Environment Canterbury Regional Council
Kaunihera Taiao ki Waitaha

Farm Environment Plan update 2017-2018

Protecting the environment is the top priority

The work to protect and improve Canterbury's rural environment has several parts:

- Set the necessary nutrient limits across Canterbury via planning rules
- Promote Good Management Practices (GMP) for farmers
- Require land-use consent to farm and independent audit
- Ensure effective and targeted consent compliance monitoring, and
- Respond quickly to as many incident reports as possible.

We want to deal with environmental risks before they turn into incidents and cause damage - let's have a fence at the top of the cliff. This is happening through land-use consents to farm and strict nutrient limits, and the Good Management Practices Programme of continuous improvement on farm, managed through the completion of Farm Environment Plans (FEPs).

What areas do Good Management Practices address?

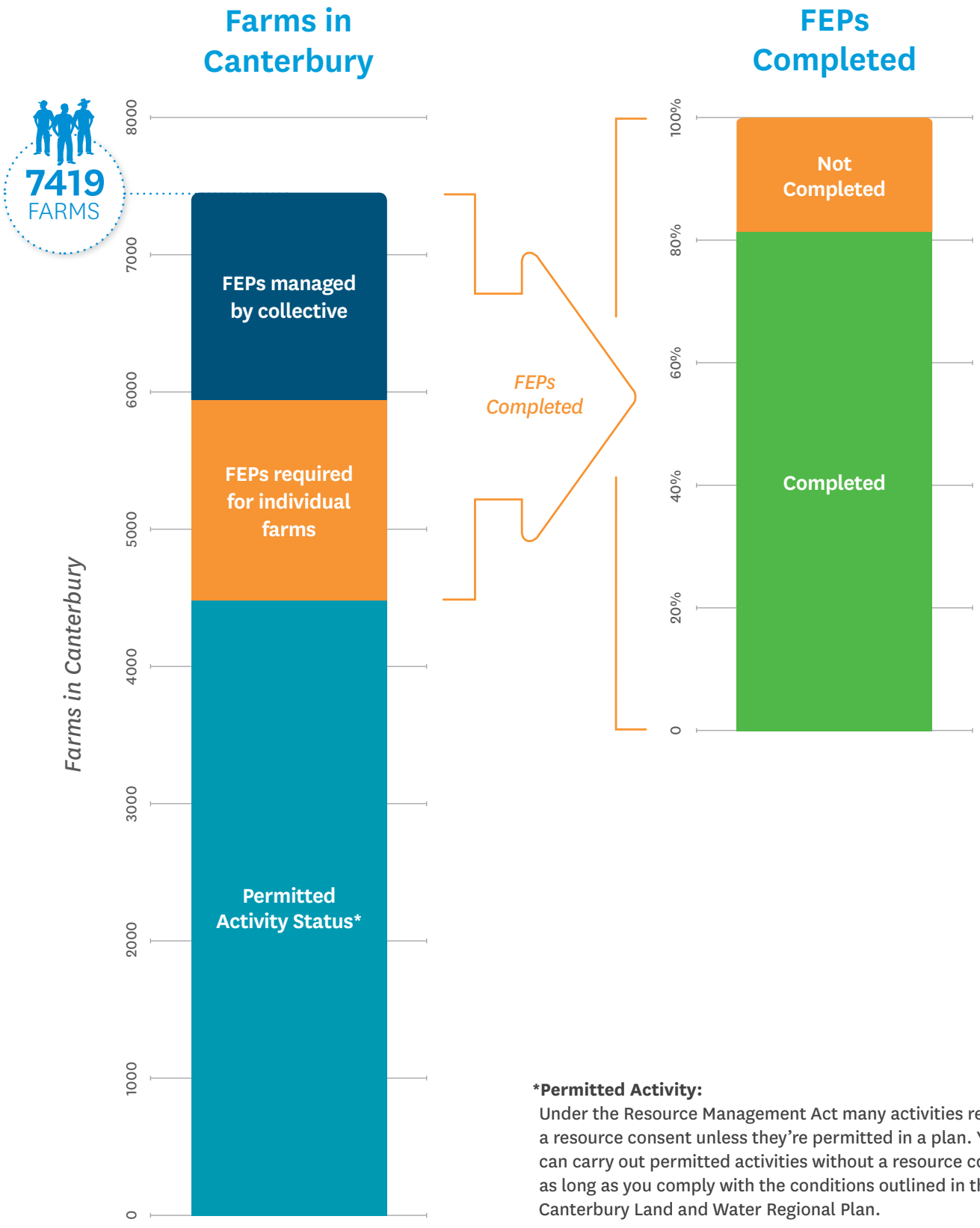
- Farm planning and records
- Cultivation and soil structure
- Irrigation and water use
- Ground cover
- Animal feed
- Intensive grazing
- Sediment, phosphorus, and faecal bacteria
- Farm effluent and wastewater
- Nutrient management

Farm Environment Plan progress

To create Good Management Practices, each Canterbury farmer must create a Farm Environment Plan (FEP).

