

The difference that makes a difference:

How Thriving Southland supports good farming practice through Catchment Groups



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Report Information

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Research team

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Key take-outs

What is the challenge?

Farmers are under increasing regulatory, environmental, economic and consumer pressures. Many want to better understand and respond to the environmental challenges they are experiencing on their farms. They are keen to access and interpret new relevant science. However, they face uncertainty around the timing and best ways of applying new environmental management rules and regulations.

Supported by Thriving Southland through the *Change and Innovation Project*, Southland farmers are working hard to make the changes necessary to continue their farming businesses into the future. This case shows the benefits to the Southland farming community from participating in Catchment Groups.



This case study is about the *Change and Innovation Project*. It is for those interested in Catchment Groups and showcases learnings to date.

What is the Thriving Southland Change and Innovation Project?

Thriving Southland received support from the Productive and Sustainable Land Use Package administered by the Ministry for Primary Industries. This package design is to enable and support Catchment Groups. Thriving Southland aims to:

- provide primary producers with regional leadership that is transparent and well-resourced
- ensure Southland's primary sector is agile and adaptable to change
- support Southland's primary production sector to develop and market its regional story.

What have the Southland Catchment Groups been able to do?

Change is occurring because of Thriving Southland's backing 'on the ground'. Catchment Groups can **access funding and develop valuable projects** based on members' needs. Farmers are learning **new knowledge and skills** together, resulting in **practical changes on-farm**. As they engage with future-focused projects, farmers **build resilience** and gain a more positive outlook. Robust **science-driven data** drives decisions as farmers respond to regulations and new policies.

... *Having that support with the science and the evidence, the data to make sure we go in the right direction and spend the money in the right place [is critical].* (Catchment Group member)

Next steps

Implementing new farming practice changes takes time, and there is an ongoing need for consistent and long-term support for Catchment Groups. Measuring Thriving Southland's effectiveness in supporting Catchment Groups to implement better farming practices is challenging when environmental outcomes may not be realised for 10 to 20 years. However, across the data and interview feedback there were clear examples of how the help from Thriving Southland has inspired community action and enabled farmers to become active participants in creating a better and exciting farming future. But farmers in many areas are only getting started and need continued support. Therefore, we conclude that this initiative has the hallmarks of being valuable, and we recommend that funders continue to invest in it.

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Executive summary

Farming has always [occurred in] a complex and changing environment. The complexity and pace of change is increasing [now] due to regulations and community expectations. This is most evident in the environmental, animal welfare and people requirements [that are being brought from outside], however, [the situation for farmers] is compounded as they [seek to] align these expectations with farm business resilience, which is also under pressure from market volatility and financial constraints.

Farmers need to [integrate] any change into a farm system context (to ensure the resilience of the farming system and business). This level of change can create complex problems, which in turn, can result in complex decisions needing to be made.

Some required changes are clear, but many are evolving. Farmer uncertainty regarding what is required is high, even more so due to [the COVID-19 pandemic]. While most [farmers] have a strong desire to find solutions to problems, it is likely they are starting their “change journey” with varying levels of understanding, experience, knowledge and financial ability to implement action.

Individually and collectively, farmers understand and have concern that change can disrupt the whole farm system, be difficult to measure and will be expensive, impacting on profitability (Christie, 2020 p.5).

Origins of Thriving Southland

A cross-sectoral group of farmers set up Thriving Southland in December 2020. Thriving Southland is an incorporated society based in the region. It was created to provide leadership by farmers, for farmers, at a time of significant change in the external expectations about how land managers run their businesses (Thriving Southland, 2020). Thriving Southland aims to:

- provide primary producers with regional leadership that is transparent and well-resourced
- ensure Southland’s primary sector is agile and adaptable to change
- support Southland’s primary production sector to develop and market its regional story.

To work towards these goals, Thriving Southland developed a *Change and Innovation Project* that builds on the earlier work of the New Zealand Landcare Trust. The Southland project is funded through the Ministry for Primary Industries’ Sustainable Land Use Programme, with \$6 million assigned for 2020 to 2023. The *Change and Innovation Project* aims to help farmers adapt, change, respond to compliance needs and prove themselves as leaders in the primary sector. The project does this through Thriving Southland enabling and supporting Catchment Groups.

Purpose of the case

Thriving Southland commissioned Pragmatica Limited to capture learnings from their activities with Catchment Groups funded through the *Change and Innovation Project*. This case tells of Catchment Groups' benefit from having support from Thriving Southland. It focuses on the Catchment Groups and the events they organised to support the farming community to respond to the regulatory, environmental and economic pressures they face. It also finds that Thriving Southland plays a critical role in providing 'backbone support' to the Catchment Groups.

This case is documenting the progress made for those interested in Thriving Southland's work and Catchment Group leaders and participants. The case:

- shows the benefits of the Thriving Southland *Change and Innovation Project*
- shows the outcomes for farmers and the innovations they are making.

Case method

This case is a local knowledge case (Thomas, 2021). The subject is the support Thriving Southland provided to Catchment Groups, and the object is the farmers' learnings from participating in the Catchment Group activities and projects. Pragmatica developed the case study from administrative data, surveys, social media content and feedback from five participants from the Catchment Groups or other stakeholder groups (see Appendix 1: Research method on page 22 for more information).

The data shows a story of Catchment Groups providing increased support for farmers as they find ways to address upcoming regulations at a time of increasing environmental and economic pressure. The case shows the incremental progress made since the start of the project, with a particular focus on the progress made from May 2021 to May 2022.

