



GROWERS  
LEADING  
CHANGE

**Handbook**  
Guide to help form an  
Arable Growth Group



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**Welcome to Growers Leading Change, developed by FAR with co-funding from MPI's Sustainable Food and Fibres Future Fund (SFFF).**

This handbook has been developed to provide some background information on the programme, and to help people who are considering forming Arable Growth Groups. It outlines the goals of this programme and the kinds of individual projects that could be funded. The guide sets out the expectations of FAR and MPI, and the application process to be followed.



# What is Growers Leading Change?

Growers Leading Change (GLC) has been established by FAR and MPI SFFF to enhance the exchange of knowledge between growers. FAR has always been led by growers, and the research undertaken by FAR has been guided by grower knowledge and experience. There are well-developed formal pathways for information to be passed between FAR and growers, and FAR and industry professionals.

Growers frequently share their knowledge and experience with other growers in many different informal settings. Growers Leading Change aims to augment both the formal exchange of research and the informal discussions between growers, by supporting groups of growers who wish to build on their current knowledge by exploring aspects of their farming operation in more depth. The issues to be examined and tested will be decided by the members of each group, and it is expected that there will be a wide diversity of issues between groups.

GLC will provide a framework of knowledge generation and exchange that encourages arable farmers to develop, test and introduce new ideas, technologies and ways of working, in order to improve their farm, industry and community sustainability.

GLC will package and deliver results via a network of discussion groups, known as Arable Growth Groups, and demonstration farms, known as Pathfinder Farms. It will cater for diverse farming systems, grower attitudes and skill levels and, most importantly, allow growers to learn with, and from, each other. Eventually those results will be shared with the rest of the arable industry.

## What results are expected, and why is FAR investing in GLC?

The goal of the GLC programme is:

***“To improve environmental and financial sustainability in the arable industry”***

In the long term GLC will be deemed a success if the following outcomes can be achieved. Note that the aim is to enhance both the business and personal aspects of arable farming.

### **A. Expected outcomes from activities focussed on Grower Wellbeing:**

- Arable farming is more enjoyable and less stressful.

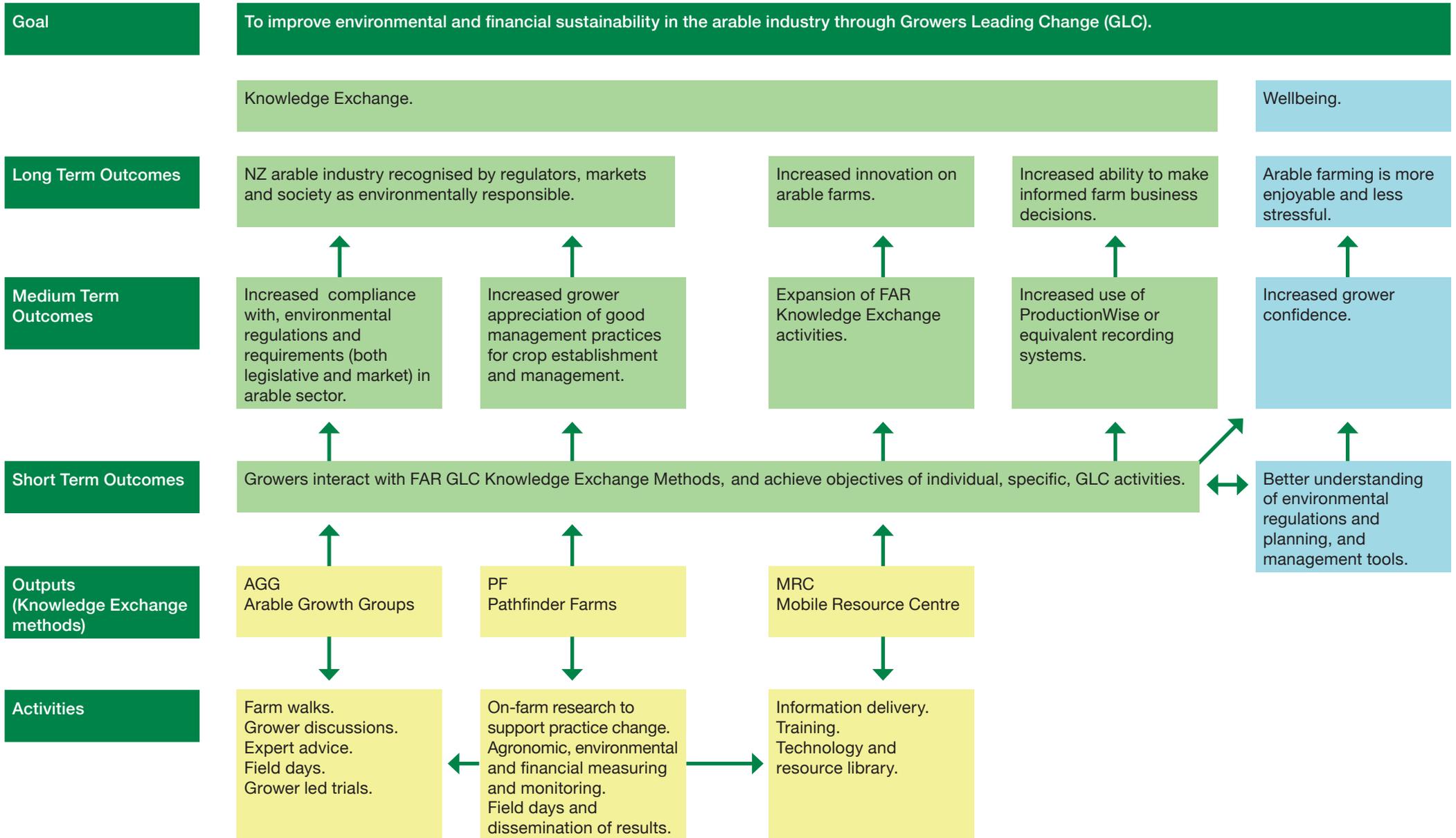
### **B. Expected outcomes from activities focussed on enhancing Knowledge Exchange:**

- The New Zealand arable industry is recognised by regulators, markets and society, as environmentally responsible.
- There is increased innovation on New Zealand arable farms.
- There is increased ability among arable farmers to make informed farm business decisions.

The long-term outcomes recognise that for the industry to prosper it needs to work together to build capability, to continually innovate, and to be accorded the recognition it deserves.

GLC encompasses several individual activities. Some growers will be involved with Arable Growth Groups. Others may be part of a Pathfinder Farm, or an associated Pathfinder support group. Still others will be attending workshops, or accessing our technology and resource library. Over time the aim is to disseminate the results achieved from each of these activities so that the knowledge is available to all levy payers. In the early years the benefits will be more with those who are directly participating in GLC activities.

# GLC Processes and Outcomes





FAR employs a national GLC coordinator and four regional facilitators. The team is there to help growers design individual activities, and once the plans and budget have been completed and approved, the facilitators will be available to the groups to organise meetings, arrange visiting speakers, assist with setting up trials, etc. Facilitators are based in the upper and lower North Island, Canterbury and Southland.

## Arable Growth Groups

Arable Growth Groups recognise growers' knowledge, skills and experience, and focus on their individual learning/information requirements. They are suitable for all growers interested in meeting and working with others to improve specific aspects of their farm's agronomic, environmental or business performance.



- Grower led, professionally facilitated discussion group.
- Approximately 10 farm businesses with a shared focus.
- Local or nationally based.
- Funds to cover speakers, visits, on-farm try-outs and demonstrations.
- One to three years, depending on focus topic.

## Pathfinder Farms

Pathfinder Farms are an option for growers who are ready to embrace new ideas and technologies in order to transition their farm to a new agronomic, environmental or business management system. A Pathfinder Farm might, for example, focus on new approaches to address nutrient-use efficiency, greenhouse gas emissions, agrichemical inputs or succession. These farms, led by high-performing growers and supported by FAR research, will help to identify sustainability pathways for the rest of the sector.



