

EXTENSION 350 SNAPSHOT 2016 - 2022

Extension E350 was a farmer-led, farmer-focused programme supporting 384 dairy and sheep and beef farmers in Northland over five and a half years. The programme used a cluster model, with groups of farmers working together in 10 areas throughout the region. Farmers were supported to achieve their outcomes in three key areas, referred to as 'planks', across financial, environmental and wellbeing improvements.

"I'm forever grateful... I actually achieved my ambition... And I would not have done it had I not had the outside help [from Extension 350]... I probably would have put the farm on the market." - E350 Farmer

"That's the biggest thing, the confidence [from E350]... It's not just confidence in our farming techniques either, it's confidence in our budgeting skills and everything that's going on behind it, from ground level up." - E350 Farmer

For every dollar invested, a return of \$11.60 was generated against measurable financial outcomes alone, with many wellbeing and environmental outcomes achieved in addition to this. The programme also delivered the following outcomes:

- > Improved farming businesses leading to higher profitability
- > Strengthened relationships among farmers, rural professionals and the wider rural sector
- > Engaged farmers keen for opportunities to connect with others and contribute to the sector
- > Successful collaboration by funding partner organisations to achieve greater success for farmers
- > Experienced stakeholders working together to understand future opportunities for farming programmes
- > Improved sector understanding around building resilience and the importance of a triple bottom line



7 dairy clusters

3 sheep and beef clusters

384
farmers involved

50
Target farms

271
Associate farmers involved

63
Mentor farmers involved

E350 was designed to support farmers in three key areas: increased profitability, improved environmental sustainability and improved farmer wellbeing. These were known as the three planks of the programme.

PROFITABILITY

 **75%**

of target farmers achieved their best annual profit with E350

 **61%**

increase in annual strategic planning among farmers

99% of target farmers

attended Mark & Measure planning course

ENVIRONMENTAL

 **100%**

completion of Farm Environment Plans on target farms

 **100%**

of target farms reported some FEP progress actions achieved

 **100%**

completion of Whole Farm Assessments on target farms

WELLBEING

 **60%**

improvement in farmers' social networks

55% 

improvement in farmers' business networks

 **59%**

increase in discussions about wellbeing in social circles

FARMERS LEARNING FROM FARMERS

E350 programme aims were to: raise the profitability of Northland pastoral farming by creating a showcase of target farms, using mentors to accelerate on farm change, and improve farmer networks in all areas of Northland, some of which are very isolated. We have succeeded in achieving these aims, and a great deal more.

Fundamental to the success of E350 has been the passion and drive of those individuals who have committed to this programme and then gone above and beyond to achieve success, for both our farmers and our industry, often through challenging times.

On reflection, there have been countless successes to emerge from E350, with the following being the highlights for me.

- > Collaboration that was demonstrated across the sectors in Northland
- > E350 has proven to be a financial success, with a sound cost benefit return. In addition was a return on improved environment and farmer wellbeing
- > Kept the programme going through COVID-19 and the subsequent disruptions and challenges to farming supply chains and physical engagement
- > E350 was designed on a premise that farmers learn best from other farmers and the connections that were created between target and mentor farmers through the programme is testament to the power of peer-to-peer learning
- > Farmers involved are in a better place environmentally, with all target farmers having completed Farm Environment Plans, and many farmers finding value in improving their understanding of the farm environment
- > E350 has been life-changing for some of the farmers involved. While this impact is difficult to measure, it feels great to know that collectively, we have led such significant change in some farmers' lives
- > There were also farmers who said they would most likely have left the sector if it wasn't for the programme, which is a fantastic outcome. Such benefits are impossible to measure, but will be enduring and rewarding for the region and sector, long past the projected life of the programme

It's amazing how many farmers watch successful initiatives over the boundary fences and then seek to replicate these practices in part on their own farms. After all, that is what this project has been all about - "farmers learning from farmers"

I would like to thank all the target, mentor and associate farmers who helped make E350 possible. Our target farmers demonstrated a genuine willingness for improvement and mentor farmers generously gave their time, advice and knowledge, while associate farmers showed a real interest in identifying opportunities for improvement. Thank you to our funders, Ministry for Primary Industries, DairyNZ, Beef+Lamb New Zealand, Northland Regional Council and Northland Inc, for both the funding provided and the extensive in kind contributions through support and resources for the farmers. In the field, the farm consultants, DairyNZ and Beef+Lamb New Zealand consulting officers provided the glue that held the clusters and behind the scenes, the project team was instrumental in ensuring delivery of the programme.

E350 has left our target farmers in a better space environmentally, personally and financially, and the programme benefits have also extended beyond mentor and associate farmers to the wider Northland region through indirect investment and knowledge dissemination.

Ken Hames
Extension 350 Chair



With E350 now complete, farmers and stakeholders are looking beyond the programme for new opportunities to support the sector and continue to build on successes achieved. It is strongly believed that the foundation has now been laid for farmers to feel empowered to continue using the skills they've learnt to advance their own business and share this knowledge with other farmers to benefit the wider community.



“What the Extension 350 programme has forced us to do is work as a group, collaboratively. We feel like we're in it together. Even if you're not in Extension 350, talk to your neighbours, talk to your friends, read articles, look at B+L websites, etc.”

- E350 Farmer

For more information

The following resources can be found on the Northland Inc website:

www.northlandnz.com/extension-350

- > The full E350 Programme Report
- > Testimonial videos from participants
- > Summative Evaluation Report, Scarlatti (2022)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

E350 would like to thank everyone who contributed to ensure the successful delivery of this programme, in particular the following:

The 384 farmers involved and teams from NRC, DairyNZ, Beef+Lamb NZ and Fonterra

We also acknowledge our funding partners:

