

Rural Decision Makers SUR[✓]EY

The Survey of Rural Decision Makers is one of the largest and longest-running rural surveys in the world.

Run by Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research every two years, thousands of farmers, foresters, growers and lifestyle block owners across the country voice their opinion on topical issues to build a better picture of decision-making at farm level across the country.

Question topics range from land use and conservation to sources of advice and future planning.

Here we present just a handful of findings from the 2021 survey.

For further information, please contact
Christine Harper: harperc@landcareresearch.co.nz or
Pike Stahlmann-Brown: surveys@landcareresearch.co.nz.

The latest results will be published to our website as they become available: landcareresearch.co.nz/srdm



Aspirations for the land

Respondents were asked to describe the aspirations for their land using 3–5 short phrases.

This was an open-ended question, and respondents could write absolutely anything. We read through nearly 4,000 answers from farmers, foresters, growers, and lifestyle block owners.

We found that many responses emphasised a **RETURN ON INVESTMENT** in the land:

Best production using technologies and systems to ensure optimal growth rates involving beef and sheep breeds that we like.

Our aspiration is that our land will provide us with food security and an additional income stream.

Others emphasised the land owner's aspiration to be a good **ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARD**:

To keep the land in good condition for future generations. We have been lucky to be the guardians of this land for the past 30 years and we are passionate about it.

A gate keeper for the next generation that leaves the land in a more sustainable and environmentally better place than when I bought it.

Still others focused on the farming **IDENTITY AND LIFESTYLE**:

... it is the means towards our way of life. We identify as farmers, nearly all of our needs (physical, financial, emotional, mental, spiritual) are met through farming our land, outside, every day.

Great being my own boss. Been able to make my own decisions.

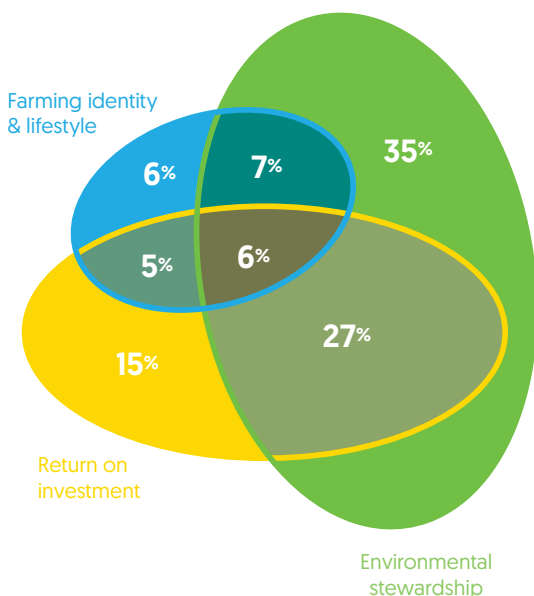
And some responses covered **MULTIPLE THEMES**:

Look after our farm for future generations, Be a good custodian environmentally, run a profitable sustainable dairy farm, have a good happy life.

Farm sustainably, while staying solvent. To be able to enjoy rural living, be able to pass the family land to future generations.

Overall:

COMMERCIAL FARMERS, FORESTERS AND GROWERS



Farming identity & lifestyle seek to preserve farming identity & lifestyle



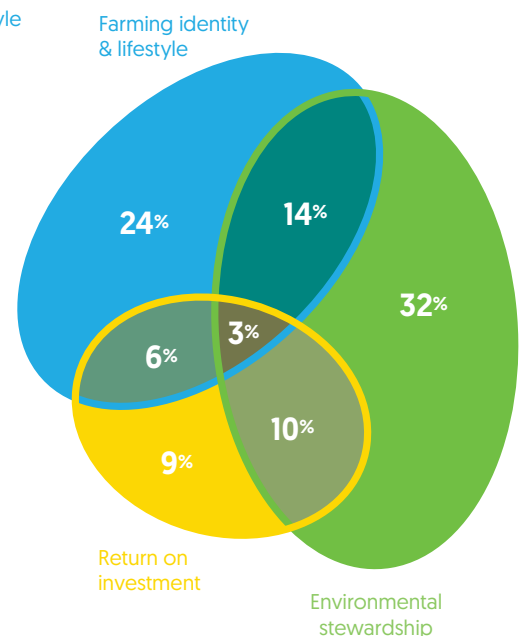
Environmental stewardship aspire to have better environmental stewardship



Return on investment achieve a higher return on investment



LIFESTYLE BLOCK OWNERS



Restricting stock from waterways

Dairy and beef farmers are taking measures to restrict stock from waterways.



