The Guardians of the Ruakituri

Integrated Farm Planning Project 22022 Milestone 8

Wrap Up of Project 02-03-2026

Project Overview - Ruakituri Baseline Data

23,000 Hectare Wilderness Zone

26,000 Hectares Farmed

70% of Area in Maori Ownership

21 Farming Groups in the Project

Predominantly Sheep + Beef

The outputs of this project exceeded expectations thanks to a significant improvement in the project delivery format, from workshop-based Integrated Farm Plan development where each farmer would need to develop their own plan, to a tailored one-on-one plan development supported by peer learning events. Delivery continued despite interruptions, including the community being isolated due to damage to the Te Reinga Bridge, and farmers needing to prioritise recovery from the 2022 rain events and Cyclones Hale and Gabrielle in early 2023. Even in this context, participation in the project remained exceptionally high. Overall, the project delivered significant value and demonstrated a strong value proposition, while the community events were an important opportunity for connection and time off farm.

The below table demonstrates our lessons learned, when it comes to project delivery:

Workshops	
Pros • Great environment for group learning • Single subjects can be communicated to a large audience • Cost effective way to bring in experts and speakers • Ability to bring a number of support services together for the community to access	**Cons** • Broad information adds less value • May not result in completed Plans • Requires a large investment of farmers' time to complete the full programme • Risk of losing farmer participation if value for time is not seen • Designing individual workshops has a lot of work behind the scenes
Farm Planning Visit + Group Learning	
Pros • Farmers will complete the programme with an individualised, action focused Plan • Farmers get more time with experts to ask questions in a private setting • Planner gets to know the farmers' strengths and challenges • The same template can be used for each visit, releasing budget to individualise plans • Farmer-to-farmer learning is known to be the most effective extension tool • Ability to focus on particular subjects and skim past others	**Cons** • Covering a large number of subjects with a business in one visit could be overwhelming To minimise this: • pre-work will be completed to reduce content covered • the discussion will be catered to the farmers understanding and interests

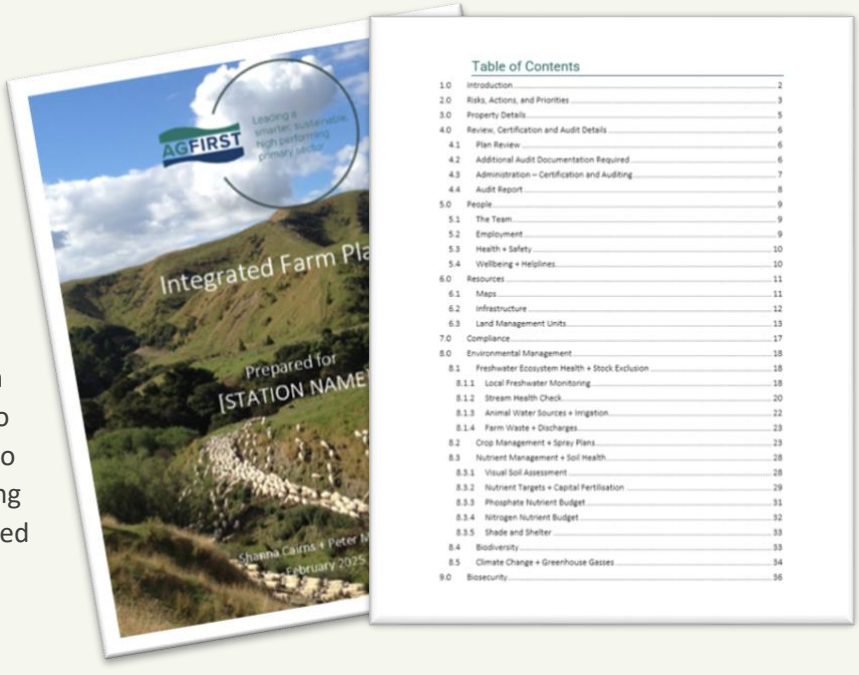
Measure	Original Target	Achieved
Farm Participation	19 (90% of the 21 farms participating in ongoing workshops)	19 (farms with completed Integrated Farm Plans and mapping)
Mitigation Stock Take	100%	100% All IFPs contain action plans
LUC Mapping Training	Yr 1: 5, Yr 2: 5	Simon Stokes ran LUC training courses separate to the project that HBRC staff attended
LUC Mapping of Catchment	90%	90% of sheep and beef farms
Number of IFP Modules per Farm	3	11 – across People, Environment, Biosecurity + Mapping
Final Deliverable	Overall Catchment Plan	Catchment Plan/Report suitable for Govt and promotional use (to be delivered after final plans completed) Data summaries Action summaries
Media	3/yr	3/yr (2023, 2024) The change in delivery model resulted in fewer media opportunities

