

# TREES ON FARMS

## Running Successful Farm Forestry Events: GUIDELINES FOR ORGANISERS

HARRIET PALMER AND NICK LEDGARD

Running a field day, workshop, or other event requires planning, commitment and attention to detail if the event is to run smoothly and be worthwhile for all concerned.

The Trees on Farms project (MPI Sustainable Farming Fund 11/047) included running 26 workshops from which we gained invaluable experience. We have compiled these guidelines to help others involved in organising similar events.



Ministry for Primary Industries  
Manatū Ahu Matua





## KEY STAGES TO RUNNING SUCCESSFUL EVENTS

1

Planning

2

Preparation

3

Implementation

4

Follow-up



## 1. PLANNING YOUR EVENT

It goes without saying that planning is the most important part of organising any event. A good planning mantra is “Audience – Purpose – Outcomes”.

**AUDIENCE:** Who is your target audience? Is it local NZFFA branch members, members from further afield, or does it include non-members? Is your event aimed at people with experience, specialist knowledge, or novices?

**PURPOSE:** What are the objectives of the event? Is there a specific topic or is it a more general visit to see how tree planting on a property is progressing?

**OUTCOMES:** What do you want to happen following the event? Do you simply want people to come your the next event? Or perhaps implement or follow up on practical aspects? You may also hope that non-NZFFA members join the Association as a result of the event.

### TOPIC

You may have a topic in mind already – think about what is relevant, topical, local and timely in the target audience’s world. Some ideas for topics include:

- **Risk aversion:** a big driver for landowners and often a good hook if your aim is to get farmers along to tree-related events. Relevant risks include **climatic extremes** (e.g. drought, wind, and heavy rain), threats to **market access** (e.g. consumer-led demands such as animal welfare or sustainability), and a **non-diversified farm income** (e.g. dependence on a single enterprise).
- **Making money** never goes out of fashion. Ideas for topics include **pre-harvest planning, options for marginal land use** (including manuka), **production thinning**, and **succession planning**.
- **Native species** are also always popular, both establishing and managing plantation natives e.g. riparian plantings; also managing regenerating areas, including pest control.

Is there any opportunity to work with another organisation to hold an event? Ideas include: NZ Beef and Lamb, Dairy NZ, local farmer discussion groups, Tanes Tree Trust, NZ Tree Crops Association.

## TYPE OF EVENT

The type of event should depend on the target audience, purpose, outcomes and topic.

- **FIELD EVENT:** good for introducing a topic to a large number of people.

A **field day** can include demonstration of specific management practices (e.g. riparian planting), or presentations on a specific theme in an outdoor setting (e.g. planning for harvest). Presentations can include everything from structured talks about practices to more much more informal learning, trying things out in the field etc. Often a lot of learning comes as people walk or drive around a property together, or chat over a cup of tea.

- **WORKSHOP:** usually suited to more focused learning; perhaps better suited to smaller numbers than field days.

A **workshop** can be indoors, outdoors or a combination of both. Good workshops involve participating and synergies between participants. They should be an enjoyable group experience. **Advice:** The word 'workshop' can be off-putting because it suggests active, group-based learning which doesn't appeal to everyone. Gauge your audience!

- **CONFERENCE:** suitable for a more complex topic where information to be transferred is scientific and/or technical.

A **conference** generally takes a lot of organising, including finding a suitable indoor venue, registering attendees, dealing with money, finding good-quality speakers, catering etc. Conference organisers often carry some financial risk. Conferences do provide good opportunities for sponsorship and for networking.

### A SUCCESSFUL CONFERENCE

*The Wairarapa Branch of the NZFFA held a one-day conference on 'Opportunities for Manuka and Marginal Land Use' in 2014. Speakers included scientists and practitioners from the honey, manuka, and forest industries. Registration was \$35 for NZFFA members, \$150 for non-members. Over 150 people attended.*

- **EVENING MEETING/DINNER:** a good idea for winter.

Evening meetings have potential for a good social element; often suited to a short, specific topic or a guest speaker. Some branches' annual mid-winter dinner is a highlight of the year.

