

SHORT REPORT

November 2011

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT: FarmsOnLine

What is FarmsOnLine?

FarmsOnLine is a government-owned online database of New Zealand rural property providing accurate information about the exact physical location of a farm, its ownership and management details, its land use and the type and position of its stock or crops. Developed in consultation with key industry partners and operated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), FarmsOnLine covers all rural land uses to which biosecurity considerations apply, including laybys and lifestyle blocks.

FarmsOnLine went live in April 2011 and aims to be the authoritative source of rural property information for biosecurity management. Drawing on data obtained from publicly held sources and information contributed by registered users, it currently provides information on 98% of New Zealand rural properties.

What is the purpose of FarmsOnLine?

FarmsOnLine is designed to serve as a fast-response tool for managing serious biosecurity outbreaks. In the event of say, an outbreak of avian influenza on a New Zealand poultry farm, the information held on the FarmsOnLine database would enable biosecurity personnel, along with local and regional government and emergency services, to work swiftly and accurately with rural owners and managers to prevent or contain a disaster. For that reason, it is critical that all industry members should register and list their information on FarmsOnLine and keep it up to date.

Does FarmsOnLine have other uses?

With New Zealand's trading partners increasingly requiring produce and product traceability, FarmsOnLine provides them with increased confidence in our ability to respond to disease outbreaks, and reduces the likelihood or scope of trade restrictions that could cost us millions of dollars a day. FarmsOnLine is also being used to support research related to the rural sector, for things like animal, plant and human health and food safety.

What sort of information is held on FarmsOnLine?

Most of the information held on FarmsOnLine, such as your property location, address, title and land use, is already available publicly. The names of the owner, manager or occupier are not publicly available but are a critical part of FarmsOnLine.

What information is NOT held on FarmsOnLine?

FarmsOnLine does not hold information on disease status, animal welfare, individual farm stock or crop information, or financial, commercial or land value information.

How does FarmsOnLine work?

FarmsOnline has a website at www.farmsonline.maf.govt.nz. The site is clearly laid out and easy to use and includes a secure, password-protected section where landowners can register and check and update their property details at any time. You can also update information about your property by calling the FarmsOnLine Contact Centre on 0800 4 FOLNZ (0800 4 36569). In addition, FarmsOnLine operates a Data Maintenance Centre which checks and validates the records of approximately 50,000 properties per year.

Is it compulsory to register with FarmsOnLine?

It is not compulsory to allow your personal details to be used in FarmsOnLine. However, by allowing your personal details to be used you will be supporting vital biosecurity initiatives. At any time you will have the right to request that your personal information be removed from the database.

How will FarmsOnLine interact with me and my business?

No action is needed by property owners to ensure their farms, orchards and forests are on the database. You may however receive a phone call from the Data Maintenance Centre seeking your assistance in checking and updating your information. Providing this information to the Data Maintenance Centre is purely voluntary. You can also register on the website to view or update your details. Once again, we think it is critical that industry members register and regularly update their information on FarmsOnLine.

What about the privacy issues?

Privacy issues have been important in the development of the system and personal information registered on the database can only be used for activities under the Biosecurity Act unless permission for wider use has been given by individuals. The use of personal and stock/crop information is also governed by strict privacy controls at all times. The information held on the FarmsOnLine database is further subject to an annual independent audit. For more information on the ways your private information will be protected, go to <http://farmsonline.maf.govt.nz/Privacy>.

What are the benefits of FarmsOnLine?

- FarmsOnLine provides you with greater protection of your business and livelihood by enabling a fast response by MAF to a serious biosecurity outbreak.
- By pulling together rural property information that is currently fragmented across a number of government and industry databases, FarmsOnLine will reduce the cost and duplication of effort in collecting and maintaining this information.
- The information on rural properties gathered by FarmsOnLine will assist with MAF surveillance and pest management programmes, and with the development of evidence-based policy and planning for New Zealand's vitally important rural sector.

Our recommendation:

For the greater protection of your individual business and livelihood, the industry you belong to and the New Zealand economy as a whole, it is vital that you register with FarmsOnLine and update your farm data regularly.

The FarmsOnLine website is at: www.farmsonline.maf.govt.nz

You can call FarmsOnLine free of charge on: 0800 4 FOLNZ (0800 4 36569).