Working through the Farm Environment Plan (FEP) helps to recognise on-farm environmental risks and set out a programme to manage those risks. Each FEP is unique. It reflects the local climate and soils, the type of farming operation, the requirements in the local planning rules, and the goals and aspirations of the land user.

A FEP is a living document; a report card to scrutinise farm performance against Good Management Practise.



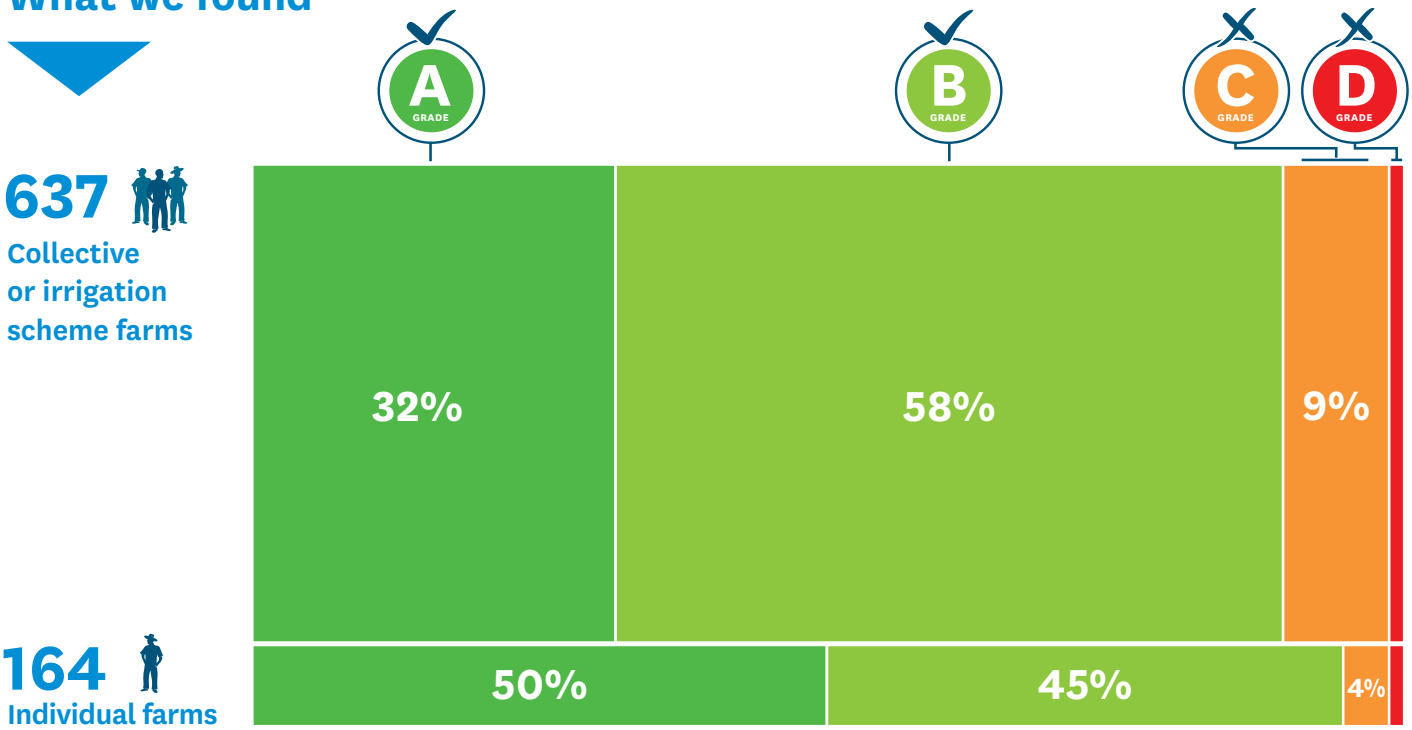
***Permitted Activity:**
Under the Resource Management Act many activities require a resource consent unless they're permitted in a plan. You can carry out permitted activities without a resource consent, as long as you comply with the conditions outlined in the Canterbury Land and Water Regional Plan.