- **SUMMER PICNIC AND FIELD VISIT:** another good social option.



## TIME OF YEAR, DAY OF THE WEEK, DURATION AND TIMING

All these aspects are a function of the target audience, the topic, and the type of event.

- **TIME OF YEAR:** depending on the target audience, certain times of year are definitely more or less suitable for holding events. Avoid the obvious busy times like calving and lambing if farmers are involved. Also, research early in the planning process into possible clashes with other local events could save a lot of grief later on.
- **DAY OF THE WEEK:** a good knowledge of the target audience will help determine whether to hold your event on a weekday or weekend. Farmers' field days are traditionally held on weekdays; if the audience is predominantly urban then a weekend day may produce a better turn-out.
- **DURATION:** a whole day, either outdoors and/or indoors, is becoming a big ask for many audiences; a good-quality, well-focused half-day may be more appealing. The 'morning indoors/short afternoon session outdoors' combination we used at the Trees on Farms workshops generally proved popular.

- **TIMING:** knowing your target audience will help with decisions over what time of day is most suitable. For example, dairy farmers may prefer a relatively early start and finish so they can be back for afternoon milking; sheep and beef farmers may prefer a later start and finish.

## THE BEST TIME OF DAY FOR AN EVENT?

*Think about ringing the changes – we ran one successful workshop where we started with a late afternoon field visit (starting at 3.30pm) followed by refreshments and then early-evening indoor presentations (finishing by 8.30pm). This meant people could take advantage of a more-or-less full working day before coming to the workshop.*

## LOCATION OF EVENT

- **OUTDOOR VENUES:** try to go to fresh, interesting properties, but within a reasonable distance (30-40 minutes) for the majority of the target audience.
- **UTILISE:** award winners or properties with an element of special interest, BUT be wary of only ever visiting showcase properties where all the work has been done. Sometimes ‘works in progress’ are more relevant to participants.
- **PROVIDE ACCURATE DETAILS:** how to get to the meeting point, and timing of the day.
- **INDOOR VENUES:** use a local hall if there is one. This involves local people and encourages support for your event.
- **IF TRAVELLING BETWEEN VENUES:** keep the distances as short as possible – ideally less than 20 minutes. Otherwise you risk a high drop-out rate.



## REFRESHMENTS AND BREAKS

Refreshments are often better provided at the beginning of, or during an event, rather than the end. Involving local people in catering – for example as a fund-raiser – can reap dividends, as more local people become aware of the event and support it. Include vegetarian and gluten-free options in any catering if possible.



**With or without refreshments, it is always advisable to break up lengthy indoor sessions – a five minute ‘comfort stop’ every once in a while is always a good idea. Encourage people to get up and walk around, make those essential phone calls etc.**

Make sure access to food and drink is quick and efficient! Otherwise much time can be wasted while people queue.

## CONTENT AND PRESENTERS

Clear objectives are essential (remember your purpose and outcomes) when deciding the line-up of speakers and topics. Try to identify key messages that fit with the day’s objectives, and ensure consistency around these key messages between speakers.

**A small number of brief good quality presentations is ideal, whether indoors or out in the field.**

- Farmers like to learn from other farmers.
- Also respected, authoritative practitioners (e.g. nurserymen, silviculture contractors); industry experts (e.g. harvesting and marketing specialists, forestry consultants) or researchers (as long as they have a sound reputation).
- Try to have some fresh faces as speakers but make sure they are the right people and that messages are consistent between speakers.
- Limit government officials/people from regulatory authorities; also limit people from industry organisations such as producer groups.



If you have a speaker who is unaccustomed to speaking to a group, make sure they are well-prepared: help them prepare if necessary. Do they need to practise their talk and check how long it takes? Or help with preparing a powerpoint presentation?



## CHARGING PARTICIPANTS

Ideally, your event will be free of charge. This encourages maximum attendance, and also keeps things more simple for the organisers. There will be some events where a charge for attending is totally justified. If this is the case, consider seeking sponsors to minimise the amount you have to charge: for example, can the costs of providing refreshments or venue hire be covered by sponsors?

