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The New Zealand Sustainability Dashboard Project

It's a new type of Dashboard – not on your car but on a farmer's computer, and indicators show environmental, economic and social performance not speed.

The New Zealand Sustainability Dashboard is a new sustainability assessment and reporting tool that will help New Zealand farmers and growers improve their farm performance and allow them to respond more easily to international market and regulatory demands. A pilot trial of the system is underway with thirty Sustainable Winegrowing New Zealand vineyards and wineries.

Developers of the Dashboard say the software will provide farmers and growers with crucial information on their farm's environmental, economic and social performance. Information from "key performance indicators" can then be used to improve results in areas such as energy use, nitrogen loss, carbon footprint and maintenance of biodiversity.

Data from the Dashboard can also be used to fulfill requirements of local and international regulators. "Farmers are under pressure to meet reporting requirements from all sorts of regulators – regional councils, GlobalGap, Marks and Spencers etc. This system will be a one-stop shop: data can be entered once and different reports generated. Administration will be reduced," said Professor Caroline Saunders of Lincoln University's Agribusiness and Economic Research Unit.

"Types of data to be entered will be similar to farm accounts and spray diaries – electricity use, water, fertiliser."

The Dashboard is designed not just for compliance and accreditation but also as a learning tool. Growers can see what works and make decisions based on the outcomes of the indicators, says Professor Henrik Moller, from the Centre for

Sustainability at the University of Otago. “The indicators are mostly quick to do and can be scored by the farmers themselves, and they are scientifically defensible so farmers, regulators and consumers trust them,” says Moller.

The Sustainability Dashboard project team leader, Jon Manhire, says the Dashboard framework has the potential to improve environmental and economic performance in the New Zealand primary sector by providing feedback to growers so they can lift farm performance. Feedback to government could also aid policy development.

“The system will not only improve farm sustainability and resilience, but also reduce monitoring and regulatory costs, build consumer trust, help secure market access and raise the profile of farming in the eyes of the wider New Zealand public,” said Jon Manhire.

Five industry partners have been involved with the development of the Dashboard: New Zealand Winegrowers, Zespri, Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, Forest Owners’ Association and BioGro New Zealand. Links have also been made with Dairy NZ, Beef + Lamb, and Aquaculture New Zealand. The research programme for the Dashboard project builds on work done for the ARGOS (Agriculture Research Group On Sustainability) programme.

Thirty Sustainable Winegrowing New Zealand vineyards and wineries are currently trialling the Dashboard system. Feedback so far is positive with growers saying the software is flexible enough to cope with reporting requirements of large businesses with multiple vineyards and wineries as well as small single-vineyard businesses.

“Our members can use the Dashboard to fulfill their reporting needs but can also use the information to showcase their own sustainability,” said Sally van der Zijpp of Sustainable Winegrowing New Zealand. “The system is adding benefit to our members without extra work.”

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