Key learnings

Many farmers want to make a positive difference to the environment and in their farming production. Thriving Southland and Catchment Groups are working together to enable farmers to "identify the at-risk areas and how [they] can mitigate some of these issues." With the help of Thriving Southland, Catchment Groups can respond to localised environmental issues and make informed decisions that reflect their mutual needs and goals. This case study shows:

- Catchment Groups are accessing funds to carry out valuable projects and the capacity of Catchment Groups is building
- access to science is a catalyst to informing good farming practice and management
- farmers are gaining knowledge and skills to drive positive change, improving their farming management practices and taking proactive steps toward farming for the future
- Catchment Groups are building farmer resilience, supporting positive wellbeing and helping build a greater sense of community and shared purpose
- Catchment Groups are building wider relationships: working with Māori helps socialise iwi values; working with scientists, local government, and other farmers helps embed sustainable change.

Next steps

Implementing new farming practice changes takes time, and there is an ongoing need for consistent and long-term support for Catchment Groups. Measuring Thriving Southland's effectiveness in supporting Catchment Groups to implement better farming practices is challenging when environmental outcomes may not be realised for 10 to 20 years. However, across the data and interview feedback there were clear examples of how the help from Thriving Southland has inspired community action and enabled farmers to become active participants in creating a better and exciting farming future. But farmers in many areas are only getting started and need continued support. Therefore, we conclude that this initiative has the hallmarks of being valuable, and we recommend that funders continue to invest in it.

Case findings

The scope of the Change and Innovation Project





Southland farms link to four main river catchments, Mataura, Oreti, Aparima and Waiau, as well as some smaller catchments. There are 32 Catchment Groups receiving funding from Thriving Southland through the Change and Innovation Project.

Map of the Catchment Group Areas



Map from Thriving Southland Website

The Catchment Groups are organised into four networks, with a paid co-ordinator supporting each network.

			
Northern Southland and Waiau	Aparima	Lower and Mid Oreti	Mid and Lower Matura
Lower Waiau, Orauea River, Te Anau Basin, Between the Domes, Upper Maitara, Ardlussa, Balfour, Wendonside, Otama	ACE (Aparima Community Environment) Upper Aparima, Mid Aparima, Waimatuku, Lower Aparima, Pourakino, Orepuke	Greater Dipton, Makarewa Headwaters, Mid Oreti, Hedgehope-Makarewa, Waihopai, Lower Oreti	Waikaka Stream, Otamita, Gore, Waimumu, Three Rivers, Lower Maitara, Waikawa, Mimihau, Mokoreta, Glenham, South Coast

What has been achieved to date

Since the start of the project in 2020, Thriving Southland has approved 86 projects worth \$1,898,160. Thriving Southland approved 58 more new projects between 21 May 2021 and 25 May 2022.

The following table shows the types of funding for the *Change and Innovation Project* and the funding distribution since it began.

Type of project	No. of projects	Range of project value	Average per project	Total value
Aparima Community Environment (ACE) major project	1	\$421,100	\$421,100	\$421,100
Other major projects	16	\$18,000 to \$169,000	\$87,195	\$1,395,132
Small project category 1	4	\$3,000 and \$13,975	\$7,994	\$31,975
Small project category 2	65	\$400 and \$4,235	\$769	\$49,953
Total funded				\$1,898,160

Catchment Groups access funds to carry out valuable projects

Farmer-led volunteers run the Catchment Groups, bringing together local farmers connected socially or by a river catchment within a farming district. Without available funds, volunteers say it would be challenging to create interest and buy-in from farmers and run the groups.

The volunteers who run the Catchment Groups may work on-farm or be in other employment. With access to Thriving Southland funds, Catchment Groups can take a more strategic approach. One volunteer described the shift as going from “trying to fly a flag and grinding away as volunteers” to “wrap-around support, and the ability to strategise and connect with a whole lot of other catchment groups.”

So we couldn't do anything except [to generate] lots of ideas, and there needed to be some sort of process of accessing the funds... So, that's where Thriving Southland came in. (Catchment Group member)


Since 2020, Catchment Groups have received significant funds to carry out projects. Each Catchment Group has run brainstorming sessions and held discussions considering possible projects. In addition, Thriving Southland has introduced scientists and relevant organisations, who provided the Catchment Groups with advice on potential projects.

Feedback from interviews and surveys shows that having funding and advice to set up projects is vital for the Catchment Groups. Participants described the projects as “exciting” and said they helped improve farmers’ interest and engagement within their catchment. Funding supports regular project meetings and staff are contracted to manage the project implementation. Projects focus on addressing local catchment issues, and the outcomes are important to diverse groups of farmers.

Catchment Group members shared that the funding from Thriving Southland “has really been an enabler to allow us to do stuff in the community”, and that the projects would not have developed without the funding.

In one example, six farmer-led catchment groups of the Aparima river catchment have come together to carry out the Aparima Community Environment (ACE) project over three years. The ACE project aims to connect communities and people with knowledge and skills to help farmers become more resilient. As described in more detail on page 28, the four workstreams focus on stream walks and water testing, developing good farming practices, developing sediment traps and exploring future farming alternatives.

In another example, the Makarewa Headwaters Catchment Group works with six farms using the Land Utilisation Capability Indicator (LUCI-Ag) computer software modelling tool. This tool helps explain the impacts of land use on various ecosystem services to improve the environmental footprint of farming. The Land Utilisation Capability Indicator will allow farmers to explore different scenarios and identify environmental mitigation options.



Funding from Thriving Southland “has really been an enabler to allow us to do stuff in the community”... Without the funding the projects would not have developed.

Capacity of the Catchment Groups is building

The Catchment Groups are mostly farmer-led, promoting positive on-farm change. They encourage good on-farm management practice, while also involving local urban communities in “community good” education and projects.



Photo from Thriving Southland Website.

