

Evaluating the Farmstrong programme amongst Māori farmers to guide future improvements

FARMSTRONG

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MAARAMA

Background

Farmstrong is a nationwide wellbeing programme for the rural community. Farmstrong has commissioned independent research with Māori farmers and growers to better understand how well the programme is working for them and how this might be improved. This research involved two stages;

Stage 1 – Quantitative survey of farmers

- n=64 Māori were included in a national CATI survey of farmers/growers,/farm workers undertaken by Research First in April to June 2024.
- The survey covered awareness, engagement, knowledge and impact of Farmstrong.
- Māori results are compared with n=627 NZ Europeans included in the survey.

Stage 2 – Qualitative interviews with Māori farmers

- n=10 x 25-30 minute phone interviews with Māori farmers / growers.
- Talking to those who were happy to be contacted for further research off the back of the Research First survey.
- From across the motu and a range of iwi affiliations.
- Across a range of farm types (Dairy, Sheep and Beef, Horticulture).
- Across a range of farm roles (Owners, Managers, Sharemilker).

This report outlines the key findings and insights from the quantitative and qualitative research.

Looking at key insights about Māori from the quantitative survey with farmers



A range of brand health metrics for Farmstrong were measured within the quantitative survey with farmers

Awareness of Farmstrong

Unprompted awareness
Total (prompted) awareness +
Sam

Engagement with Farmstrong

Ever engaged
Engaged In the last 12 months
5 plus forms of engagement

Knowledge of farmstrong

Know 'at least a little'
Know 'at least a moderate
amount'

Impact - Improvements attributed to Farmstrong

Any level of
improvement('small',
'moderate', or 'large')
attributed to Farmstrong – at
least one of nine items

5 plus items

At least one 'moderate' or
'large' improvement attributed
to Farmstrong – at least one
item

5 plus items

Key brand metrics for Farmstrong are very different for Māori vs NZ European

Key survey metrics by ethnicity	NZ European n=627 %	Māori n=64 %
Unprompted awareness	35	27
Total awareness + Sam	90	69↓
Engaged in last 12 months	26	18
Ever engaged	30	22
Five plus forms of engagement	11	10
Know at least 'a little'	73↑	52
Know at least a 'moderate' amount	21	13
Any level of improvement attributed to Farmstrong – at least one of 9 items	17	16
Five plus items	9	15
At least one 'moderate' or 'large' improvement attributed to Farmstrong – at least one item	11	10
Five plus items	4	4

Levels of awareness of Farmstrong are lower for Māori, especially Total awareness. (An upward or downward arrow denotes a statistically significant difference).

We also see lower, though non-significant, overall engagement (Ever, Last 12 months) and knowledge of Farmstrong amongst Māori.

However, the improvements that farmers have attributed to Farmstrong is relatively strong for Māori, considering the lower levels of awareness, knowledge and engagement.

What this shows is that when Māori farmers are aware of and engaging with Farmstrong, that the programme is having a strong impact with them.

The profile of Māori farmers surveyed could be playing a role in their relationship with Farmstrong

Farmer profile by ethnicity	NZ European n=627 %	Māori n=64 %
Farm role: Farm owners	63↑	22↓
Sharemilkers/contract milkers	11	28↑
Managers	15↓	19
Farm workers/ shepherds	8↓	26↑
Farm type: Dairy	37↓	63↑
Sheep/beef	45↑	33
Horticulture	11	2↓
Other	6	2
Gender: Male	69	65
Age: Under 35 years	18↓	34↑
35-44 years	14↓	34↑
45 years and over	69↑	32↓

The Māori sample looks very different to the NZ European sample, who make up the majority of the overall farmer sample.

Māori farmers surveyed are much more likely to be:

- Sharemilkers / Contract milkers
- Farm workers / Shepherds
- Work on Dairy farms
- Younger (aged under 45 years)

And they are much less likely to be:

- Farm owners
- Work in Horticulture
- Older (aged 45 years and over)

We need to be aware of these differences when looking at the overall survey findings for Māori, as they may also be playing a role in their levels of awareness, engagement, knowledge and impact of Farmstrong.

The profile of Māori farmers aligns with other farmer groups in terms of their relationship with Farmstrong

<p>Māori are more likely to be →</p>	<p>Farm role</p> <p>Farm workers/Shepherds have lower levels of awareness, knowledge and somewhat lower levels of engagement (Ever/Last 12 months) - though have comparably high levels for five plus forms of engagement and attribution of improvements to Farmstrong.</p> <p>Sharemilkers / Contract milkers have somewhat higher levels of engagement and higher levels of attribution of improvements to Farmstrong.</p>	<p>Farm type</p> <p>Those on Dairy farms have lower levels of awareness and knowledge.</p>	<p>Age</p> <p>Those aged under 45 years old have higher levels of engagement (Ever and Five plus forms). They were also significantly higher for attributing any and 'moderate' or 'large' improvements to Farmstrong.</p>
<p>Māori are less likely to be →</p>	<p>Farm owners have higher levels of awareness and knowledge but slightly lower relative attribution of improvements to Farmstrong.</p>	<p>Those on Beef/lamb farms have higher levels of awareness and knowledge.</p>	

*Because of the relatively small sub-sample sizes most of the differences reported were not statistically significant.