Project Overview - Deliverables

The below table outlines the breadth of content covered in the IFP modules and how many have been completed during the Guardians of the Ruakituri Integrated Farm Planning Project:

		Completed	In Final Stages of Development	Total IFPs completed
IFP Section	**Module**	**To M-08**	**2026**	**Within Project**
People	H&S	16	3	19
Environment	Farm Infrastructure	16	3	19
	Natural Resources Information	16	3	19
	Land + Freshwater Management Plan	16	3	19
	Stock Exclusion	16	3	19
	Management of Crops + Winter Grazing	16	3	19
	Nutrient Management + Soil Health	16	3	19
	Indigenous Biodiversity	16	3	19
	Greenhouse Gases + Climate Change	16	3	19
Biosecurity	Planning + Documentation	16	3	19
Mapping	LUC Mapping	16	3	19

Since Milestone 7, an additional four Integrated Farm Plans have been completed and a further three are underway, progressing in line with farmers' availability and seasonal workload. Participation has been strong the entire way through the project, thanks to the significant effort put in by the Guardians Exec team to communicate with their community and steer the project to provide value. Only three farms elected to not go through the integrated farm planning process, all due to already having completed plans.



Project Overview – Major Activities + Stakeholder Involvement

Wairoa Community Development Trust
12 Apr 2023

Wairoa Rural Community Backyard BBQ
The community were introduced to the project team and feedback on community priorities was gathered to inform project planning.

Rural Support Trust
20 Jul 2023

Matariki IFP Launch with Toddy Talks
Matariki celebration and reset with Toddy Talks, who delved into resilience, positive mindset, and controlling the controllable. AgFirst launched the IFP project, assisting farmers in optimising on-farm factors within their control, bettering businesses, and supporting a thriving environment.

Farm Focus
5 Sep 2023

Invoicing + Budgeting with Farm Focus
Participants left this workshop having completed an invoice to the Guardians of the Ruakituri for their allocation of the catchment group's MPI NIWE Primary Industries Recovery funding and having a better understanding of how to create budgets within Farm Focus.

Beef + Lamb New Zealand
21 Nov 2023

FeedSmart + Preparing for Drought
Join us for lunch and a workshop covering ewe body condition scoring, the FeedSmart workshop, and tips as we head into a drought. Revisit methods to assess the quality of feed and estimate its energy. As well as recap the quick, easy, and low-cost management tool that compares sheep purely on condition. Participants will be able to plan their stock feeding and take action.

GotR Exec
12 Feb 2024

IFP Refocus Meeting
The project undertook variations, reducing the number of workshops and increasing Farm Planning Visits, where LUC mapping and farm planning will be conducted together with the farmer within the same visit and followed with a Group Learning community dinner; a facilitated session where the farmers reflect on their visit and share insights to encourage peer to peer learning.

Workshop
7 May 2024

The WorkWell Workshop

This workshop brought together support services across employment relations, health and safety, personal development, and wellbeing:
Federated Farmers: Review or purchase new employment agreements and take away other useful resources
Rural Support Trust: Connect with the trained professionals to help with all kinds of situations, and help you get through your current challenges
Red Cross: Learn to use the hall's new AED and complete a basic health + skin check
Beef + Lamb: Check out the Generation Next Programme, a free personal development opportunity to all associated levy payers and their employees
REAP: Look in to the quality lifelong education available in rural Aotearoa
AgRecovery: Bring your triple rinsed containers for recycling
NAIT: Get support with your system and devices