In total, Thriving Southland supported 80 events across the 32 Catchment Groups between May 2021 and May 2022, with 2180 participants taking part. Of these:

- two in three events run through the Change and Innovation Project focussed on environmental issues and science, attracting 1425 participants via field days and workshops.
- nearly one in three events also encouraged 689 farmers to connect better with each other, through forums, presentations and panel discussions, hearing inspirational speakers, and attending wellbeing and social events.

Variation in Catchment Group formation and activity

There is wide variation in how the Catchment Groups have formed and become active. The table on page 11 shows that some Catchment Groups are well established with frequent activity, while others are still getting underway. This signals a continuing need for Thriving Southland to support the Catchment Groups.

With the need to help Catchment Groups become established, Thriving Southland ran 20 events to help build their capacity. Catchment Group leaders were offered professional development on leadership, strategy, running effective meetings, and using Zoom.

In 2022, farmer interest and buy-in continued to develop across the Catchment Groups, and participation in events was well attended as more science information becomes available. On average, 29 people participated in each event. The largest event, an Aquavan Education Programme in Winton, attracted 200 participants¹.

There is wide variation in the way in which the Catchment Groups have formed and become active.







Photo from Thriving Southland Website: Aquavan Flyer and Education Pack Discovering our Catchment and Coastal Connection 2021.

¹ Appendix 2 on page 25 contains a full list of the events and numbers attending.

Catchment Groups running projects between May 2021 and May 2022

Key: Four or more events Two or three events One event No events

 <p>Northern Southland and Waiau</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ardlussa Catchment Group Athol Garston (Upper Mataura) Catchment Group Balfour Catchment Group Between the Domes Catchment Group Lower Waiau Catchment Group Orauea River Catchment Group Otama Catchment Group Te Anau Basin Catchment Group Titiroa Catchment Group Wendonside Catchment Group
 <p>Aparima</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACE Lower Aparima Catchment Group Lower Mataura Catchment Group Mid Aparima Catchment Group Orepuki Catchment Group Pourakino Catchment Group Upper Aparima Catchment Group Waimatuku Catchment Group
 <p>Lower and Mid Oreti</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater Dipton Catchment Group Hedgehope Makarewa Catchment Group Lower Oreti Catchment Group Makarewa Headwaters Catchment Group Mid Oreti Catchment Group Waihopai Catchment Group
 <p>Mid and Lower Matura</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Glenham Catchment Group Gore/Waimumu Catchment Group Mimihau Catchment Group Mokoreta Catchment Group Otamita Catchment Group South Coast Catchment Group Three Rivers Catchment Group Tokanui Catchment Group Waikaka Stream Catchment Group Waikawa Catchment Group Waituna Catchment Group

Access to science is a catalyst to changing farming practice

Many Catchment Group members believe that Thriving Southland supports developing science in highly engaging ways for farmers. This science provides farmers with knowledge and practical solutions to local problems, leading to an improved environment.

One Catchment Group member explained that science was a catalyst, “bringing a catchment together to find information and fix the issue.” For example, Macroinvertebrate Community Index (MCI) testing and rapid habitat assessment were incorporated into a field event for the community to learn how to do their own MCI sampling. The Cawthron Institute developed a baseline report on the findings from the sampling, with recommendations for the Catchment Group, drawing on the results. This new information encouraged farmers:

- to engage more in the area of water testing
- have more local testing sites
- develop skills in independent testing in real-time
- access the results that are available online.

Notably, farmers became more confident that the land management changes they were making were right. In this way, Thriving Southland supported the Catchment Group leaders to reflect on what worked well on-farm and ways to mirror this across more farms and other Catchment Groups.

The real change will only come about if you present science that the farmers have faith in, good robust science. Through Thriving Southland we're getting that.



Future focus

Thriving Southland also helps farmers consider what will farming look like in 10 or 15 years. As shared by one Catchment Group member: “We can put our heads in the sand and just get angry at those regulations, or we can look to make proactive changes.”

Robust science supports good decision-making and gives farmers the information they need to respond to regulations and engage with Government and stakeholder groups. Catchment Group members recognised that with this new knowledge it was possible to “be at the table” and contribute with authority and expertise to the development of Government regulations.

Photo from Thriving Southland Facebook page March 18: ACE Project Orepuki 2022 Stream walk series

Farmers gain the knowledge and skills to drive positive change

With the support of Thriving Southland, Catchment Groups are providing farmers with opportunities to learn from one another and from various stakeholder organisations. Community events and catchment meetings offer farmers practical ideas and possible solutions to problems they may experience on-farm. For example, farmers learned to grow native nurseries and plant them out on sloping terrain. They also got some “take-home ideas” from using sheep dags as a source of nutrients to uses for recycled products.

I know a lot of people were a bit anxious about it. It's all very well planting out these areas, but a lot of people don't have the time to maintain them. So [the native nursery workshop] was an option that could be a guide to working with the catchment.
(Catchment Group member)

My tussock planting project was all started from the seeds sown (excuse the pun) at your catchment group meetings and enviro evenings. So just a big thank you!
(Feedback following a Catchment Group event)



Many Catchment Group members share their learnings between themselves. Thriving Southland supports this by encouraging sharing of project results and collaboration between catchments with similar issues. This knowledge exchange helps to avoid duplication of projects. Where one Catchment Group successfully finds a way to deal with problem, others can reproduce the learning without “reinventing the wheel”.

One of the clauses in the applications is that if it's applicable to other catchments and the region then it'll get rolled out. And, so if there are catchments that want to find out about sediment traps, for example, [Thriving Southland] will suggest a field day with the catchment that is doing sediment traps.
(Catchment Group member)



Photo above: from Southland Community Nursery www.southlandcommunitynursery.org.nz - Growing Native Nurseries with Hokonui Runaka.