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR SPONSORSHIP

Is there an opportunity to involve local suppliers in some events? Involving sponsors worked well at some of the Trees on Farms workshops. In return for sponsorship, some sponsors were given a speaking slot, others provided advertising collateral as handouts, others participated during the afternoon field visit, and some were simply happy to be acknowledged during the day.



## PAYING CONTRIBUTORS

Depending on the type of event, some speakers may request payment. If one speaker is paid then it is only fair that all speakers (excepting those who are speaking as part of their salaried job) should at least be offered payment. This includes farmers who are presenting as part of a professional team. If possible and as a minimum, travel expenses should be offered to volunteer speakers. A small gift for speakers never goes amiss – possibly a local or sponsor's product.

## PUBLICISING YOUR EVENT

Brainstorm options for publicity with a group of people if you can – it is surprising how wide other people's networks spread.

Also use as many different communications channels as possible – don't assume that everyone reads your branch newsletter or will see an advert in the local paper, for example.



We found that using local people and local publicity channels produced the best attendance. Rural delivery leaflet drops were very effective.

Plan publicity well in advance so as to catch e.g. monthly editions of local publications.

Piggyback on other organisations' publicity networks such as e-newsletters.

Identify at least one individual whose role it is to respond promptly to enquiries about the event.

## 2. PREPARATION

### DRY RUN

In our experience, a dry run a couple of weeks out from the event is well worthwhile. A dry run will enable you to check:

- **INDOOR VENUES** – who is the person responsible for unlocking and locking the venue on the day, and preparing the room?

Also things like lighting, heating, seats (are there enough?), facilities for presentations (e.g. screen or white wall, power points, curtains for blackout, acoustics), facilities for refreshments, parking, toilets, emergency exits etc etc. Will the audience be able to see and hear the presentations?



We recommend a microphone and loud speaker system even for indoor presentations as it helps to capture people's attention and ensures everyone can hear. Make sure right at the start that everyone can see and hear, and if not, stop and fix the problem.

- **OUTDOOR VENUE** – first and foremost, liaise closely with the property owner throughout. Also, critically assess the chosen property to ensure what is on display is what you really need to achieve your objectives. 'Showcase' properties are not always the best; young trees may be better than mature plantations.

The event organiser and the property owner should carry out an informal risk assessment during the dry run to identify and eliminate or avoid any hazards.

Also consider things like parking, the best place to meet, moving around the property, time taken to get people from A to B, ensuring people can see and hear, wet weather contingencies, and making the most of any opportunities for active displays or audience participation.

## USING VEHICLES AT EVENTS

*Safe use of vehicles is generally a matter of common sense – e.g. if travelling by car/ute between venues on public roads, warn people of any particular hazards before they set off (e.g. tricky junctions, on-coming logging trucks on narrow roads etc.).*

*On-farm, quad bikes are OK as long as drivers wear helmets and don't carry passengers. If carrying passengers in the back of utes or in trailers make sure they are totally secure.*

## HANDOUTS

Handouts are a good idea as they become a reminder for people after the event. Handouts should be relevant, short, simple and manageable, especially if they are to be used outside. An agenda of the event provides a useful record of speakers and topics; it also gives the opportunity to publicise sponsors by adding their logos.

Ideas for other take-home resources include:

- Spare copies of the Tree Grower magazine – available from the editor (good if you anticipate having non-NZFFA members, as are NZFFA membership forms to enable people to sign up on the day).
- Other organisations' collateral – e.g. NZ Dryland Forests Initiative, Trees for Bees, Tane's Tree Trust, local authority information, sponsors' literature etc.

If the target audience includes non-NZFFA people, think about ways to entice them to join the Association – e.g. is there an opportunity for a special membership offer on the day? Talk to NZFFA National Office staff about this.

## TECHNOLOGY – DATA PROJECTOR, LOUD SPEAKER



**Test equipment in situ if possible; ensure compatibility, e.g. between laptop computers and data projector.** Make sure you have the right cables (including extension cords), and spare batteries for hand-held pointers etc. Also make sure re-chargeable equipment is charged up.