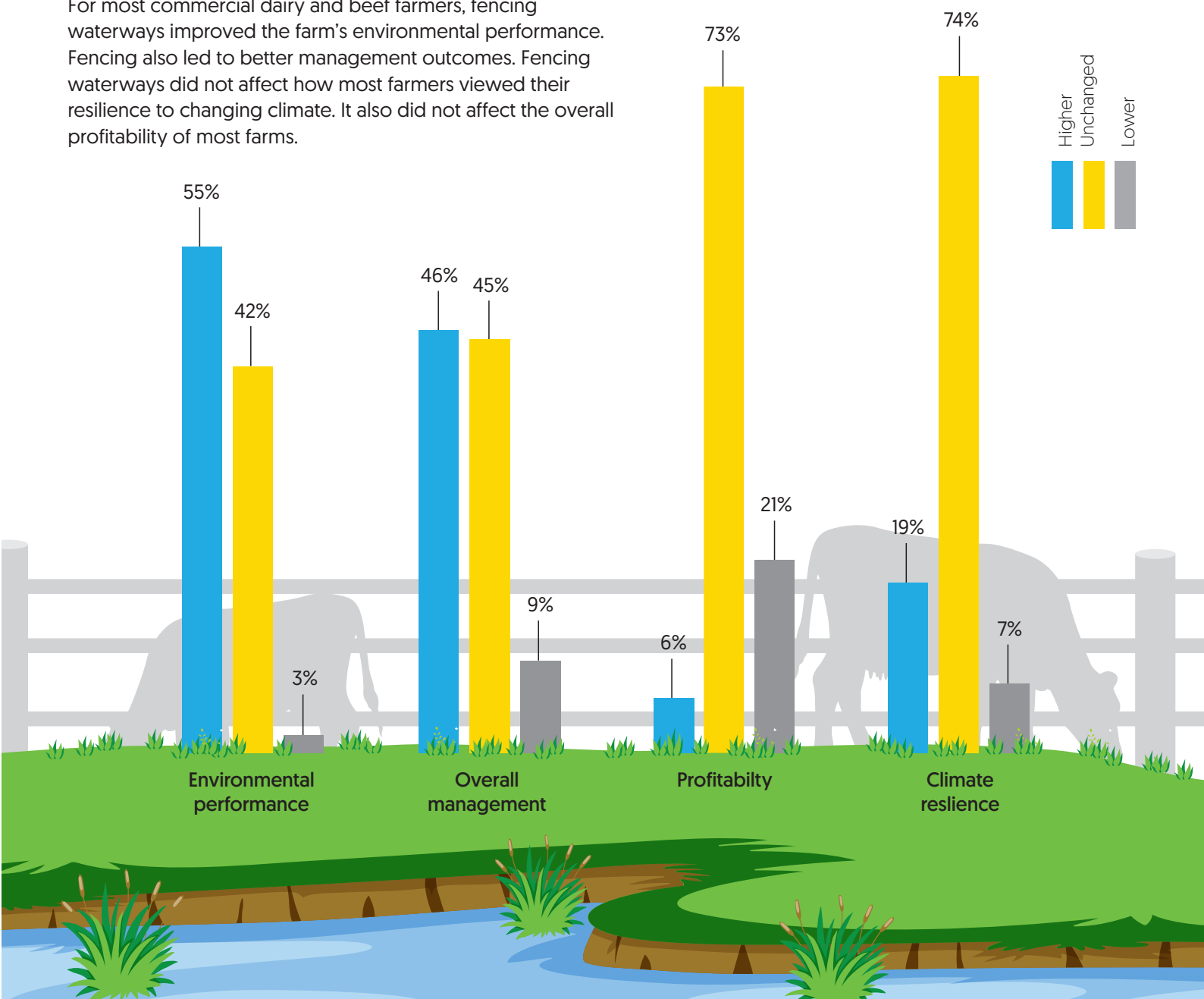
Dairy farmers are fencing nearly all the wetlands on their properties, especially in Southland and Northland, where 95% or more of the extent of wetlands on farms is fenced. Southland dairy farmers have fenced the highest proportion of streams.



The majority of major streams on commercial sheep and beef farms in Waikato, Northland, and Manawatū-Whanganui are fenced, with Taranaki and Southland not far behind. Stock are excluded from most of the extent of wetlands on commercial sheep and beef properties.

