

DEER FACTS

CREATING A FARM ENVIRONMENT PLAN THAT WORKS FOR YOU

KEY POINTS

- An active Farm Environment Plan (FEP) will help you protect some of the most valuable assets on your farm: your soil, water, vegetation and biodiversity.
- An FEP lists the risks to your farm environment, the actions needed to reduce those risks, and the time frames for completing the work that needs to be done.
- Even in regions where FEPs are not yet required, Deer Industry New Zealand (DINZ) encourages farmers to craft one.
- By working with other farmers, you can make environmental improvements that benefit each other, as well as the wider community.
- Putting an FEP in place helps you meet the expectations of consumers and the wider community, and can benefit all aspects of your farming business.

What is a Farm Environment Plan?

A Farm Environment Plan (FEP) outlines the land, soil and water resources of a farm. It:

- Identifies aspects of the farm and its management that pose risks to the environment
- Lists what needs to be done to minimise those risks
- Schedules improvements over time

Water, soil and pasture are your farm's productive heart. Drawing up an FEP will give you confidence that you are sustainably using these valuable resources.

Persistent erosion, slips/slumps, reduced water quality, silt build-up in streams, loss of native cover, and degraded wetlands can indicate that the farm's soil and water are at risk.

Importantly, not all the solutions are expensive. Many improvements listed in an FEP come at little or no cost. In addition, a well-designed plan can also identify opportunities to:

- Improve productivity without harm to the environment
- Strengthen farm systems
- Reduce long-term costs

Why have a FEP?

Having an 'active' Farm Environment Plan:

- Helps ensure your farm's most important assets – its soil and water – are being used sustainably

- Makes your farm more resilient to severe storm events driven by climate change
- Helps meet regulatory requirements
- Demonstrates environmental stewardship
- Supports industry expectations
- Identifies low-cost improvements
- Can enhance productivity and resilience to extreme weather events.

Effective environmental planning and sound management practices can deliver real benefits for individual farmers. For instance, implementing good winter grazing practices for fodder crops helps minimise soil pugging and maintain soil structure, while reducing the risk of sediment and nutrient loss.

Buffer strips along waterways alone are highly efficient at trapping sediment-bound phosphorus, with typical reductions of 50 – 90%.

Mature and well-maintained poplars on erosion-prone slopes have been shown in studies to reduce soil loss in storms by up to 90 – 95%.

In addition to the many on-farm benefits, a well-implemented plan demonstrates to regulators, the wider community, and customers that you take your environmental and legal responsibilities seriously. For these reasons, DINZ encourages deer farmers to complete an FEP, even when it is not mandatory.

Photo: Glendene stags, Trevor Walton



Many farmers find Farm Environment Plans are an invaluable planning tool, with a positive impact on all aspects of their farm business.

Farmers say it's worth it

Farmers with an active FEP have reported that it:

- Guides stock and paddock management
- Improves understanding of environmental impacts
- Is easy to share with family and staff

- Creates a better work environment
- Leads to healthier and happier stock
- Enhances birdlife and water quality

What is a Freshwater Farm Plan (FWFP)?

A Freshwater Farm Plan (FWFP) is a component of an FEP. As the name suggests, its focus is improved freshwater management.

An FWFP assesses and manages risks relating to the four key contaminants of freshwater: nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), sediment, and harmful bacteria (*E. coli*). FWFPs identify:

- Land management units
- Contaminant pathways
- Mitigation strategies to protect water quality

Who needs a Freshwater Farm Plan?

Government requirements

Under national regulations, farmers nation-wide will need to have a FWFP if they have:

- 50 ha or more in pastoral, arable, or mixed land use
- 50 ha or more of viticulture or orchard land
- 5 ha or more in commercial vegetable growing or other horticulture
- A commercial dairy farm

It was expected at the time of publication that legislation confirming these requirements would soon become law.

