



# Supporting succession planning in deer farming

New Zealand's deer farming industry is less than 45 years old, and the industry is turning its thoughts towards succession planning. To help with this, the New Zealand Deer Farmers' Association (NZDFA) is leading a project to help deer farming families talk about the future, with investment from the Ministry for Primary Industries' (MPI's) Sustainable Farming Fund.

"There are plenty of families where some members have farming aspirations and others don't – and it's not just the males who take over the farm these days," says Tony Pearse, Producer Manager at Deer Industry New Zealand.

Tony says an initial workshop in farm succession planning at one of the NZDFA's 'Next Generation' conferences attracted considerable interest, and revealed a need for ongoing support and information on the subject.

"We found young people wanted help initiating and steering conversations within families about succession planning. It was really about how you start the conversation."

As a result, the NZDFA set up small regional workshops with family groups, based around the 18 NZDFA branches across New Zealand. The workshops were led by Tony Hammington from Peer Review, who is an experienced succession planner. Over 18 months the NZDFA worked with more than 15 family groups, attracting more than 200 people – well over its target of 50.

Rather than being prescriptive, the workshops aimed to facilitate conversations. Participants were encouraged to share information to find out the gaps in their knowledge about succession planning and what expertise they required.

"Each workshop was different – some were really emotional for families – and there were tears and laughter," says Tony Pearse.

"We found that people enjoyed the opportunity to communicate from the ground up and help each other rather than being talked at."

During the workshops each participant documented where they were on their 'lifeline', including their plans and ambitions.

"A few were expecting a formula, but they were shown why that wouldn't work."

Deer Industry New Zealand Special Projects Manager Amy Wills, who co-ordinated the workshops, noted that the increasing value of farmland has added to the complexity of succession.

"Many farming operations are dealing with very large book assets, but sometimes the cashflow situations are not capable of maintaining multiple families or funding large succession loans," says Amy.

"It was great to have many families attend with their farming and non-farming members, as this allowed for both parties to get a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities."

Steve Penno, Director Investment Programmes at MPI, says MPI's support of this project acknowledges the challenges the deer farming sector is beginning to face.

"Conversations about who is going to take over the family farm can often be pretty tough emotionally," says Steve.

"These workshops are a proactive and constructive way of helping families have these difficult conversations early on. Assisting and up-skilling the next generation with knowledgeable and informed farm succession planning is a vital investment in the industry's future."

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MPI's Sustainable Farming Fund and Primary Growth Partnership have now been replaced by Sustainable Food and Fibre Futures (SFF Futures). SFF Futures supports problem-solving and innovation by co-investing in initiatives that make a positive and lasting difference to New Zealand's food and fibre sectors. [www.sff-futures.mpi.govt.nz](http://www.sff-futures.mpi.govt.nz)