- Technical team providing research planning support and input.
- Funds to cover experts, visits, on-farm trials and demonstrations.
- Three to five years, depending on focus topic.
- Pathfinder Farms will be developed in Year 2 of this project.

## Mobile Resource Centre

GLC is investigating options for delivering information and training to more growers in more regions. The aim is to set up a mobile resource centre, complete with the technology and equipment required to run workshops and events.

**The information in the remainder of this booklet focuses on Arable Growth Groups.**



# What is an Arable Growth Group?

An Arable Growth Group (AGG) is a type of discussion group, with about 10 farm businesses.

AGG members can:

- Work together with like-minded farmers, locally or nationally, to identify ways to improve the performance of their farm business.
- Benefit from on-call agronomy, environmental and business experts.
- Receive support from a trained facilitator.
- Access great tools and resources.
- Receive funding to cover expert, meeting and other costs.

AGGs are part of Growers Leading Change (GLC), a knowledge exchange programme which encourages growers to share with, and learn from each other. Growers set the focus topic for each AGG and then design the structure of their group...how often it meets, what experts they would like to hear from, any on-farm work they would like to try-out etc. These ideas are brought together into a Growth Group Plan, which, once approved, becomes the group's annual work plan.

*"A professionally-facilitated small group of like-minded growers prepared to share experiences, learn from, and support each other."*

## What sort of groups will GLC support?

Each AGG focuses on a key agronomic, environmental or business issue or opportunity. The idea could be broad, such as investigating options to reduce synthetic inputs, specific, such as dealing with a particular weed, pest or disease, technical, such as learning how to measure greenhouse gas emissions or financial, looking at options to alter the rotation to improve returns.

## Who can join?

Growers from across New Zealand are invited to join Arable Growth Groups. Their farm business will be eligible if it:

- Pays levies to FAR (including maize growers) .
- Agrees to working with other farmers in a group environment.
- Can identify a specific challenge and potential benefits, and agrees to work towards finding a solution.

Any member of a farm business – owner, partner, manager or staff is welcome to attend AGG meetings and events. The ideal person is someone who is prepared to share knowledge, and is open to change.

## Forming or joining a new AGG

If you've been pondering an issue or opportunity that would benefit from being investigated or developed with input from other arable farmers and subject experts, get in touch with Growers Leading Change and we will help you form a group either locally or nationally. It's that simple!

Alternatively, check FAR Weekly and the GLC website for notices around groups being formed. If anything is of interest, get in touch. (See expression of Interest Form page 17).

## How it works...an imaginary case study

Growers Ian and Judy want to make sure that their farm nutrient regime is as efficient as possible. They're worried about phosphorus runoff during heavy rain events and nitrogen leaching, but are not sure how best to manage these risks in their maize rotation. They talked to a few neighbours who had similar concerns.

Ian and Judy contacted Growers Leading Change with their idea and the names of their interested neighbours. An Expression of Interest form was filled out and they met with their local GLC facilitator to talk more about the logistics of forming a group. After further discussions with GLC and their neighbours, the idea seemed sound and they formally applied to set up an Arable Growth Group to look at efficient nutrient management in maize. Their four neighbours were keen to join and GLC found another four, making an AGG of nine farm businesses in the same district.

The AGG discussed how often they would like to meet and developed a list of information, activities and speakers they thought would help them learn more about managing maize nutrients; their facilitator adapted this into a Growth Plan. The plan was signed off and the fun began.

Over the year the group visited each-others' farms and discussed things like establishment techniques, yield estimates, soil testing methods and fertiliser application rates. They also heard from technical experts (paid for by the programme) and learned about some electronic tools that would help with measuring, monitoring and recording. Each farm business also set its own specific objectives which the facilitator, experts and other farmers helped them to meet.

At the end of year they reviewed their Growth Plan, left in some topics where they felt they still needed to learn more, and added some new ideas for Year 2.