Results of fencing waterways

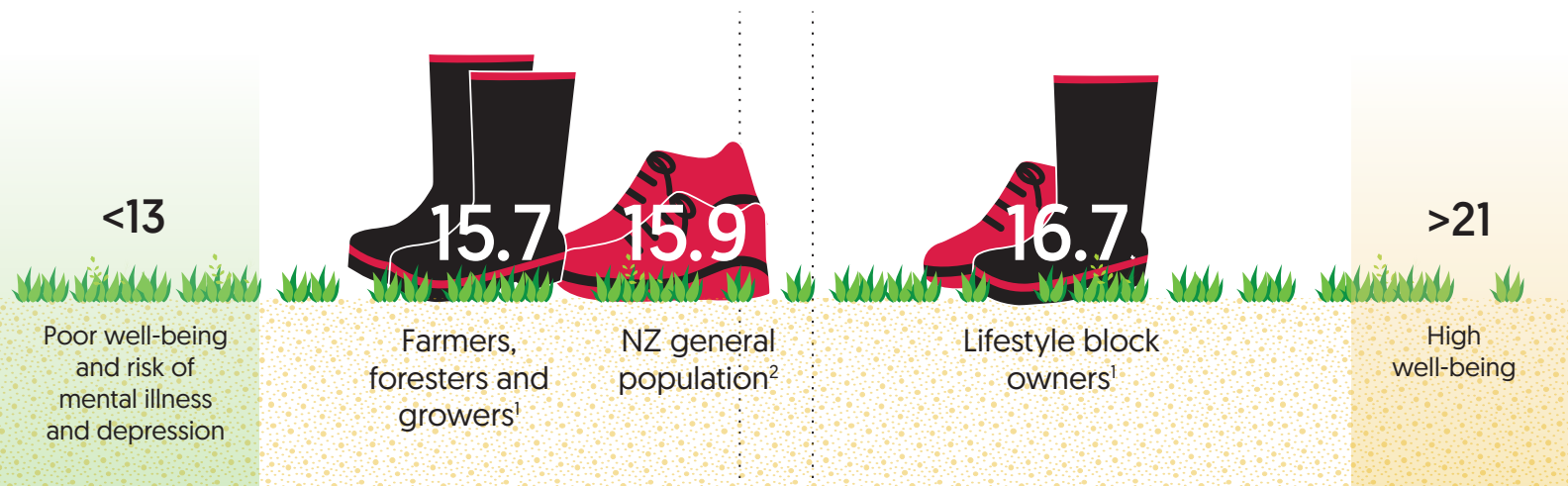
For most commercial dairy and beef farmers, fencing waterways improved the farm's environmental performance. Fencing also led to better management outcomes. Fencing waterways did not affect how most farmers viewed their resilience to changing climate. It also did not affect the overall profitability of most farms.



Rural well-being

We used the WHO-5 Index to evaluate the well-being of commercial farmers, foresters, growers and lifestyle block owners.

The WHO-5 Index was developed over 20 years ago to assess well-being and has become the most common measure of well-being worldwide. It is based on a short questionnaire reflecting on the previous two weeks and is measured on a 0–25 scale.



For comparison, average scores for adults in the UK and France in 2015 were 16.0 and 16.2, respectively³.

At risk for mental illness and depression

While the share of commercial operators who fell below the threshold score of 13 was similar to the NZ population as a whole, there was considerable variation across sectors.



By sector:



¹ Stahlmann-Brown P 2021. Survey of Rural Decision Makers 2021. Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research. DOI: 10.7931/ 3tcs-wb24

