



Far North Branch NZ Farm Forestry Assn. 2014 Newsletter

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THE PRESIDENT WRITES

Trees on Farms Workshop, Kaeo, 22nd May

It was great to have a very good attendance at this event, and gratifying to see so many new faces. Several people from our Branch put a lot of effort into ensuring the day was a success, and I thank them all, especially Paul Quinlan, Li Legler and Richard Renwick for the outstanding quality of their presentations. Thanks too to Doug Lane and his family for the forward vision and decades of dedication which resulted in Paitu farm, the field trip venue, becoming the showplace it is today. I remember the comment from farm manager Mark Vercoe, who guided us around that "it's always a pleasure to work in a beautiful environment like this."

While the workshop was primarily intended to cater to people new to planting and looking after trees, there was plenty of food for thought for the old hands too. After a substantial discussion about seemingly draconian changes to health and safety responsibilities of forest owners, there was a mood of gloom in the room. This lifted however, when it was pointed out that Australia has had a similar regime in place for quite some time, and the sky has yet to fall. Don't lose your nerve! See more on this subject below.

Bob Cathcart of Ag First spoke of trial work on sheep and beef country which showed that land with a slope greater than 25 degrees was more economic growing trees than grazing farm animals. This would come as no surprise to Doug Lane who figured out a long time ago that "if it's too steep for a tractor then its better off growing trees". We saw many examples of this philosophy as we walked around Paitu in the afternoon.

Perhaps more so than in other parts of NZ, we in the Far North are enthusiastic about growing a diverse range of timber trees, so it was interesting to learn that some of the corporate foresters are starting to think this way too.

To those who decided to join the farm forestry organization as a result of the workshop, I extend a warm welcome. And to those who didn't quite get that far, we would still be happy to see you at our field days and the annual mid-winter dinner, which just happens to be our next event...

Forest Safety Consultation Meeting, Whangarei, 20th June

Parliament is currently considering a broad ranging Health & Safety Reform bill which is likely produce new regulations aimed at reducing the unacceptable number of serious accidents and deaths suffered by forestry workers. At the same time an Independent Forestry Safety Review panel has been holding consultation meetings throughout NZ, trying to establish the underlying reasons for this sad state of affairs, following which it is hoped their findings will assist / influence the law makers. There were about seventy people at the six hour Whangarei meeting, mostly forestry contractors and consultants but also others such as safety inspectors, trainers and four of us from Farm forestry. There was a huge amount of frank discussion about what actually happens on the ground in forestry operations, both the good and the ugly, and many suggestions as to how safety can be improved. Some impressions I came home with are:

- Forest owners do have a role to play, even though we may employ consultants to organize operations on our behalf. An example would be identifying tomos, bluffs and other hazards.
- The best workers have stable careers with the best contractors, and have a low accident rate.
- The poorest workers gravitate towards the "she'll be right" irresponsible contractors, who tend to enter and leave the industry as log prices rise or fall, and it is here that the accident rate is highest. These workers see little hope of a career path ahead and lack motivation to work well and safely. The tools, machinery and working environment provided by their fly-by-night employers tend to be substandard.
- The good contractors find it difficult to compete financially with the "cowboys".
- It was claimed many young people enter forestry with an attitude of "what can I get out of you", whereas in former times it was "how can I contribute to the job".
- The stop / go and boom / bust nature of forestry in NZ is a significant factor in the accident rate. It can lead to fatigue among workers doing too many hours in a week, and inadequate training.
- Training in the forest industry was identified as leaving a lot to be desired. The training system was the problem, not the ability of the trainers. We heard that people are reluctant to become trainers for fear of being held accountable if a trainee has an accident working in a forest some time later. Some thought the emphasis was too much on ticking boxes and passing unit standards and not enough on practical skills out in the forest.
- The training system worked well in former times when the industry was largely government owned, but those days are long gone. A review panel member challenged the contractors to "own" the training of workers rather than leaving it to someone else {the tax payer} to pay for.
- The corporate forest companies are generally considered to be doing their best with health and safety but there were doubts expressed that small block owners would make the same effort. The trend now is for stagnant or declining corporate activity and an increase in work on small blocks.
- Small block owners who ignore their responsibilities regarding health and safety may find themselves in serious, expensive trouble with the law.

More than one person said that if forestry were to become a sustainably profitable industry, the accident statistics would improve dramatically. I like that!

Brian Simms

NEXT EVENT:

2014 Mid-Winter Dinner

Whangaroa Sport Fishing Club

Friday, 25th July

Socialise from 6 pm in the bar, buffet meal at 7 pm

Presentation of forestry award

Guest Speaker – Russell Shaw, CEO, Top Energy

“The earth’s heat and wood processing – a marriage made in Ngawha?”

Cost: \$ 30 per person - bring your friends and relatives too!

RSVP by 18th July to:

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Mid North Branch field day

Ron Lewis, Utakura

Okaihau, Saturday 28th June 10.30am.

Ron has planted Cypress (*lusitanica*), from 10 to 20 years and when Farm Forestry members visited about 7 years ago we were impressed so will be interesting to see their growth. He has planted Eucalyptus, *E. saligna*, *E. pilularis*, *E. muellerana*, *E. botryoides*. Ron has a total of 40 hectares of Radiata and this autumn has harvested 14 hectares. When Kathy Mortimer was with NRC Ron fenced off an area of native bush. So this will be a very interesting field day.

Directions:--- Travel north to Okaihau. Turn off at Okaihau and proceed on Utakura Road for 13kms , then turn into Mangataraire Road, then 2km to Ron’s farm. Meet at woolshed. Contact people: Ron Lewis 094019941 or Lloyd & Bev Gravatt 094346921

All welcome. Take lunch, Raincoat, and let any people you think would be interested know.