Lower photo from Southland Community Nursery www.southlandcommunitynursery.org.nz : Plant identification and seed workshop

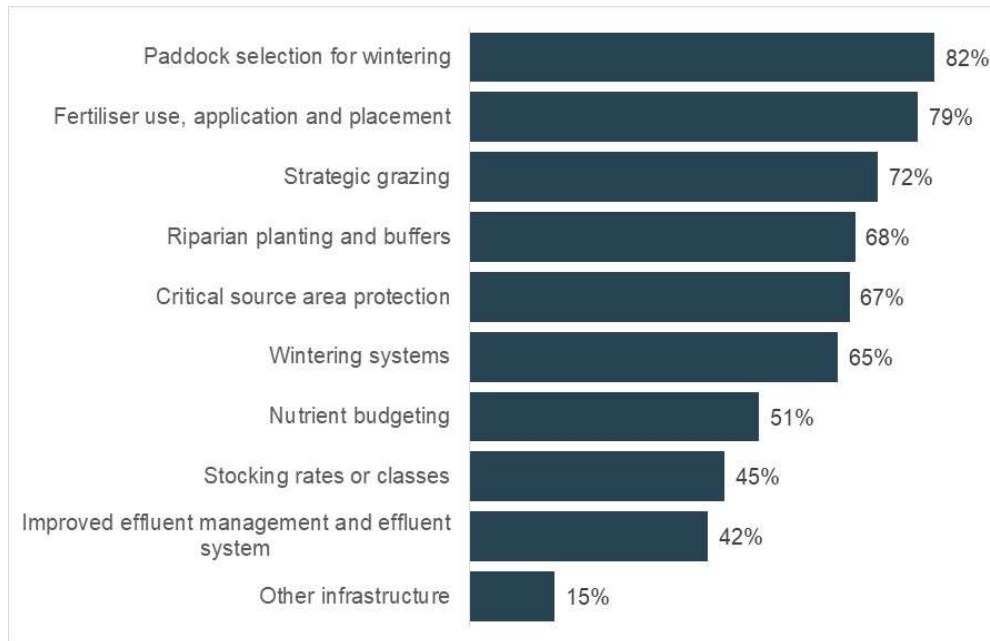
Farmers report improved farm management practices

Based on a ground-up approach, farmers are getting together and sharing ideas. As a result, farmers are far more likely to trust their neighbours, see what they are doing and then innovate from there.

Farmers apply specific approaches from information learned through Catchment Group meetings, events and projects. From direct drilling and strip-tilling to putting in cash crops and trying out different treatments with swede crops, farmers are exploring new and improved ways to work the land.

One Catchment Group member observed that “positive peer pressure amongst the farmers is driving good change”. For instance, using portable troughs and back fences for winter grazing is now common practice. Most farmers (91%) responding to the Thriving Southland Annual Survey in 2022 have a farm plan or are developing one. Many have also adopted the following good management practices.

A broad range of farming practices adopted



Source: Thriving Southland Annual Survey Data (2022) Table 2: Good management principles 2022 (n=107)² p10.

The following excerpt from a Catchment Group newsletter describes the positive change occurring as farmers engage with information and share knowledge.

Southland farmers in general were monitored many times with flyovers from Environment Southland and received great reports, a real pat on the back for all of us that we are improving. I really do think that there has been a shift in mindset, and most farmers are gaining an understanding as to how to best sow/grow/graze/resow our forage crops producing the best outcome for animal health and well-being, and environmental stewardship. There is a lot to do yet, but we are generally travelling in the right direction. (Catchment Group Newsletter)

² Note that was a multiple-selection question, i.e., the respondent could give more than one answer. Percentages here therefore represent responses over sample, and will add to more than 100%.

Farmers take proactive steps towards the future

One of the main areas of need or stress for farmers is the uncertainty around new farming policies and regulations and their implementation timeframes. Thriving Southland and other stakeholders are working with Catchment Groups to support farmers in navigating the upcoming regulations and future challenges. Farmers are trying to get ahead of the issues, participating in events and projects to develop localised responses that reflect their expertise and experience.

In the Annual Survey, farmers said they sometimes struggle to feel proud of their work when farming is viewed negatively in the media and appears unsupported by Government. Importantly, with the help from Thriving Southland and other organisations, farmers feel supported and part of a larger team that shares common goals and aspirations.

I now have more of an understanding on-farm about our environmental impacts and the Waimatuku stream that runs through our farm, plus more understanding of regulations that are coming in and where to look for information and support. Attending events has also helped us to know we aren't alone in these changes: we have great support from Thriving Southland, Fonterra and other farmers, we are all in this together. (Annual survey response)



Photo from Thriving Southland Facebook page March 18: ACE Project Orepuki 2022 Stream walk series

Thriving Southland's support affirms that farmers have a positive role and acknowledges their contribution to the Southland community and Aotearoa New Zealand. Farmers see themselves as kaitiaki (stewards) of the land and environment and are committed to leaving their farms in a better environmental condition. They consider future generations in their farming practice and want to achieve farming practice of a high standard, one that they can all continue to be proud of.

Being a 5th generation farmer with 111 years of family history on the property. Definitely your growing custodian role, and sharing the cool and unique features and stories of the whenua with more [people]. (Annual Survey response)

And that's the main reason for joining a Catchment Group: to make catchment-wide changes to our system, to make it not only sustainable but to regenerate it. (Comment from Thriving Southland video)