## What commitment is required?

By participating in Growers Leading Change each farm business agrees to:

- Develop their own Farm Action Plan which identifies a specific objective related to the topic being explored by the Group, and work towards meeting that objective.
- Actively participate in their Arable Growth Group and act reasonably and in good faith throughout.
- Adhere to their Arable Growth Group's 'ground rules' which will be agreed during the first few meetings.
- Provide information to assist with annual project progress reviews. FAR will have a programme to monitor the effectiveness of the overall GLC, and will expect each group to do the same.
- Undertake or participate in events designed to share the results achieved in GLC with the wider industry.

## Any other expectations?

As mentioned previously the long-term outcomes sought at an industry level, from GLC, include:

- Better business decisions.
- More innovation.
- Societal acknowledgement that the arable industry is environmentally responsible.

As tangible evidence of these outcomes, there is an expectation that by the end of the three years of the programme, all participating growers will:

- Use ProductionWise® or its equivalent in making business decisions.
- Apply Good Management Practices.
- Farm in accordance with their Farm Environment Plan, and be audited as compliant.
- Feel better about their business and themselves.

If being part of an AGG interests you, here's what you need to do:

- Identify an area of opportunity or concern for your farm business.
- Try and find others in your area who share your mindset;  
*or*  
Contact the GLC team at [GLC@far.org.nz](mailto:GLC@far.org.nz) to talk it through – they can help find more group members;  
*or*  
Submit an Expression of Interest Form to GLC, see page 17 or the GLC page of the FAR website, and someone will contact you to discuss your idea.

GLC is being funded by FAR and MPI and there is no direct monetary cost to grower participants. However, participants must be willing and able to invest time. Some land and equipment may also be necessary, depending on the topic or trials to be run. Taking time at the start to analyse issues and determine priorities, will provide benefits in the long term. Research suggests that 40% of the benefit of an activity like this comes from what you do before you start.



Most farm businesses can probably think of several issues and opportunities that could be addressed with support from other growers and experts. So how do you choose the right one for GLC? A simple and proven analytical tool is the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Analysis. Ideally your whole farm business team, husbands and wives, adult children, managers, advisors, etc, will be involved in a SWOT Analysis. A template can be found on the GLC website.

- Look at the business as a whole, as well as individual enterprises within it.
- Write down what you see as the business' strengths, weaknesses (areas for improvement), opportunities, and threats (things that could have a negative impact). Strengths and weaknesses are now, opportunities and threats are the future.
- Once the list is complete, identify areas with the greatest potential benefits and impact, and note down the appropriate actions in each area. That table can also be found on the GLC website.
- Prioritise the list of actions in your table. Consider:
  - Benefits – What benefit will I get if this works?
  - Time – How long will it take before we have results to apply?
  - Risk – What are the chances of success?
  - Confidence – Do we have the skills, knowledge and resources available?
- Ask yourself “what are on the most important aspects of my business that need to improve” or “what needs sorting to ensure the business will succeed in the future”.
- Remove anything that would be “nice to know”.

The information that you have collected during the analysis of the business, and the prioritisation, is going to be very useful when you discuss issues with other growers, and in the next stages of completing an Expression of Interest.

Before committing to the AGG one final check may be useful.

- Will the group's objectives address the high priority/ high impact issues I need to be working on for my farm business?
- What would I need to know before I could apply the results to my situation? Do I need to see ideas/tools tested on certain soil types, under dryland conditions, etc? Have those aspects been included in the group ideas, objective or plans?
- If I commit to this, will I have to drop something else important? Will that cause problems as time goes by?

## Contacts and further information

Growers Leading Change has its own section on the FAR website. Documents available on the website include frequently asked questions (FAQs), the Expression of Interest form and this handbook. The website also provides contact information for the four GLC facilitators who are available to discuss ideas or projects.

**Website** [www.far.org.nz](http://www.far.org.nz)

**Email** [glc@far.org.nz](mailto:glc@far.org.nz)

**Phone** 03 345 5783 or 027 306 5365



Arable Growth Groups (AGGs) are funded through the Growers Leading Change (GLC) programme to upskill arable growers by sharing existing knowledge around agronomy, business or catchment issues.

