

Amelia Searson

First up though, a new 1.5 million dollar project is underway to help farmers reduce emissions.

South West NRM is leading the Farm Efficiencies and Sustainability Towards 2030 (or simply FEaST) with funding from the Federal Government. The aim is to make farming more productive while protecting the environment. Peter Clifton is the Sustainable Agriculture Project Manager with South West NRM.

He says FEaST will focus on pasture management techniques, enhancing on-farm biodiversity and improving water security.

Peter Clifton

What we're trying to do is address some of those outcomes that they're looking for which are reducing emissions, building resilience to climate change or in our case probably those dry seasons and that feed gap and also protect biodiversity while driving productivity.

So to that, there's four components. One is feed gap efficiencies. We're also looking at perennial pastures so we'll have 10 demonstration sites in the high rainfall zone, it's got a water security component where we're running some workshops on water conservation and capture also one called Dam Enhancement which will be on four dams in the high rainfall zone again and that's around fencing and you know pumping water to troughs to keep livestock out of dams and also re-vegetate those areas to try and improve water quality for stock but also try and support biodiversity.

We have done some survey work already for the start of the project and we found that some of the things that we're targeting the confidence level isn't high. So for example, where we're looking at trying to improve feed efficiencies and that's around improving, hay and silage production or quality of hay and silage, improving sheep nutrition and feed budgeting.

So to make sure the animals get the right amount of feed. Sort of a critical part is knowing what feed to give to what animals at what time of year. That's not very widely adopted.

It's only about three and a half out of ten in terms of people that actually do it. So I guess that's probably part of it is just raising awareness that's mainly around workshops that we'll be looking at for those for feed efficiencies similar for water security.

The perennials and the enhanced farm dams, that's a little bit different where we'll have some demonstration sites. And perennials is an interesting one. A lot of people have tried and failed with perennials so it's I guess in some ways it's a bit of a risky one but you know, we keep hearing, of all the issues with weeds and grazing for a lot of the perennials. But then we hear stories of some people who have been successful. So we wanted to document, what the issues are and have a little bit more evidence behind what's being done and a bit more context as well.

So I have weeds being controlled properly? Have I got the grazing management right? And so we've engaged a few farmers who have got a bit of experience with perennials and we'll be tracking them over the next few years. Some of them have already sown the perennials.

Just recently just this year and so yeah. We'll see how that persists over time.

Amelia Searson

How effective do you expect this project will be in actually reducing emissions?

Peter Clifton

You know reducing emissions is a is a tough ask for farmers. There's a lot of other industries that are in a better position to reduce emissions. Farming obviously you know, we still need to produce food. Food production causes emissions. There's lots of emerging technologies that aren't quite ready yet for farmers.

So we're not going to get to Net Zero anytime soon, but it's about start tracking their emissions and seeing.

Amelia Searson

Well, where are the gaps to reduce their emissions in terms of this project?

You know, if we can produce better quality feed and get animals up to weight and off the farm quicker, that's going to reduce emissions. That's one of the key things that farmers can do now is just improve productivity, and get animals done quicker, rather than having them sit over summer, losing weight and having to add that weight on again, or struggling with pregnancy rates or those types of things and perennials.

I guess also water quality in terms of the enhancing farm dams. Again, the efficiencies of the water quality isn't very good, then animals might drink less and then they'd eat less. And so again they're not putting on the weight. They're basically producing more emissions for the kilogram of beef produced.

Amelia Searson

FEaST will be rolled out by South West NRM to farmers over the next three and a half years. It's 21 past six.