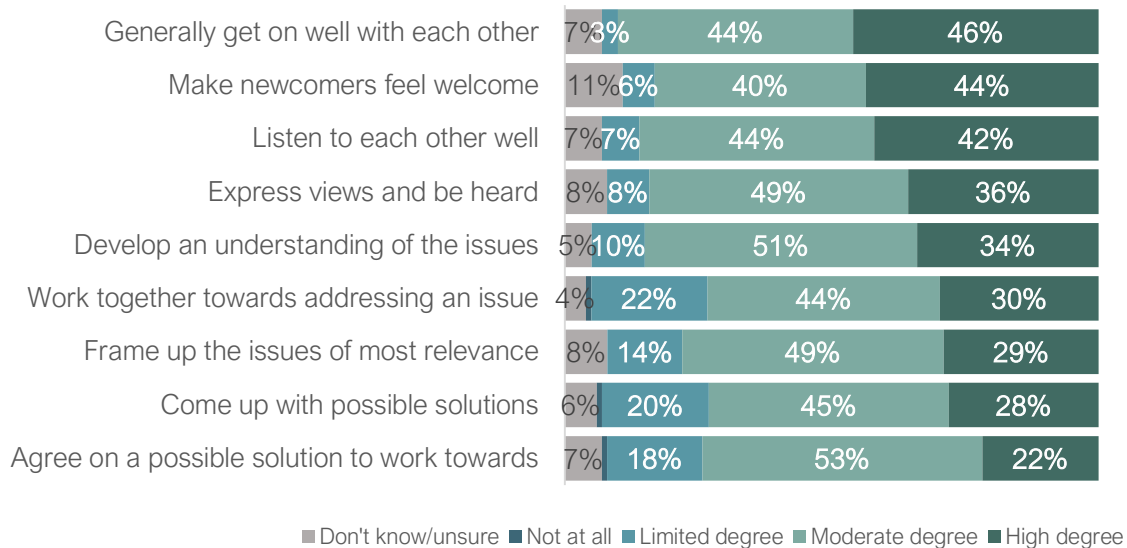
Catchment Groups build farmer resilience and supports positive wellbeing

Managing climate change and effective financial management are undoubtedly critical areas of focus in farming. However, more recently, there's been an increasing focus on mental wellbeing and resilience. Farmers face many trials and challenges, including looking after their health and family and handling weather, natural disaster and financial stress.

Cocks (2021) developed a theoretical model highlighting how farmers become resilient in the face of adversity. The study identified that farmers showed resilience in responding to challenging situations when they had a sense of purpose, were well and stayed connected.

With Thriving Southland's help, Catchment Groups deliver on the three components of building resilience identified in the study. First, farmers are encouraged to develop common purposes and goals. Second, they can seek advice and engage in purposeful, enjoyable social and educational activities. Third, working together, farmers search for possible options to respond to challenges and feel affirmed as they share their successful experiences. The following chart shows that people in the Catchment Groups can work well together to a moderate or high degree. Farmers are on a journey, can engage with each other well, and are developing an understanding and working together towards issues. There is also general agreement that people in the Catchment Groups can frame up issues, come up with solutions and agree on possible solutions to work towards.

People in the Catchment Group can work well together



Source: Thriving Southland Annual Survey Data (2022) Catchment group evaluation (n=102) p23.

SHOWCASE: Farmer wellbeing improves through connection and networking

In the Thriving Southland Annual Survey (2021) nearly two-thirds of respondents (61%) said improving wellbeing was a farm goal. Based on analysis from Catchment Groups, project reports and interviews with Catchment Group members and stakeholders, there are indications that connection and engagement is becoming healthier.

For example, in December 2021, Thriving Southland promoted a well-attended evening with former TV presenter Matt Chisholm where he spoke candidly about his battle with depression. He encouraged farmers to not bottle up their concerns and ask for help when needed. Farmers shared their learnings about managing their feelings.

Matt Chisholm spoke candidly about his battle with depression to over 120 farmers. He encouraged farmers to not bottle up their concerns and ask for help if needed.

Some of the main messages from the session with Matt Chisholm	
 "It's OK to not be OK."	 "Stop thinking I'm not good enough."
 "You're no less of a man for asking for help."	 "Don't be afraid to ask for help or ask people if they are OK."

Catchment Group interviewees also discussed how Thriving Southland helped farmers see the environmental challenges more positively. They discussed how projects and events help to promote a sense of hope and optimism. As a result, farmers feel more in control and optimistic about their options.

We are part of a problem but also part of the solution. Being part of the change I wish to see in the world. (Catchment Group interviewee)



Photo from December 2021 Thriving Southland Newsletter: Thriving Southland supported event with Matt Chisholm

Catchment Groups help communities build a common purpose

Catchment Group members together decide the needs and develop a common purpose. The farmers are responsible for driving the process, while Thriving Southland provides the needed resources and guidance. It may sometimes cause frustration that some Catchment Groups are slower to get off the ground. However, Catchment Groups are establishing themselves in a way that is fit-for-purpose and feels comfortable to their members.

A Catchment Group member gave an example highlighting the importance of deciding what to focus on and identifying what is essential to the wider group. They held two Catchment Group meetings and heard from a stakeholder agency with expertise in modelling. Once the community decided on the project, a smaller group of Catchment Group members priced the project and identified the next steps. They presented that information to the broader group. Once the project was agreed upon, detailed planning occurred, including who would do the work and which farms would be involved.

The key thing where Thriving works, and I think it only works and is unique, is the fact that it is farmer-driven. Thriving is very much hands-off, which causes some frustrations for those people that can't get anything going. But it also means that they are behind the catchments saying, "You know how to drive it." (Catchment Group member)

Although some Catchment Groups may initially struggle with aspects of project management and facilitating meetings, Thriving Southland's approach supports Catchment Groups to act with agency and autonomy. Catchment Group members maintained that Thriving Southland "adds a much more professional side to catchment groups without taking them over."

Ongoing relationship building with Māori helps socialise iwi values

Thriving Southland continues to build relationships with Māori. They are working with other stakeholder agencies to better understand iwi values related to Catchment Groups. As identified in Oakden & Spee (2021) *Evaluation of Thriving Southland: Change and Innovation Project*, building a genuine relationship with iwi is essential. There is mutual benefit in truly representing iwi concerns and aims in the Catchment Group work.

