

Ground Rules

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Welcome to another edition of Ground-rules for Canterbury farmers.

The deadline for getting Land Use Consents to Farm completed has just passed. Many of you will be well on the way of knowing what is needed for your farm and getting your consents completed but for some the consent processes might still be puzzling. You might still be wondering; do I or don't I need a consent and if I do, what do I need to do?

In this newsletter we cover:

- Do you need a Land-Use Consent to Farm?
- Using NCheck as an alternative to OVERSEER® to find an N Loss number for your farm.
- Using NCheck numbers in your consent and the pros and cons of doing so.
- Completing Farm Environment Plans.

Land Use Consents to Farm - Do I need one?

Under the Canterbury Land and Water Regional Plan many farmers will need a Land Use Consent to Farm. The requirements for these consents, including nutrient loss limits differ from zone to zone within Canterbury. There are a number of steps to follow to find out whether you need a consent or not.

1. Find out about your zone rules: Visit Environment Canterbury's website <http://www.canterburywater.farm/zones> and zoom into your zone information to find out what your zone requirements are. Alternatively ring Environment Canterbury's customer services on 0800 324 636 or visit your local Environment Canterbury office or drop-in centre.

2. Use NCheck (see below) to get an estimate of the N Loss number for your farm. If your NCheck N Loss estimate is less than the zone limit, you may not require a consent. Farming businesses with N Loss estimates below the zone limit are permitted activities and do not require a farm environment plans (FEP). However the development of a FEP is considered to be good management practice for the farm and it is recommended that every farmer develops one. A FEP for a low leaching farm is likely to be simple to develop and it will document the environmental risks on the farm and how they are being managed.

3. If you are in the Selwyn Waihora Zone and any part of your farm is within the Lake Area of the Cultural Landscape Values Management Area or the Phosphorus and Sediment Risk Area, you will require a consent, regardless of your N loss figure.

4. If your farm N Loss estimate is more than your zone limit you will require a consent. Environment Canterbury staff are the best people to talk to about this process. Ring them on their customer services number **0800 324 636** or call in to see them at their local offices and drop in centres. They will provide you with the correct consent form for your zone and an information sheet on completing the form. **You can fill out the consent form yourself.**

The consent form refers to information in your farm environment plan and your farm's N Loss numbers. Thus it is important that your FEP has been completed and that you know your N loss number before you begin filling in the consent form.

Environment Canterbury offers a free 1 hour consultation for every farmer to help with the consent form. Use your free consultation, but remember, time used over the free hour is chargeable. To save costs, fill in as much of the consent form as you can before your consultation and then use the time to clarify the parts of the form where you have specific questions.

Alternatively, you may choose to use a consultant to do this work for you.

More detailed information about filling in the individual sections in the consent form is available on the FAR website.

NCheck - An alternative to OVERSEER® - Now approved for all Canterbury zones

Free and easy and quick to use

NCheck is a good place to start to find an estimate for your N Loss number.

Access it on the Canterbury Water website here; <http://www.canterburywater.farm/gmp/ncheck/>

All farmers in Canterbury can now use NCheck to work out whether they need a land use consent to farm or if they are a permitted activity.

Many arable and horticultural farms can use their NCheck N Loss numbers when they lodge their consent application. Compared to OVERSEER it is quick, cheap and easy to use, however there are some limitations to consider:

How does NCheck work?

NCheck uses your farm address to access your farm's soil and climate information and then leads you through a set of questions about your farming activities to estimate a nitrogen loss for the farm. This estimate is a nitrogen loss number for your farm when it is being managed under good management practices.

For this reason you can't use the NCheck number to demonstrate how your nitrogen loss rate has improved over time through improved management practices on the farm. You require a series of OVERSEER budgets to do this.

NCheck use – things to consider

NCheck has been developed as an alternative to OVERSEER for mixed arable and horticulture farmers. It is an interim measure to allow time for the crop module in OVERSEER to be updated to improve its applicability for mixed cropping systems.

NCheck uses your responses about your farm to access an extensive matrix of OVERSEER numbers. The matrix of numbers was developed for cropping systems in Environment Canterbury's matrix of good management (MGM) project and it includes information about mixed cropping rotations on different Canterbury soils and climates. Because you are not entering detailed farm information into NCheck, the N Loss estimates it delivers will be less accurate than an individual OVERSEER budget produced for your farm.

If you are unsure or uneasy about the accuracy of NCheck you can choose to get your N Loss numbers prepared with OVERSEER nutrient budgets. The Ravensdown and Ballance fertiliser environmental teams and independent industry consultants can prepare these for you, but there is a cost and there may also be a waiting list.

