



Moving the Middle

Empowering rural land managers to act in complex landscapes

EXPLAINER

Oct 2024

Narrative families circulating around farming and food production in Aotearoa New Zealand

Overview

Over 80 narratives were found in the literature and have been categorised into 10 narrative families. None of the narratives or families supersede the others. Under each of the families in the tables below are the details of the narratives or storylines that are circulating about farming and food production in Aotearoa New Zealand (AoNZ). There are many tensions and contradictions, even within the same family. This speaks to the complexity of the narratives of practice and of identity. You may recognise many of these narratives or storylines – they are circulating widely and are more or less familiar. The more obvious ones will be the most deeply held and powerful narratives.

Table 1. Farming narrative families

Farming/growing (What is it?)	National identity (Farming is key to identity)	Motivation/drivers (Why farm? Why make changes?)
Food production is sacred Farming is natural and self-evident Farming is a long-term investment in the land AoNZ is world leading in sustainability Farming is a simple, hard, and risky job Farming is a complex, expert occupation Work towards a quadruple bottom line: money-with-care (in which farming is profitable and supports well-being, the environment, and society) Farming continues as usual Farming looks very different now Farming systems are complex and difficult to change Farming is an economic enterprise first Farming must consider Te Mana o te Wai/ Te Mana o te Taiao concepts Farming is an economic, environmental, community enterprise	AoNZ is world-leading in sustainable agriculture Farming part of AoNZ the identity Long-term farming history and colonial ties Feed the world We 'all' have farming roots 'Small' country Farming is a major export earner	Productivity and growth are pitched against the environment and sustainability It is about trade-offs: economic and environmental Farming must ultimately be profitable Sustainability is marketable AoNZ has a reputation for sustainability AoNZ is world leading in sustainability AoNZ's emissions are small Unavoidable consequences of farming: land and water degraded Focus is on contaminants not well-being Many want transformed environment-economy relations Many have economy as top priority Reciprocal relationship values in tension with extractive productionist view

Table 2. Science, community, and governance narrative families around farming

Science narratives	Community narratives	Governance narratives
<p>Decisions should be informed by science. But which science?</p> <p>Awareness that there are different conceptions and practices of science and knowledge systems.</p> <p>Science is settled</p> <p>Across the board can see 'science' usually not settled</p> <p>Farmers know more than scientists/advisors about their land</p>	<p>Change in land use risks unsustainable rural communities</p> <p>Increase in diversity of land use has community benefits</p>	<p>Scale of decisions: often taken by central government, leaving no agility for micro contexts</p> <p>Local government involvement is important as it is close to communities and local environment</p>

Table 3. Te ao Māori narrative family about the land (whenua)

Te ao Māori narratives
<p>Te ao Māori world view is holistic and multidimensional, does not separate people from the land or environment. There is interdependency. People are the land and the land is the people.</p> <p>Whakapapa: stories of origins of the universe. Papatūānuku (Earth Mother) and Ranginui (Sky Father). Care of Papatūānuku is paramount.</p> <p>Toitū te marae o Tāne, toitū te marae o Tangaroa, toitū te iwi; when land and water are sustained, the people will prosper.</p> <p>Long-term vision (hundreds of years), about future generations.</p> <p>Multi-ownership, people are kaitiaki of land and environment. Different roles to play: guidance, leadership, operational, advocacy, trustee.</p> <p>Different statutes to manage Māori land – may have hundreds of owners. Te Ture Whenua Māori Act/Māori land trusts. Much more complicated situation.</p> <p>Climate change increases risk to Māori capital, enterprise, and employment.</p> <p>Māori are living with the ongoing consequences of colonisation.</p> <p>Decision making: balance between profit and tikanga, kaitiaki. Do you plant exotic or native trees? Different purposes – right tree, right place, right time.</p>

Table 4. Sustainable farming and change narrative family

Change? (What next?)
<p>Sustainability is expensive: most farmers want incremental change; environmental advocacy groups want transformational change.</p> <p>Farm individualism: outcomes seen as determined by farmer choice and behaviour.</p> <p>Regenerative agriculture could be a silver bullet.</p> <p>Science-based decision-making important.</p> <p>Social, cultural, and economic-based decision making are important.</p> <p>Techno-optimism: the right technological fix will solve this.</p> <p>Farmers want to do the right thing but do not know where to start.</p> <p>Farmers want the land and environment to be healthy.</p> <p>Farmers do not want to change farming too much (reasons vary: complexity, status quo, incremental change).</p> <p>Having both the environment and humans thriving is crucial.</p> <p>Environment is healthy enough.</p> <p>Fatalism: the problem is so large it is insurmountable.</p>

Table 5. Narrative families around blame, rights, responsibility and equity

Blame, rights, and responsibility (Who?)	Equity (Is it fair?)
<p>Farmers must change regardless of economic consequences</p> <p>Farmers are responsible for environmental degradation and must pay</p> <p>Battlegrounds: us vs them; city vs rural; industry vs industry; economy vs environment</p> <p>Farmers are an easy target</p> <p>Farmers are abusing the privilege of historical support</p> <p>AoNZ emissions are too small to matter in the global context</p> <p>Minimise role farmers have to play in addressing their environmental impact</p> <p>Farming must change now</p> <p>Historical legacy of environmental damage from farming exists</p> <p>Farmers currently doing the damage must change</p> <p>Responsibility to the land</p> <p>Potential adverse environmental impacts from farming</p> <p>Intergenerational focus (long-term thinking) vs short term thinking</p> <p>Contaminants – only considered in water quality so far</p>	<p>Farms are expected to do more than other industries</p> <p>Uneven generational impact of climate change and climate change action</p> <p>Uneven economic impact</p> <p>Urban industry change is less disruptive than rural</p> <p>Co-governance is necessary; need Māori values, and Treaty partnerships to be enacted</p> <p>World views range from te ao Māori or wanting te ao Māori incorporated to the dominant social paradigm (extractive industries)</p> <p>Native species are privileged over introduced, yet farms are themselves completely introduced landscapes (flora/fauna)</p>

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