

Social Licence to Farm and 'Good Farming': Farmer and Public Expectations



This factsheet brings together material from the public and farmer surveys, exploring the similarities and differences between farmers' and the public's understanding of what is 'good farming' and 'social licence to farm', based on 2023 survey results¹.

Producers and consumers share a mutually beneficial relationship. Many public respondents feel close to the farmers that produce their food.

'Social licence to farm' – farmer and public understandings

Based on survey responses, members of the public generally understand social licence to mean community acceptance or approval of a company (or farm) and its local operations. The public also included ideas that farmers should pursue good practices to meet community expectations, and that there should be a level of transparency around what is happening on the farm. With this in mind, the public also proposed that as part of a social licence, farmers should produce nutritious, high-quality food, have low social and environmental impact, and be a viable business.

Farmers' responses indicated gaining a social licence involved using farming practices that align with society's expectations and are acceptable to society. On-farm actions need to be transparent, defensible and acceptable. Farmers agreed they should produce good food with minimal impact on their people and the environment.

'Good farming' – different expectations?

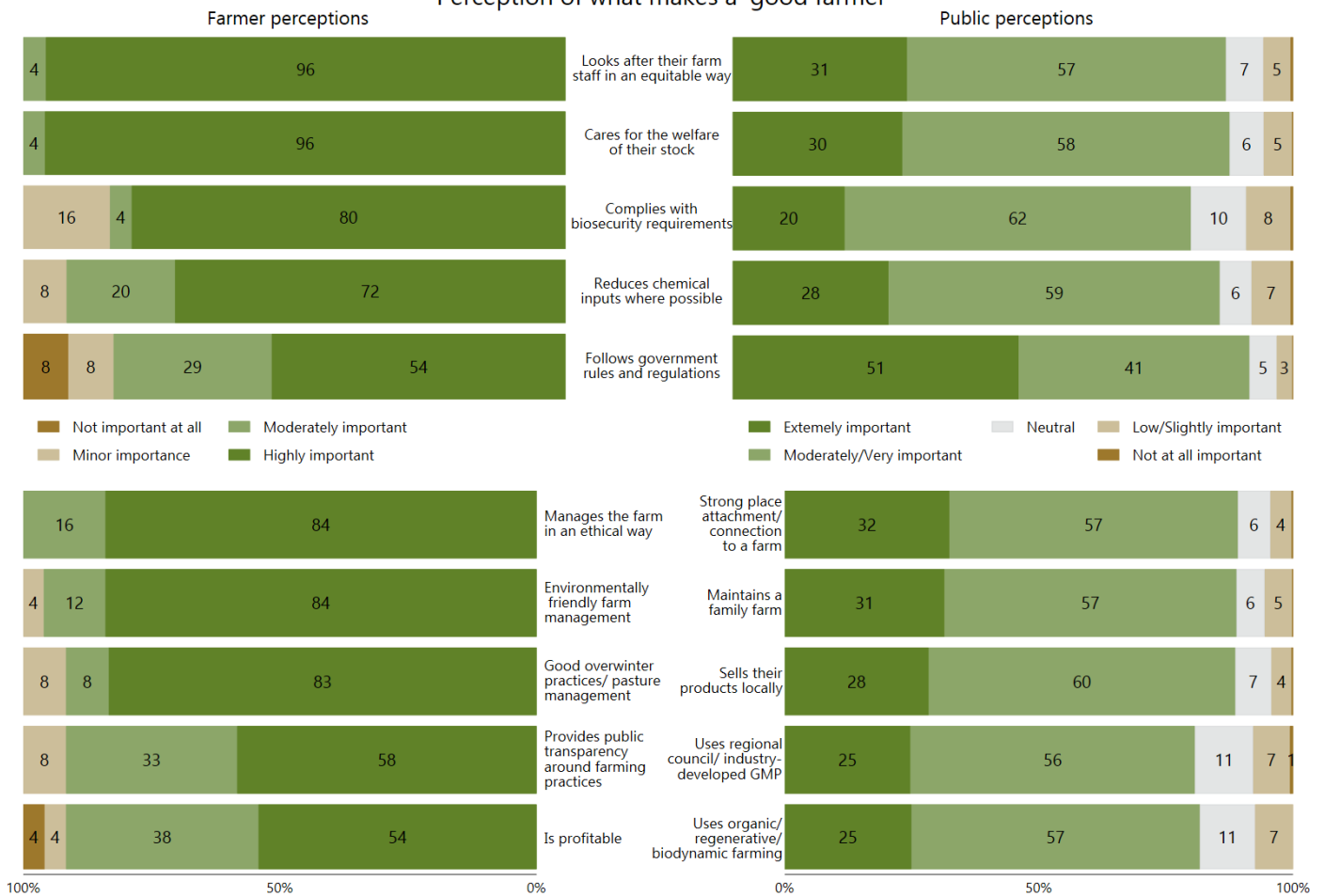
Farmers and the general public had some common views on the criteria of 'good farming'. Farmers and the public both agreed that looking after staff, animal welfare, biosecurity, decreasing chemical inputs and following government regulations were important, albeit to slightly different degrees. There were divergent views on other criteria of 'good farming'. The public rated highly the maintenance of a family farm, selling locally, using good management practices (GMPs), having a strong place attachment, being transparent, and using organic/regenerative/biodynamic farming practices. Farmers rated ethical and environmentally friendly management practices, good pasture management, being transparent, and profitability as necessary criteria for good farming.