Implication: The profile of Māori farmers does appear to play some role in their relationship with Farmstrong

Overall results for Māori show they have lower awareness, knowledge and engagement with Farmstrong – but have relatively strong levels of attributed improvements (at similar levels to NZ European farmers who have higher levels of awareness, knowledge and engagement).

The question is:

- Are the results we are seeing for Māori farmers because there are true differences amongst Māori vs NZ European farmers.
- Or are the differences due to the profile of Māori farmers – given that they have a much higher proportion of Farm workers/Shepherds, Sharemilkers/Contract milkers, Dairy farms, and Younger farmers - who mostly tend to have similar traits around lower awareness, knowledge and engagement but relatively high levels of attributed improvements.

The answer could likely be a combination of both. The qualitative research can help to shed more light on this.

Looking at key insights from the qualitative interviews with Māori farmers



The qualitative interviews showed that Māori farmers are on a spectrum in terms of their sense of identity as Māori

Some do not feel as strong in their Māori identity

Those who do not feel as strong in their identity as Māori, are less likely to feel connected to their whakapapa and/or have less understanding of te ao Māori (the Māori world).

Are often looking to gain greater understanding and strengthen their connection.

Are still proud to be Māori – but likely to be less overt about it.

While others feel their identity as Māori is very strong

Are more likely to have strong connection to their whakapapa, have strong understanding of te ao Māori, feel a strong sense of belonging and identity.

They are immensely proud to be Māori.

This is something that has been seen in other research conducted by Maarama with Māori in general. We need to understand that all Māori are different – and what works for some might not work for others.

All Māori farmers we talked to had a very strong sense of identity as a farmer

There was a clear sense of pride in being a farmer amongst everyone we talked to.

All had a strong passion for being a farmer and felt a strong sense of connection to their farm and to the farming community – while many were multi-generational farmers.

This reinforces what we have seen in the quantitative survey findings – that their farmer identity also plays a key role in many Māori farmers' relationship with Farmstrong.



What this means is that messaging and channels that target farmers in general are also likely to resonate with many Māori farmers - especially if they can be tailored to the key farmer groups that Māori are more likely to belong to - Farm workers/ Shepherds, Sharemilkers/Contract milkers, Dairy farmers, Younger farmers.

Understanding of the Farmstrong programme is varied

Depth of knowledge around the Farmstrong programme was varied - some know a lot, while some know only a little.

Most know it as a wellbeing programme for farmers, especially mental wellbeing.

Many know the connection to Sam Whitelock.

Some were aware of the different resources and tools around health and wellbeing and the stories that other farmers have shared around their experiences.

Some were aware of specific activities - Farm Fit, the 'Farmstrong book', and the comedy show 'The Bitches Box'.

Importantly, the perceptions that are held of Farmstrong are largely positive

These positive perceptions were also universal – across age, gender, farm type and role.

“Farmstrong is great for farmers – it helps to shine a light on an area that most don’t really like to talk about.”

– Māori, Female, 35-44, Owner, Sheep and Beef, Wairarapa

“You can relate to the stories. It shows that it’s not just me, but others are going through the same things.”

– Māori, Female, Under 35, Manager, Dairy farm, Waikato

“Everything they do is really, really valuable.”

– Māori, Male, 55-65, Owner, Sheep, Southland

“I think they are doing a great job.”

– Māori, Male, 65+, Owner, Sheep and Beef, Whanganui

“Keep doing what you are doing!”

– Māori, Male, 65+, Owner, Dairy farm, Waikato

The Farmstrong Programme has had an impact on some of the Māori farmers

For those that the programme has had an impact on, it has:

- Made them more aware of keeping an eye on their wellbeing, and also the wellbeing of those around them (their family, their workers, other farmers).
- Driven awareness of the importance of taking time out / off the farm / having a break or rest.
- Made them more likely to check in and ask others how they are doing.

Some don't feel they've had the need for it, though know it is there if they ever do.

While some of the older farmers wished the programme was available when they were younger.

Awareness of Farmstrong is coming from a range of sources

Nearly all have heard of Farmstrong on the radio and/or seen in magazines or online - with specific reference to Farming shows on radio, Facebook, Farming Press and Farmers Weekly.

This shows the main channels used by Farmstrong are currently working to drive some reach and awareness with Māori farmers.

While some have heard about the programme through the Rural Support Trust or through the NZ Young Farmers groups.

This shows that partnerships and networks are also valuable for extending reach and awareness of the programme.