### 3. IMPLEMENTATION: ON THE DAY

- Be **well-organised and calm**; this starts by arriving in good time and being prepared for some people to turn up early (because they often do).
- Try and ensure you have an **efficient registration process** so you capture the name of everyone attending at the very least; if sensible then capture other details including email addresses.
- Make sure people **feel welcome**, especially newcomers. Providing tea and coffee before an event is a good way to encourage a relaxed atmosphere and get people talking to one another.
- **Name badges** are good (sticky labels and a marker pen). Use first names, readable from a distance!
- **Look after any visiting speakers**; ensure they are all set to go with any powerpoint presentations loaded onto a communal laptop.
- Start more-or-less **on time**.
- Make sure people can **see and hear** what is happening.
- **Prime a few people** to ask questions and encourage well-facilitated discussion. Get people to talk about both good and bad experiences. Challenge people to justify why they do what they do.
- Keep **key messages** simple and consistent.
- **Action is good** – e.g. machines working, displays of techniques etc.
- **Finish on or before time!**



### CHAIRING EVENTS

The way an event is chaired can make all the difference between a good and a mediocre event. Good chairing includes:

- Maintaining a good humoured atmosphere.
- Making clear the objectives of the event at the start.
- Introducing speakers and diplomatically keeping them to time.
- Being flexible – for example allowing a discussion to run over time if a topic is obviously of particular interest to the majority, or dropping an item from the agenda completely if necessary.
- Keeping questions on topic; preventing certain individuals from dominating discussions.
- Summarising key points at the end of discussions or the end of the day.
- Thanking all the key people, or ensuring someone else does.

### 4. FOLLOW UP: AFTER THE EVENT

*“People go away from events thinking: the aim is to get them to think then act.”*

- **Provide contacts**, and details of how to access relevant information as appropriate.
- **Fulfil any promises** to supply more information etc. made on the day.
- **Think about opportunities** for follow-up events – was there some aspect of your day that people were particularly interested in? Or something that justifies a more in-depth event?
- **Keep in touch** with any non-NZFFA members who came to your event; encourage them to join the Association.

Feedback forms handed out at the end of the day are often completed hurriedly and without reflection. An e-survey (e.g. SurveyMonkey) or a postal survey soon after the event may provide better information (consider offering entry to a prize draw for those completing it).

Another alternative is to ring round a selection of participants a few days after the event and ask them for their opinions on things like content, presenters, venue etc.



## CONTACTS

In 2014, the Trees on Farms workshops were run by Harriet Palmer ([harriet.e.palmer@gmail.com](mailto:harriet.e.palmer@gmail.com)) and Nick Ledgard ([nick.ledgard@xtra.co.nz](mailto:nick.ledgard@xtra.co.nz)).

For more details of farm forestry field days and the activities of the NZ Farm Forestry Association, visit: [www.nzffa.org.nz](http://www.nzffa.org.nz)

For more information about the MPI Sustainable Farming Fund, visit: [www.mpi.govt.nz/agriculture/funding-programmes/sustainable-farming-fund.aspx](http://www.mpi.govt.nz/agriculture/funding-programmes/sustainable-farming-fund.aspx)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Trees on Farms SFF project was supported by a large number of individual farm foresters and the following organisations: AgFirst, Tane's Tree Trust, NZFFA Branches and Action Groups, Neil Barr Farm Forestry Foundation, Rural Women NZ, NZ Young Farmers, Landcare Trust, and a number of regional/district authorities: Gisborne, Horizons, Taranaki, Waikato, Bay of Plenty, Hawkes Bay, Marlborough, Southland.

## TREES ON FARMS VIDEOS

As part of the Trees on Farms project, we made:

- over 60 videos of individual farm foresters talking about their trees and farming businesses;
- four specialist topic videos – *Trees for Shade and Shelter* / *Trees for Soil Conservation* / *Returns from Harvesting* / *Using Timber from Trees on Farms*.

All videos can be found on the NZFFA website: [www.nzffa.org.nz](http://www.nzffa.org.nz)

