Four types of sheep/beef farmers across the ARGOS panels

Introduction

Research Note Number 35 showed how causal mapping results helped improve our understanding of sheep/beef farm management. It showed how the maps varied for farmers in each panel. In addition, it also identified four other types of farmers but did not have space enough to describe the results. This note describes the four different types of farmer as defined by the "Q" method.

Q method

The mapping method asked farmers to first identify the factors important in the management of their farm system. This involved the farmers sorting 41 factors into a distribution from the most important to the least important. Q method uses this distribution to find groups, or types, of people who sort the factors in a similar way. Causal maps were prepared for each type, based on the maps of the individual farmers in each type. These maps are shown in the full report (Understanding sheep/beef farm management using causal mapping, ARGOS Report 07/02).

Results

Results are presented in order from the smallest to the largest number of farmers.

Type 2, off-farm work important (N=4, 1 organic, 2 integrated, 1 conventional) position of the farm.
- Has an off-farm work orientation where the work is related to improving the financial

- Gave less emphasis to environment, weather and climate, and satisfaction.
- This type is trying to build up the farm financial situation and improve equity.
- Has a map with fewer connections suggesting that this type sees farming as less complex compared with other types.

The key theme of Q-sort type 2 is lower emphasis on environment, production, farmer as decision maker and family, and higher emphasis on farm profits to increase equity, facilitated by a greater role of labour and advisors. Customer requirements are unimportant to this type.

Type 3, external orientation (N=5, 2 organic, 1 integrated, 2 conventional).
- Particularly important were off-farm activities, contractors, fertiliser and soil fertility/health, and marketing or processing organisation.
- Markets and customers are paramount, paralleled by the importance given to off-farm work and off-farm activities.
- Labour has a strong influence on production. This type of farmer delegates farm work to labour and contractors while they meet off-farm work commitments.

The key theme of Q-sort type 3 is an external orientation focused on markets, customers, off-farm activities, delegation of work to labour and contractors, and maintaining fertiliser and soil fertility/health.

Type 1, Conventional, external influences important (N = 8, 1 organic, 3 integrated, 4 conventional).

- Does not emphasise the farm environment as much as other types and sees the weather and climate, and exchange rate/macro economy, as having a greater influence.
- Has only some subtle differences from the overall average and believes that some external factors, which are hard to control, have a greater impact on their farm system.
- Like Q-sort type 2 this type has a map with fewer connections suggesting that this type sees farming as less complex compared with other types.

The key theme for Q-sort type 1 is the lack of emphasis on the farm environment and the importance given to two external factors – the weather and the exchange rate/macro-economy.

Type 4, ecological concern (N=10, 6 organic, 2 integrated, 2 conventional).

- Emphasises farm environmental health, farm environment as a place to live, customer requirements, fertiliser and soil fertility/health, satisfaction, and weather and climate. Off-farm product quality is an additional factor on the map.
- Farm environmental health, fertiliser and soil fertility/health, family needs and production all have stronger connections to farmer as decision maker.
- Farm environmental health is linked strongly to production, and fertiliser and soil fertility/health has a strong effect on farm environmental health.
- Q-sort type 4 gets greater satisfaction from meeting family needs, farm environment as a place to live and farm environmental health.

The key theme of Q-sort type 4 is the importance given to the farm environment, fertiliser and soil fertility/health, satisfaction and future generations/succession.

Results from the Q-sort types can be simplified by combining types 1 and 2 (Type A), and combining 3 and 4 (Type B). Type B farmers emphasise: an off-farm theme of customer requirements, customer satisfaction and off-farm product quality, a social theme reflected in family needs, future generations/succession and satisfaction, and an environmental theme represented by farm environment as a place to live, farm environmental health and stream health. Type B farmers have significantly more connections on their maps and significantly more connections per variable.

Conclusion
ARGOS sheep/beef farmers belong to a panel depending on what management system they use. However, this is not the only way that the farmers can be grouped. The results presented here show another classification. It has some connection to management system but not exclusively. Some conventional farmers fall into the ecological category and one organic farmer fell into the conventional category.

The defining characteristics of Type B suggest that these characteristics may be social indicators of eco-cultural resilience. Production is still important, as it is for all types. There are more sources of satisfaction for Type B and this could imply greater wellbeing.

The types have identified important characteristics of farmers that we were not aware of and which may prove to be important in understanding farm management and in finding ways to improve the sustainability of farming in New Zealand.

This research note prepared by **John Fairweather, Lesley Hunt** and **Dave Lucock**.