

MEDIA RELEASE from Waikato Regional Drought Committee

13 May 2010

Rain welcome but still a long way to go with drought's effects

Recent rain in the Waikato, with a forecast of more to come over the next fortnight, is welcome news but the region's farmers are still under significant pressure because of the drought, says the Waikato Regional Drought Committee.

In the past week, rainfall has generally ranged from three to 50 millimetres in farming areas around the region. Wet weather is forecast for the next fortnight.

It is estimated between 75mm-100mm is needed over several days before soil moisture conditions could be said to be getting well on the way towards normal. Further ongoing rain will be needed to fully restore pasture health.

"The recent rain is very welcome but it will take some weeks of wet weather before farmers generally have enough pasture cover to adequately feed stock," said committee chairman Peter Buckley, the chair of regional council Environment Waikato.

"And, regardless of how quick good pasture conditions return, farmers will continue to feel the effects of this season's drought for some time."

The North Island manager for policy at the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Phil Journeaux, said assistance was still available for struggling farmers under the Government's drought declaration for the region.

"Our funding for the Waikato Rural Support Trust is ongoing and welfare support is also available for qualifying farmers. MAF will continue to monitor developments closely," Mr Journeaux said.

The trust's chairman Neil Bateup said some of the farmers he was talking to were still feeling the financial effects of the 2008 drought, and this was compounded by dry weather last year and this year.

"These sorts of financial impacts will probably be felt for at least a couple of years, even if we return to more normal weather patterns.

"I personally have had to spend an extra \$80,000 on feed and my season's milk production is down on its long run average by 35,000 kilograms. It's pretty tough out there for an awful lot of farmers."

Mr Buckley agreed many Waikato farmers would continue to feel the financial pinch even if rain continued to fall more widely.

"The rain may help solve more immediate problems by making it greener but the financial effects of this drought will last for a couple of years regardless."

Waikato farmers affected by the drought are being urged not to hold off calling the Rural Support Trust or rural professionals if they need help. The Rural Support Trust's contact number is 0800 787 254.

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