Project Overview – Major Activities

Workshop 26 Aug 2024	**Group Learning Dinner**	The AgFirst team led conversations around the Stream Health Scores to date, and the differences between Land Use Capability mapping and Land Management Units. Those that had completed their plans provided learnings to the group.
Resolution Farming App 4 Apr 2025	**Group Learning Dinner**	For those working with Integrated Farm Plans, it turns a static document into a living, evolving resource that reflects real-time decisions and actions. Farmers saw how the app could simplify record-keeping, support teamwork, and help keep plans relevant and useful throughout the seasons
Workshop 17 Mar 2026	**Group Learning Dinner – Wrap Up of Project**	The community will gather to reflect on their progress, celebrate their achievements, and look forward to what future projects they may wish to develop. See below.

Engagement Activities – Milestone 8

Scheduled: Final Group Learning Dinner

17 Mar 2026 | 3:00pm | Ruakituri Hall

Guardians of the Ruakituri have now completed their Integrated Farm Planning Project. The community will come together on 17 March 2026 to reflect on their progress, celebrate their achievements, and look forward to what future projects they may wish to develop.

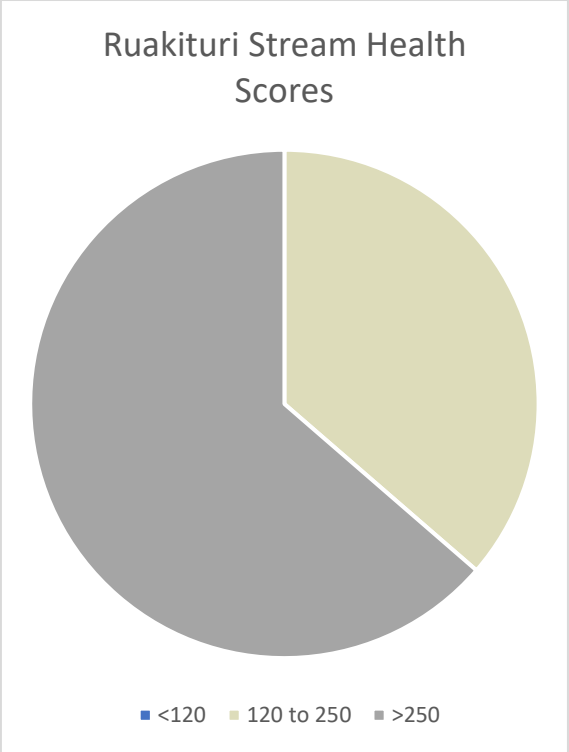
The data summaries provided within this report will be communicated with the Guardians of the Ruakituri:

- Stream Health Checks
- Visual Soil Assessments
- Soil Nutrients/Nutrient Budgets
- Land Use Capability Overview

Note: This event date falls after the final R-IFP Milestone due date as the farming calendar is at capacity through December/January, and both the Agricultural & Pastoral Show (16-17 Jan) and the East Coast Farming Expo (18-19 Feb) are held this time of year.

Environmental impacts can take years or even decades to be seen, especially in freshwater health assessments. However, education and changes in practices can and have been immediate thanks to the Integrated Farm Planning Project. Common actions included pole planting, pest control and a desire to enhance native bush blocks if funding were available to support it. The below is a summary of the soil, water, and greenhouse gas (GHG) assessments completed within the project.

