

# Media Release

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- for immediate release



## Farmer survey to study needs of small-herders

The business plans and personal requirements of small-herd dairy farmers are to be put under the spotlight as part of a survey being organised by Lincoln University Lecturer in Agricultural Management and Agribusiness, Dr Victoria Westbrooke, and Research Fellow, Dr Peter Nuthall.

Irrespective of the fluctuating price for milk solids, dairy farmers with smaller herds face unique challenges and considerations when it comes to questions of progressing their business or improving their lifestyle. For instance, it is thought that most farmers with smaller herds are probably working the farm largely by themselves, which creates particular problems and stresses.

The research, which has been commissioned by the Small Milk and Supply Herds group (SMASH), will entail phone interviews of approximately 10 minutes each to around 350 farmers. Only those farmers with 350 cows or fewer will be asked to participate in the interview. Farmers will be randomly selected from the SMASH client list and the Electoral Roll. In many cases the telephonists won't know the size of a farmer's herd prior to making contact.

The information collected will include views on development and change with regard to such things as purchasing land, investing in labour-saving technology, investing in off-farm ventures, or even diversifying into farm-based tourism. There will also be an opportunity for interviewees to express any ideas or thoughts that sit outside the set questions.

SMASH are keen to collate this information to more effectively develop and deliver the resources these small-herd operators need. Similarly, they hope to gain a clearer picture of succession intentions in order to ensure relevant support material and mechanisms are established.

Farmers will be asked to provide information about their business to enable the categorisation of groups for assessing any emerging themes. For example, farmers who express concerns about the capacity or desire to continue farming might find resources on options for farm devolution useful. Relating attitudes to requirements will help ascertain what type of information is required and how it might best be framed or presented.

Farmers will also be asked their preferred method for obtaining this information; such as online, in topical booklets, at field days, or through a specialist consultant.

The telephonists hope to begin phone interviews in the next few weeks. The material collected will be kept strictly confidential, and, although it is the intention of the researchers to publish general research findings, no information in which any individual farm can be recognised will ever be provided – farm details will only ever be available to the researchers involved.

SMASH and DairyNZ are funding the survey via One Farm, a joint research group of Lincoln and Massey University Farm Management experts.

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