

Adoption of the Timata Method for Restoring Native Bush

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John Burke, co-lead of the Retiring Farmland into Ngahere project

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The Timata Method initiates natural processes known to restore ngahere. It was tested, reviewed and communicated by the Retiring Farmland into Ngahere project, funded by Our Land and Water. When less productive farmland is 'retired' into ngahere there can be positive impacts on water quality, greenhouse gas emissions, farm management and profitability, all of which contribute to the Our Land and Water objective.

In the Bay of Plenty over 160 hectares of native forest were planted (using 400,000-plus plants) applying the Timata Method in 2022–24, by the Wai Kokopu and Project Parore community catchment projects and several enthusiastic landowners.

Balanced Forestry, a company managed by Bronwyn Douglas, has seen a steady increase in tree orders, totalling 680,000 forestry grade plants that will be planted using the Timata Method (30,000 in 2022; 200,000 in 2023; and 450,000 orders in 2024). Ms Douglas directly attributes this increase to the resources produced by the research project, including a video that has been viewed on YouTube over 130,000 times.

The Timata Method is also used to plant commercial mānuka plantations for high-UMF honey production. Mānuka Farming supplied 1.2 million mānuka between 2021 and 2024 to plant approximately 1000 hectares. Comvita has used the method to plant over 7500 hectares of mānuka in the central lower North Island.

Regional councils are also interested in increasing planting by this method to cost-effectively achieve broadscale retirement of steep pastoral erosion-prone land. Hawkes Bay, Waikato and Marlborough Regional Councils have begun to actively promote planting using the Timata Method.

Many land managers across Aotearoa would love to retire some marginal or highly erodible land back into ngahere. Previously, the establishment cost of up to \$30,000 per hectare for traditional high-density, high-grade planting has limited landowners' participation in large-scale planting projects.

The Timata Method is a 'disruptor' approach, reducing the cost of establishing native trees by over two-thirds or around \$20,000 per hectare. This equates to potential national savings of \$10 billion if even half the 1,000,000 hectares identified as highly erodible pastoral land were returned to native forest using this method.

Project co-lead Alison Dewes, NZ River Voice Award 2019 recipient and director of Tipu Whenua, says this significant cost difference has encouraged wholesale nurseries and contractors to reduce planting costs by applying Timata principles, adopting wider (2m) plant spacings and providing a proportion of less expensive mānuka and/or kānuka at a lower T28 plant grade.

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The Retiring Farmland into Ngahere project built on a 10-year Primary Growth Partnership project that retired over 400 hectares of marginal land into mānuka plantations for honey, then applied that knowledge to broader land retirement into mixed natives on steep erosion-prone slopes, riparian margins, and critical source areas.

Our Land and Water provided funding to describe the best-practice methods in a report, fact sheet and video for landowners, agribusiness and forestry advisors, regional councils and native forest restoration projects. The educational resources provided critical information on weed and pest control, coloniser species mix, planting density, soil biome, and establishment timelines.

Non-traditional research outputs, such as these educational resources, are encouraged by Our Land and Water due to its emphasis on mission-led implementation of research, making it a uniquely suitable funder of this work.

The project outputs were shared by media (two Farmer's Weekly articles were viewed online 5500 times), social media, and catchment newsletters. The method was presented by Alison Dewes at three national conferences, and by project co-lead John Burke at over 15 seminars around Aotearoa. Mr Burke applied the Timata Method on his own Pukekauri Farm (winner of the 2024 Cawthron National Freshwater Champions award) and frequently hosts on-farm field days to showcase the approach.

'Timata' – from te reo Māori, meaning to begin, start, kick-off, or commence – is now a well-recognised name for low-cost native reforestation.

Multiple individuals and agencies (particularly the Bay of Plenty and Hawke's Bay Regional Councils) contributed to refining the Timata Method at Pukekauri Farm, Lake Tutira, Ao Marama Farms and other trial sites. Individuals from Te Uru Rakau, Pāmu, Project Parore, Kaipara Moana Remediation, Balanced Forestry and several forestry and Māori agribusinesses were involved in reviewing the educational resources.

The method will be further refined over time, particularly when combined with the knowledge and assistance of Tane's Tree Trust, Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research, Scion and Mānuka Farming.

This article was prepared as an impact case study for MBIE as part of Our Land and Water's 2023–24 annual reporting requirement.

Additional information:

- [Retiring Farmland into Ngahere project](#)
- [Restoring land into native forest: The Timata Method \(video\)](#)
- [Lower Cost Native Restoration of Farmland: Timata Method Fact Sheet](#)

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