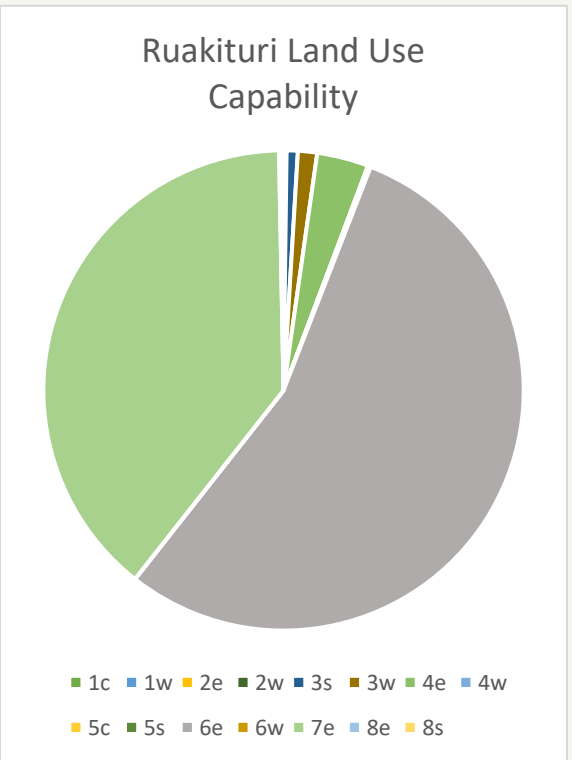
Freshwater assessments are completed using the Beef + Lamb Stream Health Check method and scoring system. A score less than 120 indicates the stream has been adversely affected by activities on farm or upstream in the catchment. In this situation, farmers are encouraged to find questions with scores of 2 or 4 which may be improved with farm management and planning. Common actions were to allow stream banks to revert to natives, or where practical, to exclude stock. The project supported education of practical ways to support freshwater ecosystems.



A score between 120 to 250 indicates a stream that has lots of potential and is at in an intermediate level of health. There are some aspects of the waterway that need attention.

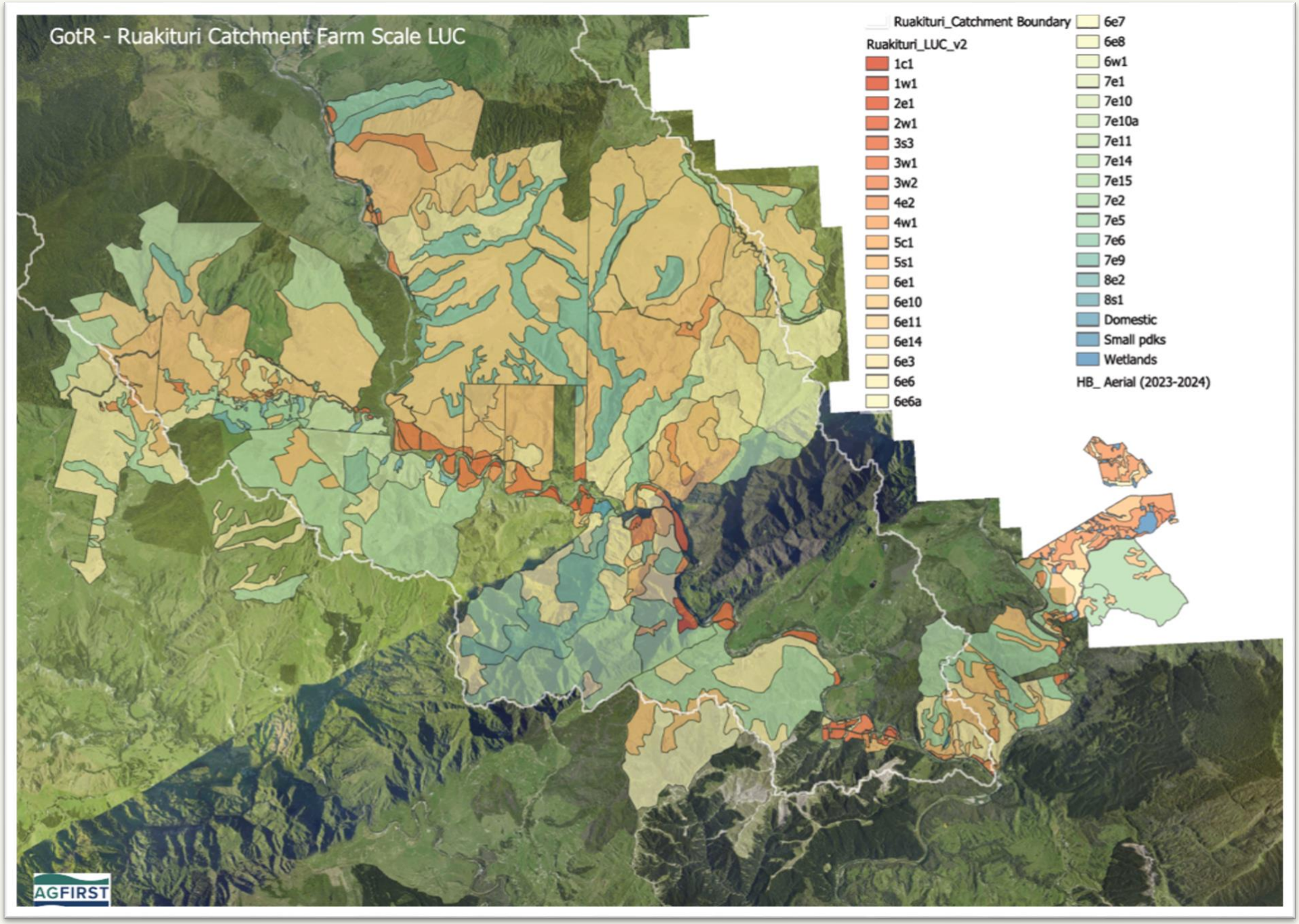
A score of more than 250 indicates the stream is very healthy and has low priority for waterway management. It provides important fish and wildlife habitat and clean water for downstream users.