You can reduce the cost and the preparation time for an OVERSEER nutrient budget by having all your farm information organised and ready for their first visit.

This MGM matrix does not include the nutrient losses associated with winter dairy grazing in arable rotations, so NCheck cannot provide an estimate of the nitrogen losses from winter dairy grazing.

If winter dairy grazing is part of your arable system you will need OVERSEER nutrient budgets for your consent.

If you have a mixed arable system and choose to use the NCheck estimates in your consent process there will be limitations on the term of your consent.

- If your farm is in the Selwyn Waihora Zone and your NCheck number is more than 15 kgN/ha/yr, you can use the NCheck to estimate your Nitrogen Baseline **until 2022**.
- If your farm is in the Selwyn Waihora Zone and in the Phosphorus Sediment Risk Area and/or the Lake Area of the Cultural Landscape Values Management Area, you require a consent irrespective of your N Loss estimate. Your NCheck number can be used in the consent and **there is no time limit for this use**.
- If your farm is anywhere else in Canterbury – and your NCheck number is above your zone limit, then you can use NCheck to estimate your Nitrogen Baseline **until 2020**.

More information about NCheck can be found here: www.canterburywater.farm/assets/Uploads/5841-CWMS-NCheck-Guide-Feb2017.pdf

What happens after 2020 or 2022?

After these expiry dates you will need to reapply for a consent. This needs to happen 6 months before the consent expiry date and at this time you will need to supply OVERSEER files for your farm.

Your new consent requires an OVERSEER **Nitrogen baseline**.

An **OVERSEER Baseline** is the average of the N Losses below the root zone over the period of 01 July 2009 - 30 June 2013. OVERSEER is used to estimate the nitrogen losses and you will need to supply farm information about the crops and stock on your farm between the years 2008 and 2013. OVERSEER budgets are prepared by the fertiliser companies and independent consultants.

The downside of choosing to use NCheck in your consents is that you will have to go through the whole consenting process again in 3-5 years' time and we do not know whether the process will be easier or more challenging to follow at that time.

Whatever you choose to do, you will need to provide information for your OVERSEER baseline using data from the 2009-2013 period, so you will need to be able to provide the farm records for this period. Collate them now and keep them in a safe place.

Finishing of your FEPs

Many of you attended FAR's FEP workshops and made a good start at developing your individual FEPs. Now is perhaps the time to have another look at them and tidy them up before you apply for your consents. Your FEP can be submitted with your consent application as supporting information.

Here is a checklist of things to consider.

1. The **FEP maps** are very important. They can often convey much more than words. Remember the next person to look at the maps, will not know the farm like you do.
 - a) Check the map has a good key, explaining what the lines and dots you have drawn mean.
 - b) Make sure that all the risk areas are marked on the Environmental risk map (Map 3). Think about the different soils on your farm and where different activities are carried out; - consider marking in things like change in soil type and winter grazing and irrigation areas. Have you identified everything that might be considered an environmental risk? Include things like intermittent streams, overland water flow paths, eroding stream banks and areas where stock congregate such as stock camps and yards.
2. In the **Environmental Risk** boxes in the management sections. Have you identified all the risks on the farm associated with that management section? These should match up with the things marked on your Environmental Risk map.
 - a) For example in the soils section is there a list of the soils on your farm and the environmental risks associated with them? You might write something like this:
Block- A has light sandy loam soils, these can be wind erodible if there are NW winds during spring cultivation.
 - b) In the irrigation section; You might write something like this:
The risk of applying too much water is low because my irrigation is an old roto-rainer and we struggle to keep irrigation coverage during dry summer seasons.
or
My system is a centre pivot and there is a tendency for ponding in the low corner of Paddock X
3. In the **Key Actions** box for all sections, many of you will not have any action points.

The good management checklists gives an overview of how your farm is managed, but it can be helpful to also summarise the information in the Key Actions section.

I would start this summary by saying:

My current farm management practices include:

Then list information about cultivation, irrigation and nutrient management.

For example:

I use reduced tillage practices whenever possible.

If there is pugging and/or compaction after winter grazing or harvesting I do...

Try and find short sentences rather than single words.

After this summary, if there is nothing you are going to do differently say *"No key actions have been identified."*

If you have any questions concerning farm environment plans and consents please contact the FAR office, 03 345 5783, or Diana directly on 0275 442236 or 06 8779 435.

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