Farm Environment Plan audit grades 2017-2018

Audits demonstrate a farm's progress towards meeting good management practices and water quality limits. Consented farms require regular audits at intervals of between six months and three years (or four years for collectives and irrigation schemes) depending on their previous grades. Non-compliant farms are audited more frequently. A and B grades are compliant, while C and D grades are not. Repeated instances of a C or D grade result in enforcement action. Reflecting the consent process, most of the audits currently being completed are of irrigation scheme consents, rather than individual farms.

Benefits:
You can record your progress towards achieving "good management practice" and show you're doing the right thing.

What we found



What do the FEP Audit grades mean:

Overall Grade	A GRADE	B GRADE	C GRADE	D GRADE
Compliance against resource consent	Compliant	Compliant	Non-compliant	Non-compliant
Frequency of Audit				
Individual farms	3 years	2 years	1 year	6 months
Farms connected to an Environment Canterbury Approved ISO Accredited Audit Programmes (Industry Programme)	Dependent on Approved ISO Accredited Programme timeframe	2 years	1 year	6 months
Farms connected to an Irrigation Scheme, Principal Water Supplier or Hurunui Waiau Collective	Dependent on Approved ISO Accredited Programme timeframe	2 years	1 year	6 months
Change in management or significant change in farm system	1 year	1 year	Within the year	6 months

Sound environmental farm management needn't cause grief

Farmer Marv Pangborn and Farm auditor Alison van Polanen standing in front of new effluent system.

It's been two years since Marv Pangborn had his dairy farms and support properties near Rakaia audited by an independent farm environment plan auditor, and the outcome of today will affect his farming business going forward.

At his last audit, Marv received two B grades and one A grade for his Selwyn-based farms. The audit showed he needed to check the efficiency of all irrigation systems, improve effluent storage and pond management, and undertake a quantitative assessment of the soil moisture status on the run off block to meet an A grade standard.

With the goal of achieving three A grades this year, Marv had some work to do.

Under the Canterbury Land and Water Regional Plan, all consented farms in Canterbury are required to have a farm environment plan (FEP) which identifies on farm risks and sets out how the farm is going to manage its environmental impact.

All FEPs must be audited by an independent auditor and the results are reported to Environment Canterbury or an irrigation scheme as part of its consent conditions. Farms achieving a C or D grade are considered non-compliant and are required to be audited more frequently, while farms achieving an A or B grade are compliant and are audited once every two to four years depending on consent conditions.

Farm auditors help take the pain out of compliance checks

Farm auditor Alison van Polanen first met Marv two years ago and is revisiting his farms to understand what changes to infrastructure and management have been made since his last audit.

"Our role is to understand the parameters each farm operates within and assess its progress towards meeting good management practices. We do this through a combination of discussions, reviewing records and an on-farm assessment.

Our role is not to advise farmers of solutions, but rather to identify when something isn't meeting good management practice. If a farmer seeks further clarification we can provide examples of what and how we have seen other farmers achieving good management practice, but it's the farmer determines what is appropriate and relevant for their farm system," Alison says.

Good environmental performance means fewer compliance checks

In the past two years leading up to this farm audit, Marv has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars upgrading his effluent ponds and irrigation system as well as investing in bucket testing and soil moisture monitoring in the hopes of reaching that A grade.

Overlooking his old effluent storage system, Marv reflects on how things have changed.

"Back when we got our previous effluent system, we could get no one to help us design it - there was no one doing it. There was no effluent calculator and we designed it too small with only about 7-8 days storage which we thought was lots, because we were coming from a system where we only had one day storage," he says.

This year, he installed a new effluent system which now includes 30 days storage.

On his run-off paddock, he shows Alison how he's made changes to the way he irrigates. At the last audit, he only had one pivot, but now he's using a fixed grid and two pivots and has found land has been much more productive.

"The farm used to be irrigated in a 16-day round with 50ml of water at a time; now we're using 5 ml at a time but more frequently which has helped with the leaching. We use half as much water than what we used to, and the land has been more productive.

"Good environmental practices benefits bottom lines too

Having reviewed Marv's farm environment plans, nutrient budgets and other data as well as viewing changes he's made to infrastructure on farm, Alison was able to award him three A-grades.

"Receiving an A grade was pleasing as it showed we are on the right track and means that I do not have to spend the time and money on an audit for another three years," Marv says.

For farmers striving to achieve higher grades, Alison has some advice:

"When an auditor comes, ask a lot of questions so you understand what good management practice is being reviewed, why it's important, and what the options are available to address any issues.

"Treating your audit as a learning process will enable you to take as much value from it and may challenge your thinking in whether you can do things better to have a more sustainable and profitable business," she says.

For more information on farm audits see **www.canterburywater.farm**

Find out more about Good Management Practices and Audits at canterburywater.farm

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