoroughly view the property, draw up a draft plan, and review it with the owner so that it can be fine-tuned to his/her requirements. A final version, incorporating a map and photographs of the property, will be bound between covers and delivered.

Follow-up service

Once a plan has been delivered, it is up to the landowner to implement it, as plans are prepared in close consultation with owners, and structured around their long-term aspirations for the property.

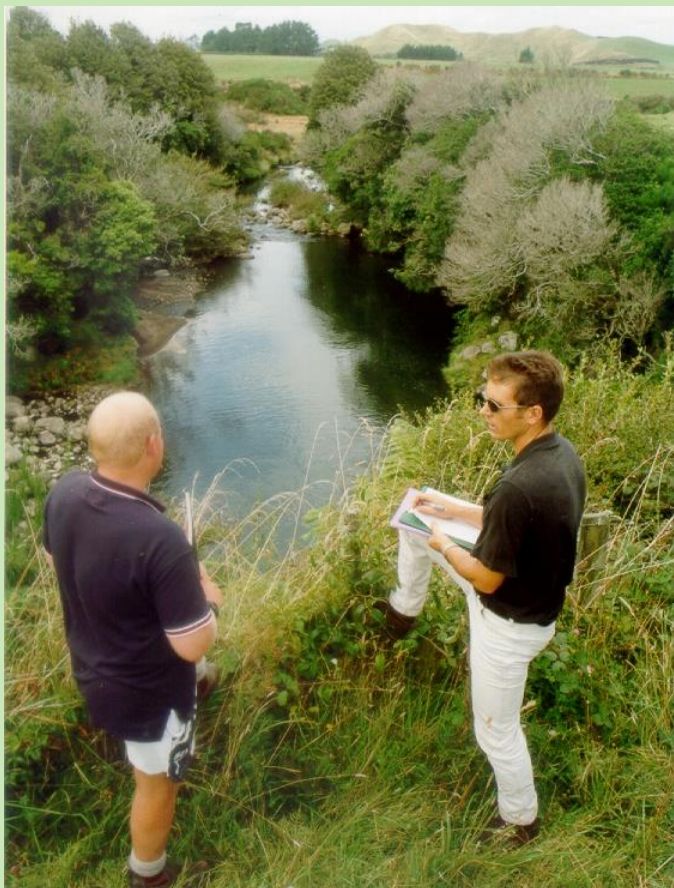
Implementation of soil conservation measures on the ground is however, often slower than initially proposed. The reasons are usually a drop in farm income due to low product prices, or unexpectedly high expenditure on some item in a particular year. The delay is not a problem, so long as a plan's works programme gets implemented eventually.

The plan, bound between covers, is just a start. The actual work has to be done on the ground. To help with this, a Land Management Officer will be assigned to assist the landholder implement the plan by providing advice and assistance on a regular and as-requested basis. This will include seasonal activities such as checking condition of plantings carried out the previous winter; advising on any problems that need fixing; discussing what the farmer needs for next seasons planting program; organising supply of poles and seedlings; providing contacts with planting gangs; and formulating work programmes.

A word about land use capability

Land use capability (LUC) is a mapping technique used by Council staff when preparing a comprehensive farm plan or an agroforestry plan. It is an assessment of the versatility of a property for sustained agricultural production, taking into account physical limitations of the land, management requirements and soil conservation needs.

There are eight LUC classes - represented by Roman numerals - that rank the suitability of land. Under this ranking, land classes I to IV are suitable for arable use and may also be suitable for pastoral or forestry use, while classes V to VII are suitable for pastoral or forestry use. Class VIII is unsuitable for productive agriculture or forestry use and therefore requires permanent protection.



A Council Land Management Officer discussing a plan with the landowner

For conservation plans and riparian plans, LUC does not need to be mapped, though quick visual appraisal of LUC along a riverbank or in a problem area often helps Council staff decide what soil conservation measures will be an appropriate solution.

An invitation to participate

Advice, information and advocacy are the methods the Taranaki Regional Council uses to promote sustainable land use, and to encourage changes in management so that it does not adversely affect soil and water resources.

Conservation plans, riparian plans, agroforestry plans and comprehensive farm plans are ways Council staff can help farmers determine soil conservation measures and farm management techniques that will maximise farm production and minimise damage to the environment.



Taranaki Regional Council

Land Management Section
47 Cloten Road, Stratford
Email: hillcountry@trc.govt.nz
Ph: 06 765 7127, www.trc.govt.nz