FARM MAPS BRING AN FEP TO LIFE

Farm maps form the backbone of most FEPs.

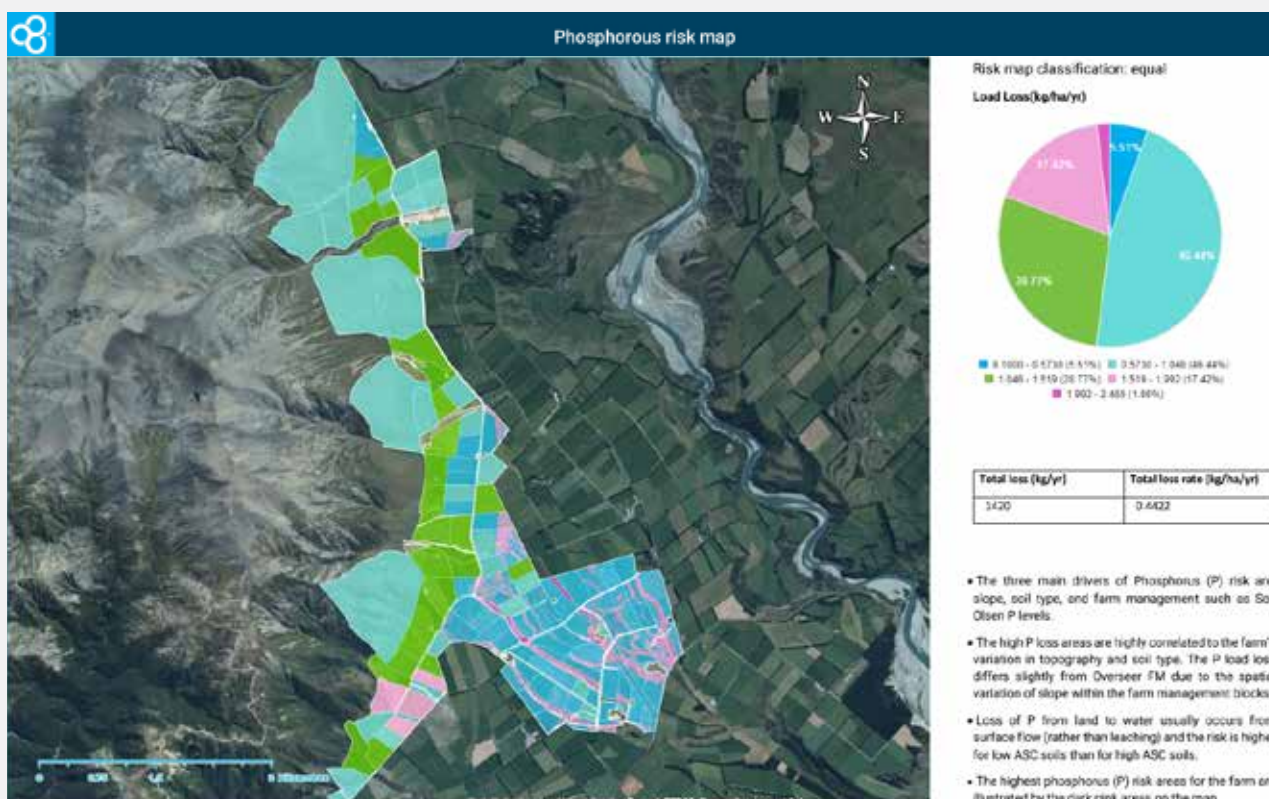
They typically show:

- At-risk areas
- Waterways
- Soil types
- Infrastructure
- Vegetation
- Critical source areas
- Slope
- Aspect
- Elevation

Mapping options include:

- Existing digital maps
- Council aerial imagery
- Fertiliser company mapping services
- Private software providers

Tip: Use multiple map layers to avoid overcrowding on one map



The phosphorous risk map for Mt Hutt Station: This map is one of seven layers on the Mt Hutt Station Map. The other layers are locations, paddocks and farm features; soil types; aspects, slopes and land management; elevation; nitrogen risk; sediment risk and critical source areas.