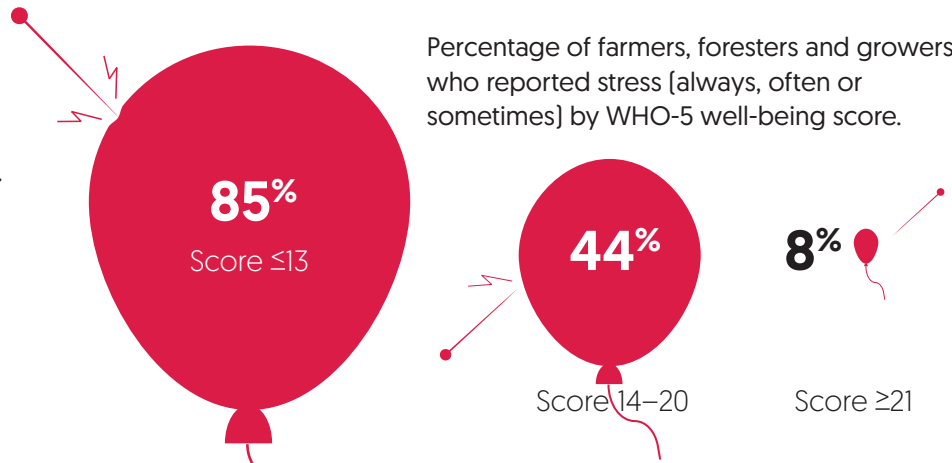
² IPSOS [2021]. Well-being amongst New Zealanders. <https://mentalhealth.org.nz/resources/resource/wellbeing-amongst-new-zealanders>

³ Sischka, P. E., Costa, A. P., Steffgen, G., & Schmidt, A. F. [2020]. The WHO-5 well-being index–validation based on item response theory and the analysis of measurement invariance across 35 countries. Journal of Affective Disorders Reports, 1, 100020.

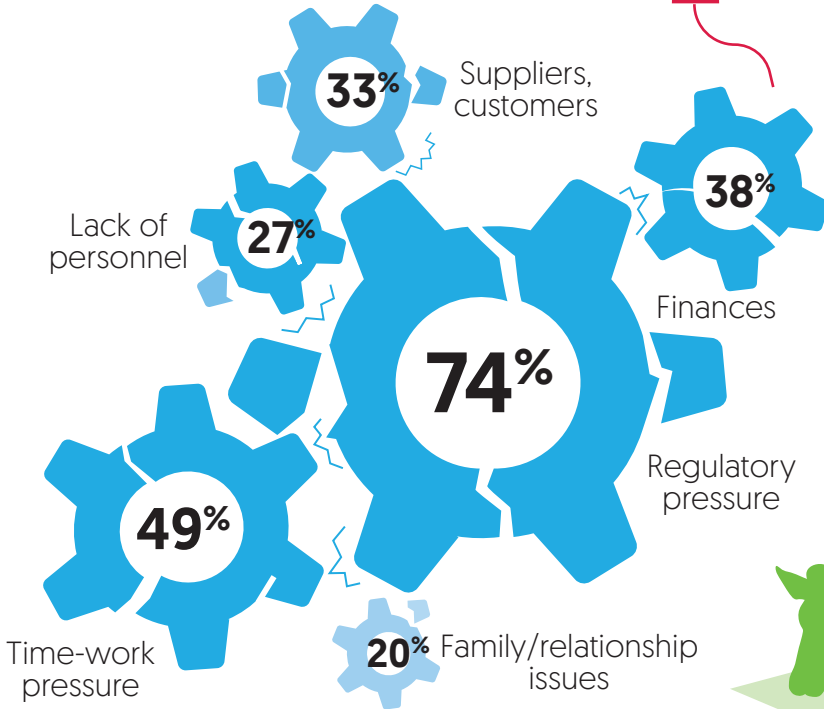
Stress

We asked farmers, foresters and growers how often they felt stress.

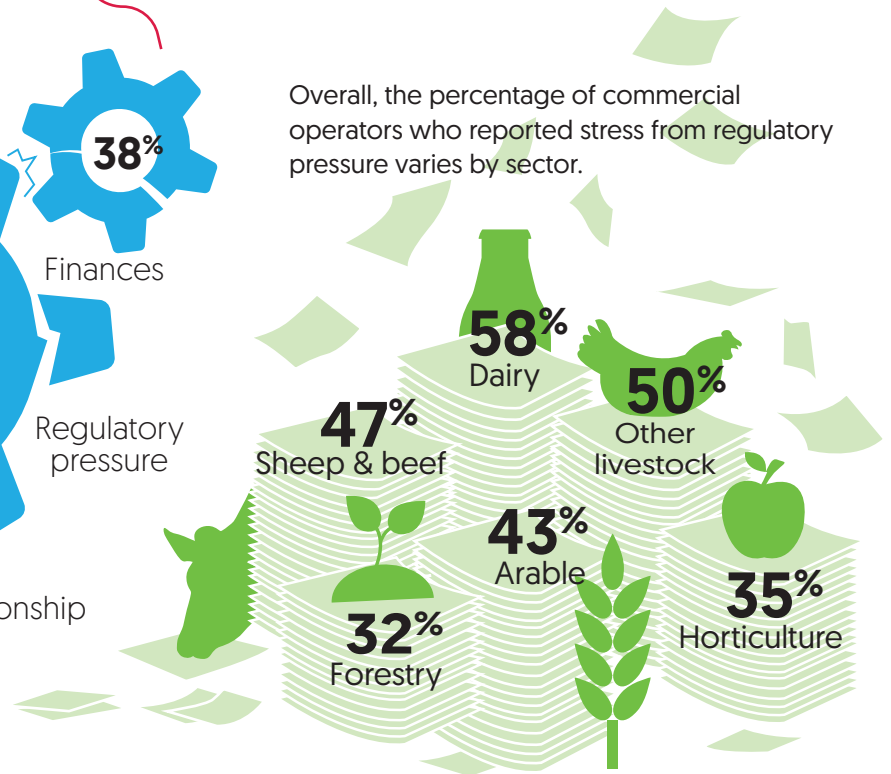
Percentage of farmers, foresters and growers who reported stress (always, often or sometimes) by WHO-5 well-being score.