Of the sites assessed thus far, no sites scored below 120. 36% scored in the intermediate range, with common reasons for lowered scores being due to natural factors such as stream bank erodibility, or inability to exclude stock due to the complexity of fencing in the given landscape. Majority, 64%, of assessment sites scored above 250, indicating great stream health.

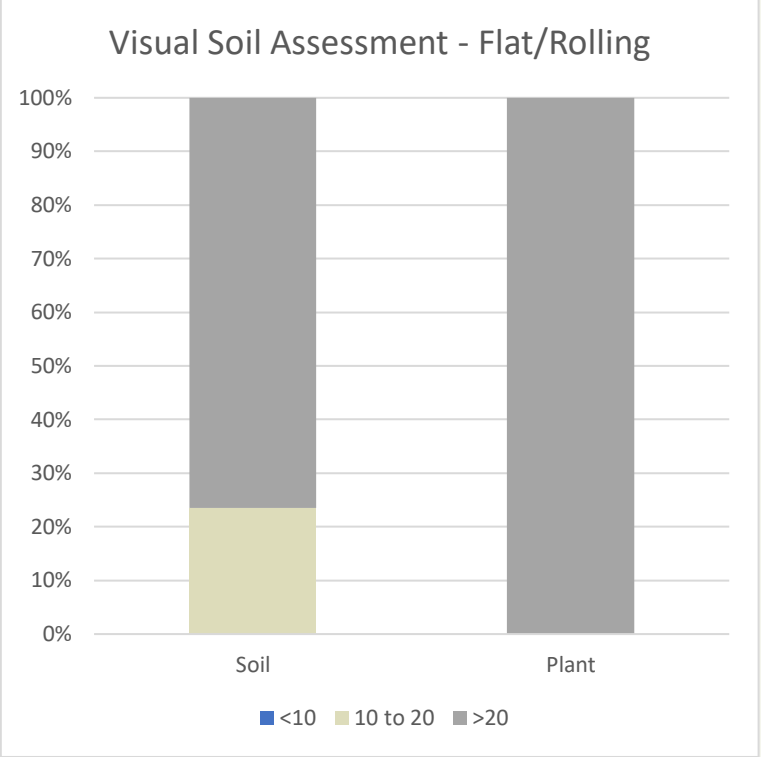


A significant function of the Guardians of the Ruakituri IFP project was the development of Land Use Capability (LUC) mapping to farm scale. The pie graph to the left shows a simplified breakdown of LUC, illustrating the proportion of each land class and its limitations in the areas mapped so far. The number is the class of land, with 1 being highly versatile land and 8 being the most severely limited; and the letter is the limiting factor: e – erosion, c – climate, s – soil, w – wetness. The pie graph to the left shows that 55% of the land mapped to date is classified as LUC 6e, with a further 39% as 7e. The following page presents aerial maps of the valley.

