

Valuing the New Zealand farming story



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The release of a plant-based hamburger patty onto the market offers NZ red meat producers an opportunity to differentiate their product on the world stage, says B+LNZ farmer director Phil Smith.

If you haven't heard of the Impossible Burger, I suggest you google it.

Created with the backing of Bill Gates, this plant-based hamburger patty has been released onto the US market with much fanfare. Made from wheat, coconut oil, potato protein and something called heme, it looks and bleeds like a meat patty – and apparently tastes like meat. Some commentators are suggesting this meat substitute could do to the meat industry what Uber has done to taxis, so we ignore it at our peril.

Personally, I think products like the Impossible Burger provide New Zealand's red meat producers with the opportunity to differentiate their product on the global stage. The consumers we want to target are those who appreciate – and can afford – grass-fed protein produced to the highest standards of animal and environmental welfare by family-based farming businesses. Our beef and lamb contains naturally high levels of iron, omega 3 and nine essential amino acids – and of course is grown in fresh air, not in a factory.

The launch of this product has highlighted an issue Beef + Lamb New Zealand and the processing industry have been working on in the past 12 months – using the New Zealand farming story to extract value out of the market.

New market strategy

Working collaboratively, B+LNZ and the processing industry have developed an industry-wide marketing strategy which gives different organisations clearly defined areas of responsibility. B+LNZ will be responsible for marketing at a higher level – telling the New Zealand story – while processors will leverage

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off that story in marketing their own products. This means there is little crossover, as processors will be operating within different horizons from B+LNZ.

Certainly B+LNZ has the skills and resources to articulate the story of New Zealand sheep and beef farming – but most importantly, it's about encouraging farmers to share their stories with consumers hungry for this sort of information.

I will be discussing this marketing strategy, along with the review of the B+LNZ Constitution, at my annual round of farmer consultations. Look out for meeting dates in the [e-Diary](#). Levy-payers will also have received an information pack in the post which details the key topics up for discussion, as well as the many ways farmers can provide feedback.

Going backwards

Obviously lack of profitability in the sheep meat industry is an ongoing concern and this has been highlighted by the outcome of B+LNZ's North Canterbury Sheep for Profit Partnership programme. The 10 participating farmers lifted productivity by an average of 20% over 4 years, while their profitability fell by 1%.

This frightening statistic highlights to me that the industry urgently needs to be extracting more value out of the marketplace, and this is where telling the story of New Zealand farming comes in.

We all have a great story to tell – we just need to get out there and tell it.

Phil Smith is Beef + Lamb New Zealand's Northern South Island farmer director.

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