Primary causes of stress for commercial operators



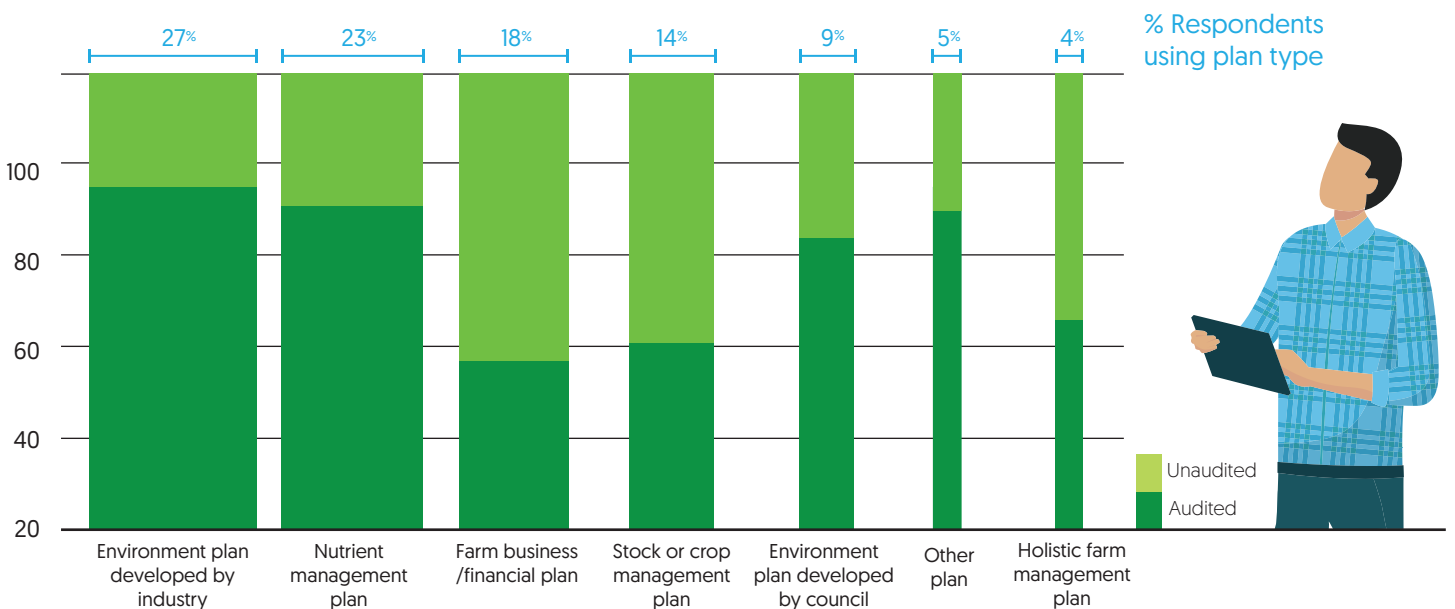
Overall, the percentage of commercial operators who reported stress from regulatory pressure varies by sector.



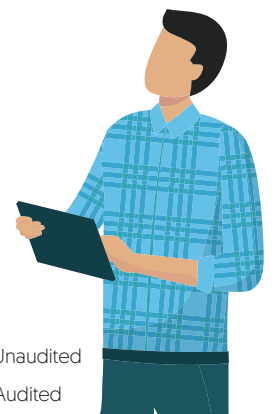
Aspects of Farm management

Farmers, foresters, and growers follow many pathways to achieve better environmental outcomes.

