Dairy farming in the Waituna Catchment:
Protecting Lagoon Health

Update October 2012
This catchment Action Plan was produced by dairy farmers in the Waituna Lagoon catchment with the support of DairyNZ. We are faced with the challenge of ensuring a sustainable future for the Waituna Lagoon and our community. As local dairy farmers we are proud of the initiatives we are taking to secure this future.

How are we going?

There are 40 dairy farms in the Waituna Lagoon, which is around 35-45% of the land area of the catchment. Farmers have been implementing a wide range of practical actions to protect the health of the Waituna Lagoon, the catchment and wider Southland environment, for today and the future.
What actions have been implemented so far?

33% of the implemented activities relate to effluent management. Some highlights include:

- New effluent systems costing between $100,000 -150,000 each. These increase the capacity to store dairy effluent lowering risks of discharge that could subsequently enter waterways and the Lagoon.
- Improving the drainage from laneways around milking platforms to ensure that run-off doesn’t enter waterways.
- Trialling the use of k-line irrigation for low-rate effluent application to reduce the risk of leaching and run-off entering waterways.

A further 34% of implemented activities relate directly to nutrient management, including:

- Mapping and replacing tile drains to further reduce the risk of nutrient leachate finding its way into waterways.
- Permanently fencing off part of a paddock which was identified as a nutrient leaching ‘hotspot’.
- Using less urea as a part of an overall nutrient management plan.

A range of other actions have been carried out including landscape, stream bank stability and waste management improvements such as:

- Fencing off waterways on farms where this was identified as an area to improve in 2011.
- Increasing the area of riparian planting.
- Improving rubbish management.
- Fencing off native bush blocks.
Looking toward the future

Farmers have made a significant commitment by responding to some of the environmental challenges facing Waituna Lagoon. It is recognised by those living in the catchment that there is still more to do. For the 178 action items that need to be implemented farmers have estimated a total future investment of $3 Million to make them a reality. The largest investment comes with upgrading or replacing farm dairy effluent systems, and this type of activity requires careful planning.

Together with actions carried out by other parties including Environment Southland and the Department of Conservation, there are a number of other initiatives that farmers are carrying out that will strengthen the Catchment Action Plan including:

- Setting realistic nutrient targets which reflect the need for environmental improvement while maintaining productivity.
- Developing Sustainable Milk Plans to replace the 2011/12 plans. These link on-farm actions to catchment wide outcomes for the Lagoon.
- In partnership with the dairy sector and fertiliser industry farmers are making nutrient management improvements. There is a lift in the amount of training that is available to fine-tune day-to-day decisions to achieve the best environment and production outcomes.
- Environment Southland has built an improved water quality monitoring system to better understand the drivers of the Lagoon’s health.

Waituna farmers concerns are:

- Policy certainty for farming in the catchment is needed to satisfy lenders and investors about security.

The farmers are eager to report their progress to the Southland community, so more is known about what they are doing, how they are going and plans for the future. Waituna farmers share a passion for the country, and take stewardship of the land seriously.

It is going to take a sustained effort to continue to manage the risks to the Lagoon from sediment and nutrients. Farmers welcome these initiatives as it will improve the amount of information and confirm what influence the changes they are making are having on the Lagoon’s health. We look forward to developing another progress update early in 2013.

For more information contact: Gerald Spain on 027 841 6323 or Jo Marshall-Crack on 027 818 4605
DairyNZ is proud to support the efforts of farmers in the Waituna catchment. For more information on DairyNZ, visit www.dairynz.co.nz or call our farmer information line: 0800 4 DAIRY NZ (0800 4 324 7969)