### Contact details for applicant group

Contact 1	Contact 2 (optional)
Name: _____	Name: _____
Address: _____ _____	Address: _____ _____
Home phone: _____	Home phone: _____
Mobile phone: _____	Mobile phone: _____
Email: _____	Email: _____

### Group details

*Please describe your group (number of farmers involved, general location) and whether you are looking for more people to join. We recommend no more than 10 farm business per group.*

### Topic

*What do you want this Arable Growth Group to focus on? Why is this of interest? What opportunity or concern would it address?*

### Additional information

*Include any further details or links to related resources here.*

### Submit

Please email this form to [glc@far.org.nz](mailto:glc@far.org.nz)

### Next Steps

The Growers Leading Change Team will contact you to find out more about your ideas. If they feel that it fits the profile of an Arable Growth Group, you will be asked to bring your potential group members together to discuss the proposal in more detail and to complete *Form B: Arable Growth Group Application*. Please note that Growers Leading Change funds are limited, and not all applications may be able to be funded in a single year, or at all.

The following terms and abbreviations are used frequently throughout this programme.

#### Arable Growth Group (AGG)

Grower led, professionally facilitated discussion groups made up of 8-10 ten farm businesses with a shared focus. They may be locally or nationally based and are funded, via GLC, to cover speakers, visits, on-farm try-outs and demonstrations. An AGG may run for one to three years, depending on their chosen focus topic.

#### Facilitator

GLC will provide each AGG with a professional facilitator, who will also act as group co-ordinator. At meetings, their role is to lead discussions and encourage information sharing and wider thinking to assist the group achieve its joint and individual farm objectives.

#### Farm Action Plan

Farm Action Plans outline the goals that individual group members set for their own farm in line with the objectives of their AGG (see Growth Plan).

#### Grower

Any FAR levy payer may seek to join a relevant AGG. Grower members determine their group's goals, structure and rules.

#### Grower leader

Each AGG will identify a grower leader. The grower leader acts as first point of contact/ liaison for grower members, and assists the facilitator and subject experts as required.

#### Growers Leading Change (GLC)

Growers Leading Change (GLC) is a MPI SFFF funded project which will develop an extension framework to encourage arable businesses to develop, test and introduce new ideas, technologies and ways of working, in order to improve their farm, industry and community sustainability.

#### Focus topic

Each AGG focuses on a key agronomic, environmental or business issue or opportunity. The Focus Topic will determine the activities and goals of the AGG.

#### Governance Group

The Governance Group is responsible to MPI SFFF to ensure GLC meets all milestones on time and within budget. It includes FAR staff and FAR grower board members.

### **Growth Plan**

Growth Plans outline the objectives, planned activities and some estimated costs (groups must run within a specified budget) of the AGG as a whole. The agreed plan is signed off by the facilitator on behalf of GLC and the grower leader on behalf of grower members.

### **Knowledge Exchange (KE)**

An extension approach that recognises that no-one person or organisation knows everything about any topic. KE encourages growers to share knowledge, skills and experience with a wider group, including 'experts'.

### **MPI SFFF**

The Ministry for Primary Industries Sustainable Food and Fibre Futures Fund. Supports problem-solving and innovation in New Zealand's food and fibre sectors by co-investing in initiatives that make a positive and lasting difference.

### **On-farm try outs**

An AGG Growth Plan may include on-farm try-outs of new crops or agronomic approaches. These will be carried out by AGG members on their own farms, with support from GLC. Facilitators will arrange training on the design and management of such try-puts, and the group will visit and discuss them throughout the season. These will not be replicated trials.

### **Pathfinder Farm (PF)**

Pathfinder Farms provide forward thinking growers with technical and research support to transition their farm to a new agronomic, environmental or business management system. These farms will help to identify sustainability pathways for the rest of the sector. As they will be looking at major systems changes, it is anticipated that they will run for three to five years.

### **Subject matter expert**

Subject matter experts are identified by the AGG facilitator or group members, or PF Technical Team, and brought in, as required, to share specialist information and advice via extension activities, resources etc.

### **Technical Team**

Pathfinder Farms will address issues requiring more technical and possible 'new' knowledge. As such, each will be assigned a Technical Team to assist with planning the PF programme of work and assessing progress against objectives.