Regional requirements

Each region has its own soil and water management rules. In June 2026, FEPs were compulsory for some deer farmers in these regions:

- Lake Taupo catchment
- Lake Rotorua catchment
- Tukituki catchment, Hawkes Bay
- Greater Wellington
- Canterbury
- Southland (FEMP)

To ensure your farming operations are legally compliant, keep a close eye on your regional council website.

What does an FEP cover?

An FEP is a document that is customised for your farm. It identifies the farm's environmental risks and outlines specific, actionable, time-bound management strategies to mitigate them.

It covers soil health, water quality, nutrient management, effluent systems, irrigation, erosion control, and biodiversity. It also acts as a record for compliance purposes and highlights the milestones you have achieved.

Key components:

- Risk identification and assessment: identifies areas vulnerable to nutrient loss (N, P), sediment runoff, point sources, critical source areas, and erosion.
- Management strategies: documents the land, water, nutrient, and stock management practices you have adopted to minimise environmental impact.
- Supporting plans: detailed plans for specific areas, such as nutrient management, effluent management, biodiversity, and irrigation.
- Action plan: a documented, time-bound plan that outlines actions for improvement. This helps ensure compliance with regulations.
- A farm map highlighting key resources, waterways, critical source areas, and infrastructure.

Where to start?

Deer Industry Environmental Management Code of Practice

The best starting point is the *Deer Industry Environmental Management Code of Practice*. Find it on the Deer Hub >>

The Code:

- Reflects practical deer farmer experience
- Provides guidance on managing behaviours such as fence pacing and wallowing
- Offers practical advice on crop feeding and fertiliser management

There is also useful environmental management information on the Beef + Lamb New Zealand website >>

Digital farm planning software

Farm planning software to assist farms in creating a Farm Environmental Plan is available from several providers. Look at the integrated farm planning page of the Deer Hub to select the best tool for your needs.

Working with neighbours and catchment groups

There can be benefits from neighbours working as a group on a co-ordinated environment plan to improve water quality in their catchment.

- In large catchments, overall water quality can't be improved unless all land users have similar environmental goals.
- The cost of a consultant can be shared.
- Being part of a shared project can be a great motivator.
- It is easier to get funding support and community recognition for groups than for individual farms.

Waikaia Catchment Group

Farmers in the Waikaia catchment, Eastern Southland, have formed a catchment group, made up of 12 farms ranging in size from 30 – 65,000 ha. Four farms with deer are included.

The group has had several farm planning workshops, designed to build capability and provide tailored guidance for individual farms. Topics like freshwater management, biodiversity, winter grazing, and greenhouse gases have been discussed.

With funding from MPI and Rabobank and guidance from the Ballance Farm Sustainability team, the farmers in the group have developed Southland Farm Environmental Plans for their properties.



Deer farmer Simon Lee

Simon Lee, manager of Glenary Station, is part of the Waikaia Catchment Group. He says the workshops explained the purpose of a farm plan and how to develop one that meets legal and other requirements. The practical elements included:

- How to set up enterprise details and to explain the farm story
- How to use land unit mapping to assess risk from a certifier's perspective
- How to develop actions as part of a farm plan
- How to build an electronic freshwater farm plan using the system developed by QCONZ, a private QA company working in the primary sector

The catchment group approach to completing individual farm plans has been a win-win, Lee says.

"As farmers, we saw the need to get plans sooner rather than later, and for Ballance it meant they could support more farmers when we were working together as a group."

CASE STUDY

Making your FEP part of the big picture

Photo: Goldpine

Bruce Hood, Mt Hutt Station, Mid-Canterbury

The Hood family of Mt Hutt Station, Mid-Canterbury, have had an 'active' Farm Environment Plan for several years. It's a requirement of their irrigation consent. The plan is independently audited every 2–3 years.