Formal written plans used by farmers, foresters, and growers.



% Respondents using plan type



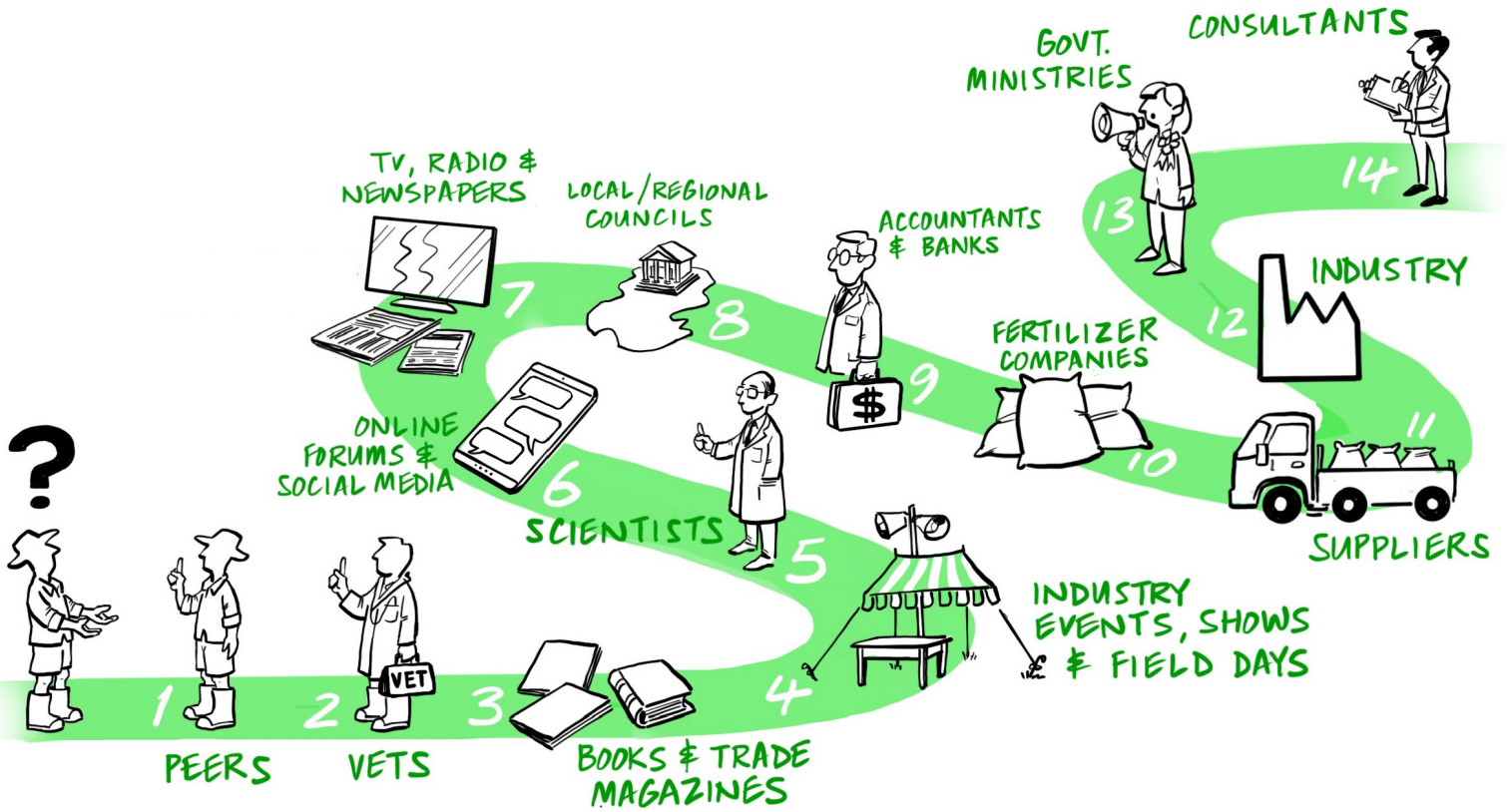
Lifestyle block owners

These results are for the 3,175 lifestyle block owners who responded to the survey.

Trusted sources of advice

MOST
trusted

LEAST
trusted



Activities on lifestyle blocks

80% have their own livestock

