

<https://www.odt.co.nz/rural-life/rural-life-other/experts-call-review-regenerative-farming-mythology>

Summary:

NZ farmers are adopting a range of practices that have been grouped under this title. The headline is somewhat misleading, as is the first paragraph: catering to the sensation and the quick glance? The experts referred to are not ultimately casting doubt on the benefits of practices of this type (especially their environmental impact), but recommending more and detailed research as to what works best and in which locations.

One of the take-home messages for me is that it seems that NZ agriculture is ahead of us!

Maxine  
June 20

***Experts Call for Review of Regenerative Farming Mythology***  
**Rural Life article in full - by Sally Rae**

Two prominent plant science academics have called for the establishment of an expert panel of scientists to review claims made about regenerative agriculture.

In a letter to Agriculture Minister Damien O'Connor, Dr Derrick Moot, a professor of plant science at Lincoln University, and retired senior lecturer Dr Warwick Scott said they were concerned about the "mythology" of regenerative agriculture "and its worrying increased profile in the New Zealand media and farming sectors".

New Zealand sheep and beef farmers had world-leading agricultural practices and the underpinning scientific principles of the country's current agricultural systems were in danger of being devalued by a system they believed had several serious shortcomings, they said.

They were particularly concerned the "erroneous publicity" about regenerative agriculture would divert the limited New Zealand agricultural science resources from more important, substantive issues.

To define regenerative agriculture was difficult, the pair said.

"There are imported textbook definitions, but in short it has become an all-embracing term to encompass any individual's practices who does not want to be seen to be using conventional agricultural techniques. Importantly, this definition, by default, implies that current conventional agriculture, as practised in New Zealand, is degenerative.

"We strongly reject this implication. Our current sheep and beef farming practices are world-leading.

"We recognise that there are practices and practitioners in conventional agriculture that can be improved but consider these are minor compared with most international production systems.

"Indeed the sheep and beef sector is the only industry to have reduced its greenhouse gas emissions intensity to below 1990s levels while continuing to achieve strong productivity gains.

"For decades, New Zealand scientists have advocated pastoral systems to New Zealand sheep and beef farmers that promote environmental stewardship within profitably and socially responsible farm systems."

Drs Moot and Scott believed the regenerative agriculture system lacked credibility and contained many aspects that were scientifically untenable.

"We believe it is our statutory duty as academics to provide some warning about the fallibility of these systems."

They supported several aspects of conventional agriculture that were promoted within regenerative agriculture.

Practices such as rotational grazing, high-quality leafy-legume-based pastures, direct drilling, overcoming nutrient deficiencies and landscape farming to provide ecosystem services all had a sound scientific basis and were not new. They were already well researched and validated, they said.

In a response to the *Otago Daily Times*, Mr O'Connor said farmers had always had the freedom to make individual choices about alternative practices on how they operated behind the farm gate, and "curiosity is one of the drivers of innovation".

That was to be encouraged if it could provide solutions to the challenges farmers encountered on a daily basis, whether extreme weather events, making changes to meet new regulatory requirements, or seeking to proactively improve their environmental footprint.

At present much of the information available to farmers about regenerative agriculture came from trials and studies in other countries with different climates, soils, and farming systems to New Zealand.

"There is a real opportunity for our science and research community to work with farmers to build a robust, evidence-based understanding of the benefits of regenerative agriculture practices in a New Zealand context," he said.

Some of that work was starting with research projects being undertaken by Manaaki

Whenua, Lincoln University, and Pamu (Landcorp), through case studies on individual farms, he said.

In their letter, Drs Moot and Scott referred to a recent episode of *Country Calendar* featuring Linnburn Station, in Maniototo, which highlighted regenerative agriculture.

The *Otago Daily Times* contacted both Peter Barrett, of Linnburn Station, and Pure Advantage, a registered charity led by business leaders which has been promoting regenerative agriculture, for comment, but did not receive responses.