

FEDERATED FARMERS NORTHLAND CHRISTMAS CATCH-UP



NORTHLAND

Dry weather officially an adverse event

Christmas is a time for communities to rally together and never is that more true than now as Waikato and the Ruapehu District join North Auckland and Northland in official drought.

The news that the region is already in its second drought in a row has created a somber mood around Northland and all local farmers are hoping the recent drop of rain will continue through Christmas.

I met with the Minister of Agriculture, David Carter, near Dargaville when he declared the area was suffering under a medium scale adverse event.

While, so far, the drought has been characterised as 'green', it was a sobering sight to see farms on lighter soils beginning to look almost as parched as Australia.

This is not a time to be suffering alone; farmers under stress should make the time to get off the farm to keep some perspective.

Neighbours should also look out for each other in these times.

NIWA's recent prediction of rain for the New Year has bolstered spirits, but farmers should bear in mind they also predicted a wet spring.

While hoping for the best, we need to plan for the weather not playing ball and staying dry.

However, at last we have bright spots on the horizon. The rain that has fallen around the Whangarei District has bought some relief and the Metservice forecasts have finally turned to the rain NIWA has been

forecasting for a long time. The 40mm we received between 13-17 December on our farm nearly matches the total November, December and January falls for 2009.

Will this prove to be a drought breaker? We certainly hope and pray so.

The response from government, so far, has been positive, with Minister David Carter showing a genuine appreciation for the issues local farmers face. The Rural Support

Trust continues to be the first port of call for farmers in need of emergency assistance.

Obviously in a subsidy free environment this does not mean free stock feed or debt assistance, but that rural professionals and community groups work in a coordinated way to help those facing challenges find the best options for moving forward.

There is also an emergency grant under strict conditions for those people unable to pay their day to day living expenses.

Europe's icy blast raises palm kernel prices

Palm kernel prices are rising on global commodities markets in the face of the severe cold weather in Europe and exceptional demand in New Zealand. This and a challenge with shipping availability around Christmas is resulting in a sharp rise in the price of PKE, with RD1's spot price almost reaching \$400/ton at the time of writing.

RD1 assures me that they are not profiteering; however, other sources tell me that the international situation does not justify the current price. I advise farmers to shop around.

Those who have contracted forward a few weeks ago have made substantial savings

and this trend may continue.

We also urge those farmers with feed available to call Federated Farmers 0800 DROUGHT (376 844) and get their feed on our Feedline as part of a co-ordinated feed relief effort. This is a service open to all farmers as well as members.

Small forest exemptions for the Emissions Trading Scheme (Scam)

There are some important deadlines coming up in the New Year for owners of land with pre 1990 forests. Under the ETS owners of pre 1990 forests can apply for an allocation of carbon units which can amount to a substantial asset. Applications for these units must be in by 30 November 2011.

Also exemptions from the ETS for all or part of pre 1990 Forests under 50ha are available and applications for exemptions must be in by 30 September 2011.

Please note that if you have cleared land from scrub or native bush to plant pines after 1990 this area may well be deemed as pre 1990 forest by MAF, contact MAF for more information.

Planning a great Farm Day 2011

The next Northland Farm Day will be held at Denis Anderson's farm at Kokupu on March 13. We view Farm Day as essential in an age where farmers are more and more a minority and Government policy is driven by polls. We need the public to be informed and on our side, otherwise anti-farming groups will take us to the cleaners.

The day is proving a great way to get farmers and non-farmers together to bust many of the myths around agriculture while giving



townies some experience of the daily duties of farmers such as working with animals and also some large machinery.

Our challenge is to get more people along to enjoy a great day and the many activities we are organising. Please take some time over the holidays to think of friends and acquaintances that could be interested and let them know what is happening.

And to everyone, wishing you a wet, rainy Christmas and a green and prosperous New Year from Federated Farmers Northland.

Matthew Long - Federated Farmers Northland, Provincial President



Welcome rain brings new management strategies

Northland has started receiving rain, Ohaeawai (in the central Bay of Islands) has had 80mls at the time of writing.

It is a welcome start to Christmas but it is important to remember the drought is not yet over from a management point of view.