Bruce and Becky Hood have continually developed and refined their FEP, integrating it into the farm's broader business goals and areas of focus.

Key actions Bruce and Becky have implemented through their FEP include:

- Fencing waterways to exclude deer and establishing riparian planting
- Installing soil moisture probe monitors
- Applying low-solubility phosphate fertiliser to reduce the risk of phosphorus loss into waterways through runoff
- Assessing winter feed paddocks prior to planting to ensure suitability, including protection of critical source areas and reducing the risk of pugging

"As farmers, we're committed to ongoing improvement. This includes enhancing environmental outcomes on the station and in the wider catchment, and improving the wellbeing of livestock and staff," Bruce says.

In late 2025, Bruce and Becky embarked on a \$1 million biodiversity management pilot project. This aligns with Mt Hutt Station's New Zealand Farm Assurance Programme Plus (NZFAP Plus) status as a venison supplier.

Mt Hutt runs between 18,000 and 20,000 stock units, including 2000 velvetting stags, 3000 breeding hinds and 2600 young deer.

Landcare Resources

NZ Landcare Trust has produced 15 videos showcasing good deer farming environmental practices, available on YouTube >>

DINZ can help

Deer Industry New Zealand monitors changes in environmental regulations to ensure that deer farmers' interests and concerns are understood by government agencies. We also communicate with deer farmers, helping them understand what they need to do in order to comply with local and regional authority rules.

DINZ works collaboratively with a wide range of stakeholder groups to support long-term environmental outcomes, including Beef + Lamb New Zealand, DairyNZ, HortNZ, PorkNZ, the forestry sector, Forest & Bird, and iwi groups.

We work with the NZDFA to make submissions on proposed legal changes in the interests of deer farmers.

We also organise joint seminars, field days and workshops with these organisations, as well as MPI.

See the links to *Deer Facts* and other resources at the end of this fact sheet.

If you want to know more about what's happening in your region, or how regulatory changes will affect you, contact the Environmental Stewardship Manager at DINZ: 04-473-4500 or info@deernz.org

Measuring the benefits

Effective environmental planning and sound management practices can deliver tangible benefits for individual farmers. But every farm is different.

For example, good winter grazing practices for fodder crops help minimise soil pugging, maintain soil structure, and reduce the risk of sediment and nutrient losses to the environment.

For farmers who have cleared willows from flood-prone creeks or planted poplars on erosion-prone slopes, the benefits are seen in reduced flood impacts, such as fewer landslides, less infrastructure damage, and a reduced need for regressing following flood events.

For farmers in regions where N and P loss from farms has resulted in a decline in freshwater and groundwater quality, progress may need to be measured by water testing.

More >>

Deer Facts: www.deernz.org/deer-facts

- Effective nutrient management on deer farms
- Fence pacing: costs and solutions
- Protecting waterways from wallow and feed pad run-off
- Intensive winter feeding: minimising the environmental risk
- Planning for winter: best options for deer and their environment
- Trees for deer: environment, welfare and productivity
- Make your native bush sing: biodiversity, protection & enhancement

Deer Hub: www.deernz.org/deer-hub

- The *Deer Industry Environmental Management Code of Practice* >>



**Deer Industry
New Zealand**

PO Box 10702, Wellington 6143 | Level 4, Wellington Chambers,
154 Featherston Street, Wellington 6011, New Zealand
Telephone: +64 4 473 4500 | Email: info@deernz.org

Deer Facts are produced by Deer Industry New Zealand (DINZ), supported by the Ministry for Primary Industries, to assist farmers to run profitable farm management systems that are recognised for their high standards of animal welfare and environmental performance.

Each *Deer Fact* sheet has been checked for technical accuracy, but DINZ cannot take responsibility for decisions based on their content. If in doubt, seek professional advice.