

## FarmCheck: Polytechnic partnership set help promote a third of NZ's exports

**Dr Samuel Mann**  
Otago Polytechnic  
Dunedin, New Zealand  
smann@tekotago.ac.nz

**Ian Brown**  
Otago Regional Council

FarmCheck is a computer program developed by the authors that forms part of a drive to provide environmental assurance for the New Zealand Dairy industry.

New Zealand has long prided itself on its clean green image: it is a key marketing tool in almost all primary industry marketing programmes. In recent years however, there have been an increasing number of questions raised as to how clean and green NZ really is. Over many years the dairy industry has invested heavily in research aimed at improving on-farm environmental performance, and encouraged farmers to put in place systems that assure a clean environment produces a safe product. Market Focus is the new industry mechanism to deliver that assurance.

Two years ago an industry group led by the Dairy Research Institute set about to develop an environmental management system that could be used by all dairy farmers throughout New Zealand. The group which is funded through a Ministry for Environment sustainable management fund grant, includes representatives of the Dairy Board, NZ Dairy Group, Kiwi Dairies, Dexcel Consulting Officers, the Waikato EQUALS programme and the Otago Regional Council.

Market Focused is an environmental management system that has been developed for use by dairy farmers throughout New Zealand and provides a systematic approach to on-farm risk management.

Market Focused is a means of putting substance to the words. It puts the farmer in a stronger position enabling them to demonstrate that they are farming in a responsible manner, to "walk the talk" as Owen Symmans argues.

Market Focused is a two module system. Allowing a two module approach provides farmers with some flexibility to "move" into a quality assurance approach, recognising that some progress is better

than no progress.

**Module One** allows the industry policies and guidelines to be implemented in conjunction with the significant activities that are specific to individual farmers and their farms.

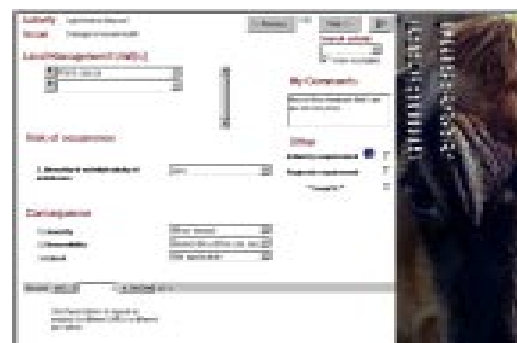
**Module Two** is a progression for those farmers who have completed Module One, and/or are looking for a more comprehensive identification and analysis of individual farm environmental issues. In this regard Module Two is very similar in content and approach to Enviro-Ag (Mann and Brown 2000).

A major component of Module Two is FarmCheck, a computer program developed in partnership with Otago Polytechnic (Figures 1 and 2). It is an auditable system of assessing the inputs of activities and identifying management.

In the short term it will not be compulsory for dairy farmers to have a Market Focused plan. Industry quality assurance manuals strongly encourage farmers to responsibly manage their environment. Market Focused is to be promoted by the industry as a flexible means of doing this, although it is flexible and some farmers may come up with their own system that achieves the same objectives. In the medium term it is highly likely that environmental quality assurance will become compulsory for dairy suppliers in the same way as animal welfare and product quality matters have.

### References

- Mann, S. Brown, I. (2000)** *Working with Farmers: A Practical System for Proving and Improving Environmental Management* *Environmental Perspectives Journal* (22) 4-6
- Symmans, O. (2001)** Dairy Board Manager of Industry Relations Reported in "Dairy Industry advised about environment" Otago Daily Times 29/05/01 <http://www.odt.co.nz>



**Figure 1: The core of FarmCheck is the assessment of potential issues derived from the farming activities.**