We read a prompted description of the Farmstrong programme to all farmers to gauge their views on it

This was important to ensure all farmers could provide informed feedback on the programme.

- Farmstrong is a nationwide wellbeing programme for the rural community.
- The programme looks to help farmers, growers and their families to cope with the ups and downs of farming by sharing things they can do to look after themselves and the people in their business.
- A lot of this is other farmers and growers sharing their stories, via videos and in print, about what works for them.
- There is quite a lot of focus on changing how we think about things, but it also includes practical tools and resources – around topics such as eating and sleeping well, being physically active, learning new things, connecting with others, coping with stress, taking time out, giving back, getting health checks and seeking help and advice from others.



We then asked - how appealing they found the programme, and what it was about the programme that they found appealing.

All of the farmers found the Farmstrong Programme very appealing

Every farmer felt highly positive about the programme – with a range of areas driving appeal:

- The programme drives greater awareness of mental wellbeing / looking after yourself.
- It provides tips on wellbeing and coping with stress and challenges.
- It shares the experiences of other farmers that they can relate to.

“I think it’s great that they give you ideas and tips to look after your wellbeing.”

– Māori, Female, 35-44, Owner, Sheep and Beef, Wairarapa

“It’s good that it’s not just information but also personal stories.”

– Māori, Female, Under 35, Manager, Dairy farm, Waikato

“This really hits home as I know a few farmers that have committed suicide. The pressure is huge on some farmers. This programme can help stop things getting that far.”

– Māori, Male, 65+, Owner, Sheep and Beef, Whanganui

“Any help you can get is valuable.”

- Māori, Male, 65+, Owner, Horticulture orchard, Bay of Plenty

“This stuff is really important for farmers to know.”

– Māori, Male, 65+, Owner, Dairy farm, Waikato

Looking at where improvements could be made to better connect with, and impact, Māori



Driving greater connection and impact with Māori can come from two avenues

Via their
Māori identity

Targeting Māori specifically with tailored messaging, channels, programme content, stories.

Via their
Farmer identity

Targeting farmers generally – especially those groups that Māori are more likely to belong to – Sharemilkers / Contract milkers, Farm workers / Shepherds, Dairy farms, Younger farmers.

i.e. messaging / stories related to Dairy farmers will resonate more with Dairy farmers.

There are things that Māori farmers we talked to felt Farmstrong could do to improve in general

Be involved in networking / local social connecting events

Getting farmers off the farm / getting them to switch off / can be farm related or not / things that will get farmers socialising and talking.

Sports / Interests – golf, bowls, tennis, guest speakers, events like the Bitches Box, whatever gets farmers together.

Aligning with other rural programmes / events

Tractor Trek
Bark up
Mates at the gate
Surfing for farmers
Rural Support Trust

Keeping a finger on the pulse with the current situation for farmers

With many currently doing it tough with high debt, high interest rates, increasing costs, low prices / payouts, high stress.

Proactive check ins with farmers - as many won't reach out themselves.

Being there in times of need.

“Keep pushing what you are doing, especially as there’s likely to be many farmers going through tough times now – how do we make sure they’re ok?”

– Māori, Male, 55-65, Owner, Sheep, Southland

There are also things some felt Farmstrong could do to better connect and resonate with Māori specifically

Specific channels

Connecting through Māori networks and events – Iwi / hapū / rūnanga / iwi agnostic groups (like Awhina farms, Te Hiku farming collective), Tāhuri Whenua (Vege growers collective), Ahuwhenua Trophy event.

Kanohi ki te kanohi (face to face) visits to farm.

Sharing stories of Māori farmers and their experiences

So they can see themselves reflected in the programme.

A breadth of stories - male, female, older, younger, different farm types and roles, connection to te ao Māori.

Talking about what issues have they faced? What's worked well for them?

"Māori relate to other Māori"

Using Māori champions and advocates

Using high profile Māori that they can look up to.

"Like what you've done with Sam Whitelock – someone who would resonate with Māori."

Winners / finalists of the Ahuwhenua Trophy.

Tailored messaging and content


Te whare tapa whā / Holistic wellbeing / Keeping things in balance.

Use of Rongoā, Mirimiri, Karakia.

Importance of connection to the whenua (land) and te taiao (the environment). Being kaitiaki (Guardians / Custodians).

Talking about the collective - whānau / community based.

Looking after yourself and looking after others.

The image features a large, abstract graphic on the left side. It consists of a black diagonal shape that cuts across the frame from the top-left towards the bottom-right. Overlapping this black shape are several teal-colored elements: a large, thick teal ring on the left, a smaller teal circle in the center, and a thin teal circle at the top. The background to the right of the black shape is white.

**Mā te whatutahi, ka whakatutuki
ai ngā pūmanawa ā tāngata.**

**Together weaving the realisation
of potential.**