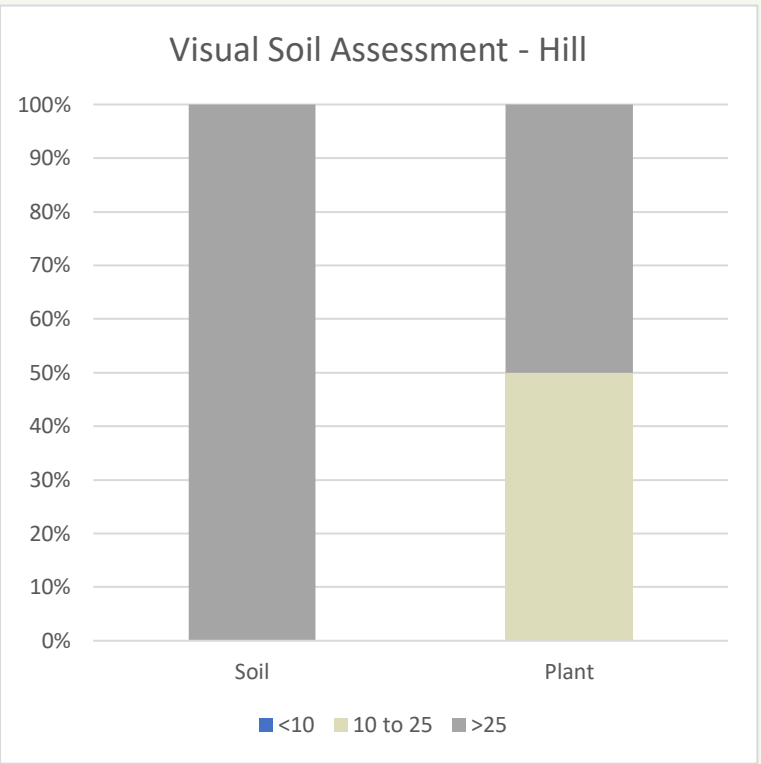
When farmers understand their LUC maps, they gain evidence for why some paddocks perform better than others and can use that information to match stock and management decisions to each land class's strengths and limitations.


GotR - Ruakituri Catchment Farm Scale LUC
Ruakituri_Catchment Boundary
Ruakituri_LUC_v2
1c1
1w1
2e1
2w1
3s3
3w1
3w2
4e2
4w1
5c1
5s1
6e1
6e10
6e11
6e14
6e3
6e6
6e6a
6e7
6e8
6w1
7e1
7e10
7e10a
7e11
7e14
7e15
7e2
7e5
7e6
7e9
8e2
8s1
Domestic
Small pdks
Wetlands
HB_ Aerial (2023-2024)
AGFIRST

Visual Soil Assessments (VSA) are completed using Beef + Lamb's VSA method. The soil and plants are assessed and each scored to indicate overall soil health.

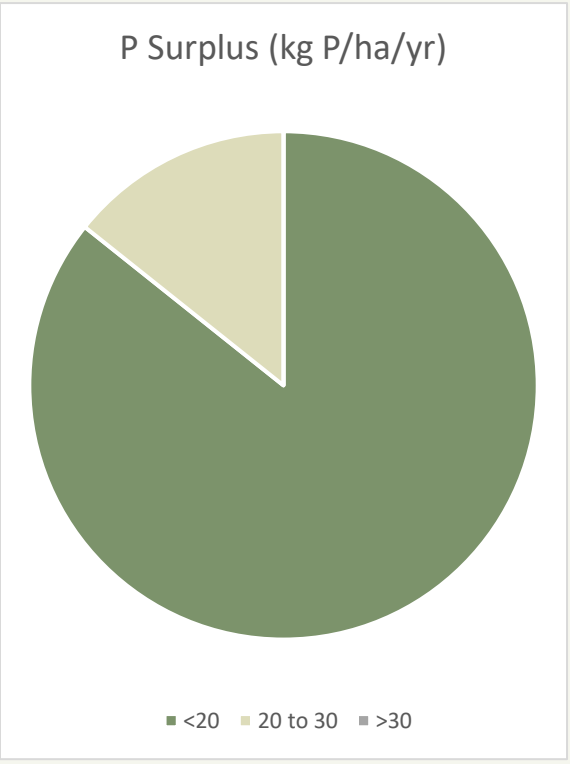


On flat to rolling land, a soil score below 10 indicates poor health, 10 to 20 reflects moderate health, and above 20 signifies good health. Of the properties assessed so far, none showed poor soil health. In fact, 76% of soil indicators pointed to good health, with the remaining 24% indicating moderate health. Across all sites, plant scores consistently reflected good soil health.