Thriving Southland is making good progress in building relationships with Māori. Thriving Southland is working with Te Ao Marama Inc. (the environmental arm of the iwi Ngāi Tahu ki Murihiku) and Environment Southland. They are socialising the Southland's freshwater and land policy through the People, Water and Land programme – Te Mana o te Tangata, te Wai, te Whenua. Together they have identified that the Catchment Groups need to do more to achieve a state of hauora and te mana o te wai.

Thriving Southland and Te Ao Marama Inc. have jointly shared information about the environmental challenges the region is facing with six Catchment Groups (to date). The



Thriving Southland continues to build relationships with Māori.

presentation covers the gap between where they are now and where they need to be. Catchment Group members are coming to the meetings and engaging in the conversation.

However, there is a need to further relationships between Catchment Groups and Māori. This will improve knowledge and understanding of Māori values and potentially highlight synergies between farmers and iwi.

Catchment Groups' wider relationships help embed sustainable change

Thriving Southland is supporting a community of practice which involves learning opportunities, building capability, sharing knowledge and reducing duplication of work.

To do this, they introduce key stakeholders to the Catchment Groups and support farmers to access people with specific expertise. Talking with other Catchment Groups, farmers find “cool synergies” with what other groups are doing. Thriving Southland is helping Catchment Groups see how they can work with stakeholder agencies and highlighting where the common goals and aspirations lie.

I often joke with the team down at Thriving Southland how Southland's mission is a Thriving Southland vision, so that's a highlight... we are travelling in the same direction, so the work's really complementary.
(Stakeholder interviewee)



Catchment Groups are seeking more science information and land sustainability information.

Catchment Group's interest and involvement with stakeholder agencies like Environment Southland has improved. Environment Southland is receiving many requests for access to its scientists and land sustainability information. This has caused some capacity challenges for Environment Southland as they try to meet the need.

Through the presentations and existing relationships with Catchment Groups, Thriving Southland has raised awareness of Te Mana o Te Wai, the national policy statement of freshwater management, reaching farmers in a way that supports the work of both Te Ao Marama Inc. and Environment Southland.

Thriving Southland also proactively commissioned a report to provide background information for Southland farmers on:

- the state of the environment relating to freshwater quality
- risks and pressures on catchments in the region
- the implications for farmers
- gaps in knowledge that need to be filled to assist farmers in meeting future challenges.

Farmers see Thriving Southland as a trusted entity. Local Government agencies recognise they have compliance and information roles and can be viewed more as regulators. Therefore, farmers are more likely to consider information from Thriving Southland as more independent and trustworthy.

They get the same information from Thriving, but because they're seen as independent and farmers supporting farmers, it's a big plus and that information tends to be trusted. (Stakeholder interviewee)

Synergies occurring between Thriving Southland and other stakeholder agencies. For example, Local Government is looking to engage a climate change expert that presented to Catchment Groups.

By engaging with Thriving Southland, scientists can work directly with farmers. The science developed reflects on-the-ground needs, strengthens good farming practice and thus produces better outcomes.

We're all driving for the same outcomes and supporting our community in the transition that's needed, so definitely all on the same page and working together. (Stakeholder interviewee)

Stakeholder agencies find they can achieve better reach amongst farmers by working with Thriving Southland to socialise new ideas. In turn, farmers can share their experiences and knowledge with scientists and provide input into how things are done in Southland.

Thriving has a much better knowledge of what's happening overall in the region, [and] we've [previously] perhaps not been able to get that information out into the wider community in a way that they pick up on it. I've seen that Thriving's been really successful in that space. They were also very instrumental in getting farmers to take the lead so catchment groups are doing their own science. They're so empowered by that you know? They're getting out there, they're seeing what's happening in their catchment and then they're making changes as a result of that. And that's not funding that we would ever be able to make available for something like that. (Stakeholder interviewee).

Photo from Thriving Southland website: Wilderlab eDNA (environmental DNA) test on stream walks

When Catchment Groups work with scientists, the science developed reflects on-the-ground needs, strengthens good farming practice and thus produces better outcomes.



Conclusion

Change is occurring

Change occurs because of Thriving Southland's backing 'on the ground'. Catchment Groups can **access funding and develop valuable projects** based on members' needs. Farmers are learning **new knowledge and skills**, resulting in **practical changes on-farm**. Farmers **build resilience** and gain a more positive outlook as they engage with **future-focused projects**. Robust **science-driven data** drives decisions as farmers respond to regulations and new policies. Farmers contribute in kind to the *Change and Innovation Project* in the time and effort they put into supporting and engaging with science, networking and sharing learnings with other Catchment Groups and farmers.

Thriving Southland's contribution

Thriving Southland is working as a backbone organisation (Kania and Kramer, 2013, Martin, 2014), helping Catchment Groups to become a valuable resource in the Southland farming community. Thriving Southland's support is targeted and responsive, whether it be help filling out application forms, introducing guest speakers, sharing information, funding events and projects, or coordinating Catchment-wide collaboration.

Thriving Southland understands that a one-size-fits-all approach does not work, and each Catchment Group needs different support at different times. They help and encourage Catchment Groups to develop their own systems and processes. With the right resource and backing, farmers are carrying out projects that lead to localised solutions.

*In my mind
Thriving Southland
are brilliant
steering us in the
right direction
cause we really had
no idea.*

Next steps

Implementing new farming practice changes take time, and there is an ongoing need for consistent and long-term support for Catchment Groups. Measuring Thriving Southland's effectiveness in supporting Catchment Groups to implement better farming practices is challenging when environmental outcomes may not be realised for 10 to 20 years.