One challenge is that many of 'good' farming practices are not immediately visible to the public. Therefore, farmers and the public should explore and negotiate mutually acceptable ways for making farming practices and communication of them more transparent and visible.

¹ About the data:

These figures and statistics in this factsheet were derived from a selection of questions from two surveys about "good farming" and understanding of the 'social licence to operate' (SLO) concept in New Zealand from the public and farmer points of view. The surveys were conducted by Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research, Cawthron Institute, Quorum Sense, Thriving Southland, Dirt Road Communications and University of Otago. The surveys were conducted online in March and May 2023 and completed by 1293 randomly selected members of the public and 42 farmers across New Zealand. The survey and this factsheet were funded by the Our Land and Water National Science Challenge.

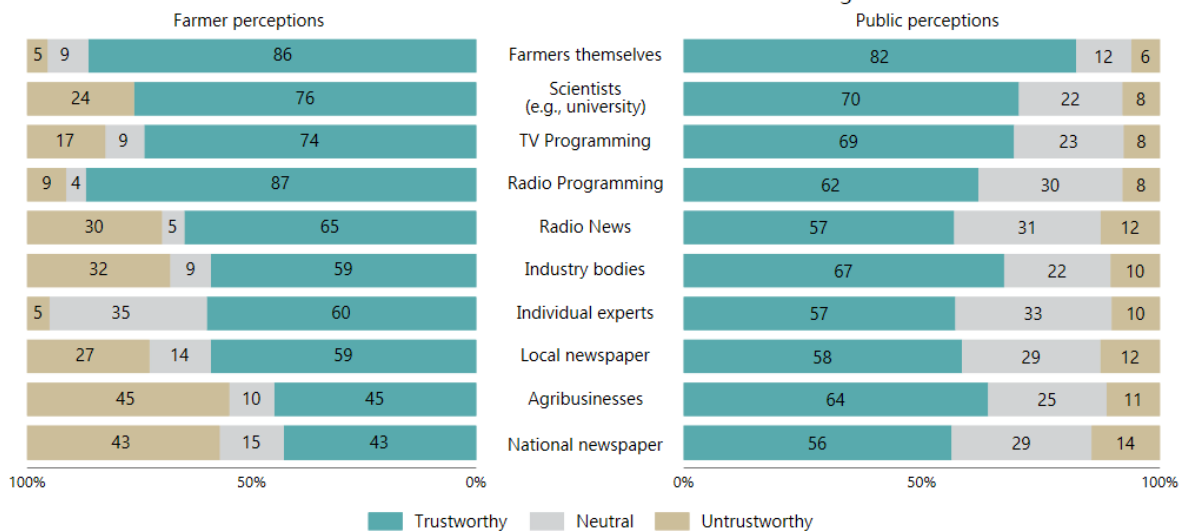
Perception of what makes a 'good farmer'



What information sources do farmers and members of the public trust?

Farmers and the public strongly trust the information from farmers themselves, information from scientists, and from TV and radio programming. Interestingly, the public trusts information from industry bodies more than farmers themselves. Least trusted sources of information (not shown) were social media, alternative media and online media.

Perceived trustworthiness of sources of information about farming in New Zealand



Disclaimer

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What do farmers and the public have to say about 'good farming'?

Some of the key themes that emerged from survey comments by the public and farmers are best summarised through these selected quotes:

'By my definition, a good farmer is one who would be trying to educate people in what good farming should look like.' (Farmer)

'Land is not totally owned by an individual to do what they like with it. It is part of who we are as Kiwis. Land must be looked after for the whole of society and for generations to come. It is a privilege to own land that should not be abused by mistreatment.' (Farmer)

'Farmers are our lifeblood food producers and have been doing it tough through covid, government regulation and weather events but they are a hardy bunch who keep pushing through.' (Public)

'Whether the public considers farmers "good" or not is dictated largely by the media they are consuming. Unfortunately, the public does not tend to venture outside the norm to understand farmers better. Farmers shouldn't be seeking 'approval' from the public to farm, rather the public, if they are actually interested, should be seeking to understand farmers, by going to them, visiting them and finding out how hard it can be to farm.' (Farmer)

'Being transparent with their local community of their practices. Be bold in addressing difficult issues they're facing personally with farming and get peoples' support.' (Public)

'I know farmers are trying to have a more sustainable approach. The agricultural community is huge in NZ.' (Public)

TAKEAWAYS FOR EVERYONE

- Public and farmers have similar conceptions of social licence.
- Public and farmers both suggested ways social licence can be gained or maintained. These include being socially and environmentally friendly, maintaining local connections, and being transparent.

TAKEAWAYS FOR FARMERS

- Ninety-eight percent of the public surveyed say they have visited a farm in the past 10 years, and 65% have interactions with a farmer, so they believe they may have some level of familiarity with farming.
- Farmers and the public share a mutually beneficial relationship. Seventy-three percent of the public respondents feel connected to the farmers that produce their food.
- Clear, concise communication and transparency of on-farm practices is likely to lead to more support and social license for the primary industry now and into the future.

TAKEAWAYS FOR THE PUBLIC

- Farmers are trying to be socially and environmentally responsible in how they farm.
- Not all farming practices noted as important by the public are easily visible, so take the time to talk to and get to know a farmer and learn more about what they are doing on their farm.

WANT MORE INFORMATION?

For more information about social licence and connecting producers and the public: ourlandandwater.nz/project/connecting-food-producers-and-consumers/

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