On the hill country sites assessed, there were no signs of poor soil health based on either soil or plant scores. All soil scores indicated good health, while 50% of plant scores also reflected good health and the remaining 50% indicated moderate health. Lower plant scores were commonly due to factors such as reduced pasture growth and regrowth, bare ground on steep slopes with sheep tracks, and potential for drought stress. In steep hill country, many of these factors are beyond management control and do not require further action.

Nutrient budgets are conducted using the method in Gisborne District Council's Farm Environment Planning template. In some cases where farms didn't apply fertiliser in the most recent year due to weather or budget constraints, data from a typical year was used instead to illustrate the potential risk of nutrient leaching under normal conditions.

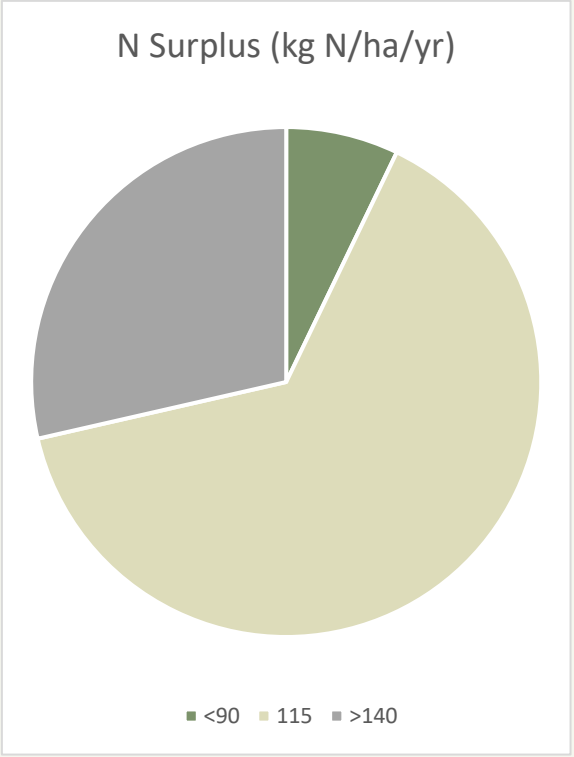


Phosphorus (P) surplus is calculated by subtracting the P outputs (stock and wool) from the inputs (fertiliser and naturally released by the soil). A surplus of less than 20 is low and may be mining soil P reserves, a surplus of 20 to 30 is moderate, and a surplus of more than 30 is high and soil P could be accumulating. A high result is appropriate when soil testing results indicate P levels are below optimal, when applications are in line with industry best practice.

86% of soil nutrient budgets completed had low surplus phosphorus and low likelihood of nutrients entering the environment. A low result is optimal for farms where soil P reserves are above or within the optimal range; it is not advisable where soil P reserves are below optimal and farmers are recommended to work with their fertiliser rep to bring soils to optimal P ranges for pasture production, within budget constraints. The remaining 14% of soil nutrient budgets revealed moderate surplus P. There were no results where surplus P was high.

High phosphorus levels in freshwater systems in Hawkes Bay and Gisborne are largely driven by sediment and erosion, not fertiliser.

Nitrogen (N) surplus is calculated by subtracting the N outputs (stock and wool) from the inputs (fertiliser and clover N fixation). A surplus of less than 90 has low leaching potential, a surplus of greater than 140 has a high leaching potential, and in between (a surplus around 115) has a medium risk.



7% of soil nutrient budgets completed to date had low leaching potential; 64% of assessments had moderate leaching potential; and the remaining 29% had high leaching potential. Interestingly, the major driver of the high and moderate leaching was not fertiliser application, but strong N fixation from clover. As this is a natural and beneficial process, no further management actions are required in these circumstances. 29% of farms applied N fertiliser, and the average application rate was 8kgN/ha/yr – far below the 190kgN/ha/yr limit.

Proudly completed by the AgFirst Team:

Left – Peter Manson; Middle – Erica Whalley; Right – Shanna Cairns.