However, across the data and interview feedback there were clear examples of how the help from Thriving Southland has inspired community action and enabled farmers to become active participants in creating a better and exciting farming future. But farmers in many areas are only getting started and need continued support. Therefore, we conclude that this initiative has the hallmarks of being valuable and we recommend funders continue to invest in it.

Photo from Thriving Southland Facebook page April 26 Apirama Fresh Water Management – communities coming together to better understand streams that line properties.

Appendix 1: Research method

Introduction

Thriving Southland commissioned Pragmatica Limited to capture learnings from their activities with Catchment Groups funded through the *Change and Innovation Project*. This case tells of the benefit to Catchment Groups of having support from Thriving Southland. It focuses on the Catchment Groups and the events they organised to support the farming community to respond to the regulatory, environmental and economic pressures they face.

Case framing

The case documents the progress made for those interested in Thriving Southland's work and Catchment Group leaders and participants. The case:

- shows the benefits of the Thriving Southland Change and Innovation Project
- shows the outcomes for farmers and the innovations they are making.

Case method

This case is a local knowledge case (Thomas, 2021). The subject is the support Thriving Southland provided to Catchment Groups, and the object is the farmers' learnings from participating in the Catchment Group activities and projects.

The data shows a story of Catchment Groups providing increased support for farmers as they find ways to address the upcoming regulations at a time of increasing environmental and economic pressure. The case shows the incremental progress made since the start of the project, with a particular focus on the progress made from May 2021 to May 2022.

Data used in this case

Pragmatica developed the case from administrative data, surveys, social media content and feedback from five participants from the Catchment Groups or other stakeholder groups.

The following information was used to develop this case.

- Five semi-structured interviews were conducted by zoom between with key stakeholders and Catchment Group members. Interviews were of 30 to 45 minutes duration and were conducted between 24 May and 10 June 2022.
- Thriving Southland's Annual survey questions and data
- Tracking worksheets on Catchment Group projects and events
- Tracking worksheets on Catchment Co-ordinator activities
- Science reports prepared for Thriving Southland
- Reviewed Thriving Southland communications activity
- Links to Thriving Southland Newsletters May 2021 – May 2022
- Catchment group feedback, workshop information (including presentation to Te Mana o te Wai)
- Reviewed Thriving Southland and Catchment Groups' social media.

The case study also used information from the initial briefing with the Project team and a one-and-a-half-hour sense-making session with two Thriving Southland staff - the Project Manager and the Project Lead.

Analysis, synthesis and reporting

The researchers first separately analysed the individual data sources outlined in the previous section. Administrative data sets in spreadsheets were analysed using descriptive statistics. Some comment fields were analysed qualitatively.

The researchers then undertook a synthesis process to draw the different strands of data together and map them against the emerging themes. We then held a sense-making workshop with the Project team to present and discuss the findings, validating and contextualising the conclusions. This process helped ensure any recommendations offered have strategic alignment with Thriving Southland policy direction and are practical to implement.

Limitations

This is a small, targeted case focusing on Thriving Southland's support of Catchment Groups and what Catchment Groups have achieved in supporting farmers. The case does not cover other areas of the *Change and Innovation Project*, such as Thriving Southland's governance or project management functions.

Appendix 2 – Events undertaken and major projects

Activities undertaken

Detailed list of activities undertaken by Thriving Southland and the Catchment Groups May 2021 to May 2022

Activity	Number attending
ACE - Future Farming Expo 2021	130
ACE – GFP Make it count field day	39
ACE 2022 Series Pourakino Stream Walk	34
ACE RP's catchup	6
ACE Sediment Trap Field day	25
ACE Wetland Land Walk	17
AGM	34
Aquavan - Community Session, Winton	65
Aquavan - Education Programme, Winton	200
Ardlussa Winter Grazing Plans, Pizza and Beer	14
B+LNZ Farm Environment Plan Workshop Day 1	18
B+LNZ Farm Environment Plan Workshop Day 2 - 1p.m. to 6 p.m.	21
Between the Domes Catchment Group Xmas BBQ & Native Planting Afternoon	18
Brews & Banter - Dipton	60
Catchment Group Forum	97
Community Social & Wellbeing Evening with Wayne Langford	45
Education Kit Day at Balfour School	120
Glenham Initial Catchment Group event with Justin Kitto	16
Gore Effective Meetings and Engagement Workshop	14
Greater Dipton Catchment Group - SHMAK Kit Training	8
Greater Dipton Catchment Group Native Seed Collection Field Day	18

Greater Dipton Catchment Group Roadside Clean Up & Community Lunch Wellbeing event	21
Greater Dipton Catchment Group SHMAK Kit training session 2 with Environment Southland	9
Greater Dipton Catchment Group Utilising Unproductive Land Field Day	22
Hedgehope Makarewa Catchment Group Grow Your Own Native Trees From Seed Field Day	8
Hedgehope Makarewa Catchment Group Pot Luck Lunch	20
Lower Aparima planting day	16
Lower Aparima Catchment Group brings to Riverton the YOLO Farmer	25
Lower Aparima Catchment Group Stream walk	21
Lower Maitua Catchment Group - Tour and Social event	18
Lower Maitua Great South Event	16
Lower Oreti Catchment Group Wintering Event	51
Lower Waiau Wellbeing Event BBQ and Swim	16
Makarewa Headwaters end of year BBQ	51
Making online easy: Tips and Tricks for using Zoom	7
Marshalls Creek Stream Monitoring - Mid Oreti Catchment Group	10
Mid Oreti Catchment Group - Grow Your Own Natives Part 2 - Trees	18
Mid Oreti Catchment Group - hosted for Mid & Lower Oreti Catchment Groups - Environment Southland and Te Ao Marama Future Environmental Challenges Facing Southland Talk	29
Mid Oreti Catchment Group Composting Barn Field Day	60
Mid Oreti Catchment Group Spring Social BBQ	6
Mid Oreti Catchment Group's Grow Your Own Natives Event - Part 1	24
Mighty Marshalls Creek Rubbish Clean Up	4
Mokoreta Catchment Group - understanding our water quality	22
New River Estuary Exhibition Committee Meeting	5
Orepuki Stream Catchment Group walk	9
Orepuki Wintering Tour	23
Otago & Southland Coordinator Hui	12
Otamita Catchment Group Stream Walk	15
Otamita Catchment Project Event	15
Rural Support Trust Coffee Drought Shout - Te Anau	10
Social Science Training Workshop	n/a
South Coast Catchment Group & Beef + Lamb NZ - Farm Planning Workshop	24