This was reflected in the topic change at Tuesday's drought meeting in Dargaville – how to manage your way out of a drought after receiving rain.

While there is a temptation to increase pasture rotation after rain, the grass has suffered a lot of damage over the dry spell.

It is important to allow time for pastures to recover.

Hopefully, people will have maintained a rotation policy throughout the drought and will keep to that same plan over the next few weeks.

Preparations for the next Farm Day are progressing well, thanks mainly to Louise Wilson.

It will be held at Dennis Anderson's dairy farm near Whangarei. At the moment we are looking for pets to feature in a petting park.

Please contact me if you can help out with this.

Roger Ludbrook - Federated Farmers Northland Meat & Fibre Chairperson



A bit of rain not relief

Rain falling a week out from Christmas has been a welcome change in weather, but it is not going to change Northland's drought status.

As of last Friday there had been 60mls recorded at Mangawai and about 25mls each at Taipuha and Maungaturoto.

But it started out patchy; our place, also at

Maungaturoto, only had 10mls of rain.

It is getting heavier now so things may change dramatically in the next two weeks.

At this point the rain may actually cause what grass there has been to rot.

To really break the drought we need six weeks of gentle, soaking rain – no heavy stuff which would flood off the land.

Milk production is dropping and now is the time to seriously look at getting non-productive cows off the farm to reduce feed demand.

Off-loading is not easy and will get more difficult as the season progresses.

With the drought spreading across the top of the North Island options are tightening and the fire, which destroyed the Te Aroha Silver Fern meat processing plant, could cause delays with cull dairy stock spaces at a premium.

If you want to get stock off the farm, do it now before everybody else wants to.

My main message is for everyone to make sure they have time off from the farm.

Pack up the car and the chilly bin and sit on a beach for a day or so and relax.

It is a tough ask, with everyone feeling this drought has come when they were not recovered from last year, but taking a break is necessary to make sure you keep perspective and get through the drought.

Thankfully there has been an increase in Fonterra's dairy pay out which may ease some minds.

Ironically, some economists predict a continued decline in national production due to drought may raise pay outs further due to the natural laws of supply and demand.

However, I would prefer to have a good season with a good pay out for all.

I wish everyone a Merry Christmas and may the rain gods smile on us all in the New Year.

Ashley Cullen - Federated Farmers Northland Dairy Chairperson



Double drought hits harder

Three aspects of Northland's developing drought make this year's adverse event worse than the drought over 2009-10.

The first concern is that the drought started earlier in the season with record low rainfall in October and November. Many indicators show Northland is already in the same position as it was in January 2010.

Secondly, much of the damage from lack of rainfall and record low soil moisture deficits has already occurred and is unlikely to be redressed by average or even above-average rainfall after Christmas, as NIWA has

forecast.

Lastly, this year's drought is not a stand-alone event.

This drought carries the cumulative effects of last year's event on farm and orchard production, animal health and welfare, financial viability and strain on farming families.

Most districts had only 22 per cent of the normal October and November rainfall and farmers have been unable to make hay or silage, summer crops have not established and pasture growth rates are below half of normal.

But as the drought spreads across the upper North Island the ability of Northland farmers to sell store stock outside the region or find additional grazing will become seriously restricted.

To deal with the issues arising from the drought the Rural Support Trust has reactivated the Northland drought committee.

Committee members include representatives of local and central government, rural support groups, the agricultural and horticultural industries, animal welfare organisations and the financial sector.

The drought committee provides a combined sector approach to the communication and coordination of information including the assistance that is available through the Rural Support Trust.

Subcommittees are working with the community to address specific drought-related issues.

These are; the Extension/Advice Subcommittee, which will keep Northlanders informed about drought developments and provide drought management tips, the Financial Subcommittee working to help the rural community overcome financial challenges caused by drought, and the Welfare Subcommittee whose members will give one-on-one advice from experienced farmers to those needing budgetary help and work to coordinate welfare assistance.

The Northland Rural Support Trust can be reached on 0800 787 254.

Julie Jonker -

Northland Rural Support Trust co-ordinator