South Coast catchments wintering event	40
Stakeholder Breakfast	41
Teams that Thrive Leadership Workshop	17
Think to Thrive Strategy Workshop	19
Three Rivers Catchment Group School Lunch	10
Three Rivers Wintering Event 'The Good the bad and the Mudly'	25
Thriving Southland presents Matt Chisholm - Mossburn	63
Thriving Southland presents Matt Chisholm - Waikaka	63
Titiroa Catchment Group - On Farm Biodiversity Workshop	33
Waihopai Catchment Group Christmas BBQ	25
Waihopai Catchment Group On Farm Recycling Field Day	18
Waikaka Catchment Group & Beef + Lamb NZ - Farm Planning Workshop	18
Waikaka Catchment Group Grow your own natives	13
Waikaka Catchment Group nursery visit	8
Waikaka Stream Catchment Group, Limit setting talk with E.S.	13
Waikaka Catchment Group Wintering Event	50
Waikawa Catchment Group Pest Event	13
Waimatuku ACE Stream walk	11
Waimatuku Catchment Group Planting Day	30
Waimatuku Catchment Group History and Wellness evening	37
Wendonside Catchment Group Wintering Field Day	n/a
Winton Effective Meetings and Engagement Workshop	6
Womens Enviro Steering Group	16
Grand Total	2180

Description of projects over \$100,000 and their progress to date

Project	Description	Progress to date
<p>Building our future together with our community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aparima Community Environment (ACE) (Aparima Freshwater Management Unit) \$421,100 	<p>Run over three years – four different workstreams:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One: lifting farmer and community awareness and engagement through a journey of stream walks and water testing Two: working with farmers to understand environmental risks on-farm and create/enhance farm environment plans Three: Sediment trap construction demonstration sites and guidance for on-farm construction Four: Exploring alternative farming choices that comply with regulations and moderate environmental harm. 	<p>The following progress is reported to January 2022</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One: 18 stream walks undertaken – added 20 new water testing sites Two: an extension programme with six workshops in 2022 will support bringing farm plans to life module by module Three: Designed and built six new sediment traps this summer with six more next summer with nutrient and volume testing Four: five demonstration farms are using a range of tools to provide options to meet future challenges
<p>Understanding Wendonside Land and Water to Effect Change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wendonside Catchment Group \$169,000 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physiographic science, land and water linkages Macroinvertebrate Community Indexing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Much of the science completed, Minister O'Connor visited the project in January 2022. Land and Water Science are working to make the science reporting farmer friendly.
<p>Targeted Solutions to Environmental Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balfour Catchment Group \$159,750 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide land managers with science-backed information to make informed on-farm decisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High-resolution digital soil mapping of the Balfour Fan completed by Land and Water Science.

<p>Understanding the geology, prioritising and defining solutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orauea River Catchment Group • \$161,000 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land users have sufficient information and guidance to make changes on farm that improve the Orauea River and its tributaries in regards to sediment and E.coli. 	<p>Starts 1 July 2022</p>
<p>Winter Crop Trial - Alternative Crop Establishment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hedgehope Makarewa Catchment Group • \$138,650 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To test whether utilising alternative crop establishment methods to conventional cultivation (e.g. direct drilling, strip tillage, air seeding, precision drilling etc), for fodder beet, swedes and kale, improves soil structure and strength, thereby reducing pugging and improving animal welfare during winter grazing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fodder beet, swede and kale crops were grown. Have tested alternative methods and are now reporting out to the community. • This project brought in a range of rural professionals and allowed discussions between the farmers and professionals. • Visited by Minister O'Connor 13 August 2021. • Project to be completed by end of June 2022.
<p>On Grass Winter Trial and Systems Modelling Stage 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pourakino Catchment Group • \$130,500 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following on from Stage One - using treading resilient pastures, to look at broader applicability and adaptation across a range of intensive properties in Southland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage 1 had a field day last week. A Dairy NZ technician will be contracted to help analyse the results. • Stage 2 due to start in August – the nature of the work will depend on the findings from Stage 1.
<p>Understand the Land to Drive Change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hedgehope Makarewa Catchment Group • \$128,000 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To draw on local knowledge and advanced scientific datasets to empower land user decision making. • Make the science outputs relevance and useable combining local knowledge with a wider ecosystem of primary industry and rural professionals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project extended out to March 2023 as COVID and weather conditions have had an impact. • Majority of the landscape science work has been completed – final drone surveying still to be completed. • Deferring the field days until Spring.

**Next Generation Farming
Systems - Project Reference
Group**

- Thriving Southland
- \$101,000

- Allow Southland farmers to fully assess
 - whole farm system requirements, the commercial opportunities and risks, and impacts of changing (in part) land use on their properties to support the increased production of oat for oat milk processing. Document the evaluation process to provide a broad template for the review of other potential land use changes in Southland.
 - Project to finish at the end of June.
 - A New Crop tool has been developed to aid in assessing the opportunities for new crops in Southland. The tool incorporates “behind the farm gate” and “beyond the farm gates factors” and incorporates the “Our land and water 6-deimension framework” into the criteria so more than just financial factors are considered in the analysis.
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