

Kia Ora Commissioners

My name is Brendan Balle and I wish to present to you today the perspective of my family business with regards to the topics of Block 2. No doubt you will have by now have heard of hundreds of farming families stories and anecdotes about how their various farming operations work , and how they see this Plan and how it will affect their lives.

I apologise in advance if you feel you have had enough of these stories and anecdotes, but I feel it is important that these stories are conveyed as they give you as commissioners an overview of the fabric that holds our Rural communities together as well as a snap shot of the positive environmental work that farmers and growers have quietly been getting on with for many many years.

Our our family journey as vegetable growers started in 1919 when my grandfather arrived back in NZ after serving in WW1 for the whole 4 years of that terrible conflict. He managed to purchase 10 acres on the North Western slopes of Pukekohe Hill and set about growing vegetables to feed and sustain a growing population in Auckland and around NZ as well as raising 8 children.

Fast forward to 2019 and my family business now employs more than 300 loyal staff working across 6 different Regional Council jurisdictions to produce Reasonably Priced Healthy Food for the still increasing population of Aotearoa.

It would be fair to say that one of our greatest challenges is a continual onslaught of Environmental Policy such as Horizons One Plan and more recently Waikato's Plan Change 1.

The provisions for Commercial Vegetable Production are very onerous and quite frankly unless moderated significantly will place the ability of our sector to produce reasonably priced healthy food in jeopardy.

Across this Plan Change our sector has seen a continual creep of rules being manipulated by regulators that seek to tie our sector up in red tape and rules that will have very little positive impact in Water quality. I wish to elaborate more on this at the Block 3 hearings and today I wish to present to you a simple power point to convey some of my messages.

Slide 1 This image reflects a cropping property that our family purchased in 2010 on the headwaters of the Mauku Stream near Pukekohe. Previously to this the property had been farmed as a dairy farm by the same family for over 100 years. Upon purchasing this property we immediately set about setting up the property to avoid any adverse affects on the Mauku Stream from our vegetable growing activities. We have achieved this by setting up an extensive network of soil bunds and silt pits that control run off and soil movement. We have undertaken a huge riparian planting program along the Stream and have retired any steep sidlings and gullies that once would have grazed dairy cows with very little environmental protections in place. I also refer to this on the subject of Cultivation, Slope and Setbacks. If the setbacks are required as drafted several paddocks on this property could not be viably cropped. If bunding and silt traps are developed, it mitigates the need for setbacks which in their primary form have little positive environmental effect in Commercial Vegetable Production.

Slide 2. Land Use Comparison by Region

This reflects current land use patterns for our business in the Auckland and North Waikato areas. I hope it reinforces the reliance our sector places upon leased land and the need for the rules of PC1 to consider the 4 contaminants as a discharge consent rather than a land use consent. To fail to do so will have serious consequences for our sector.

Slide 3. Aerial Map

This shows the geograhic spread of our vegetable cropping operations across the two areas with Auckland in yellow and North Waikato in red. Geoprahic spread is very important to our sector as it assists in our Integrated Pest Management strategies to mitigate the effects of airborne fungi and insects that affect our crops. It also helps us meet market demands throughout the year with Early to market, Winter grown crops that are produced on the warm Volcanic slopes of Pukekohe,

Pukekawa, Onewhero and Te Kohanga. This helps mitigate the risk of frosts which have a severe impact on the crops we grow.

#### Slide 4. Pest and Disease Management

These following images show just some of the soil borne diseases and pathogens that build up in the soil if wide crop rotations can not be encouraged. As the PC1 rules are drafted it appears there is very little REAL understanding from Council staff that Rotation is vitally important to our industry.

#### Slide 5. Healthy Crops

These images show actual vegetables that my family business grows and the Healthy soil we grow them in. They are not images borrowed from the internet or some glossy brochure. The Environmental lobby and some Council staff would have the public believe that our Vegetable Growing sector are polluters, Environmental vandals that grow plants dripping with dangerous chemicals and toxins, degraders of soils and streams, and Capitalists that place Money before all other considerations.

I wish to point out that if all of this was true would we still have a soil and water resource that sustains abundant life at a reasonable cost after more than 100 years?

#### Slide 6. Good Management Practices

As explained earlier in my presentation we have been undertaking measures such as these for more than 20 years. These controls are some the of many mitigations we employ to avoid soil and nutrient loss on our land, and run off into sensitive receiving environments.

- Earth Bunding
- Silt pits
- Wheel track ripping
- Riparian planting
- Use of slow release fertiliser
- Autumn soil preparation
- GPS and controlled traffic technology
- Intergrated Pest Management

#### Slide 6. Our People

Our sector is primarily run by a small ( and dwindling) group of extremely passionate and dedicated families who are assisted by a very loyal workforce. Our sector is in dire circumstances facing succession planning challenges that threaten our ability to produce Healthy food for Aotearoa New Zealand at a reasonable cost. One of the biggest fears of our future growers is onerous environmental policy that adds huge compliance cost with questionable positive environmental benefit. The real loser will be public health in general as the cost of Healthy food will have to keep raising to try and keep pace with the ever increasing cost of compliance and regulation.

#### Slide 7. Elvis.

I spoke earlier of loyal staff and how fortunate we are to have the wonderful people that go out every day in rain hail or shine to produce healthy food.

This lovely humble man is Elvis Galvin. He started working with my father upon leaving school in 1975, starting out by hand picking potatoes. My father quickly realised Elvis was a natural operator and he swiftly progressed to tractor and machine operations, where he happily applied his talents to working the soil he loved.

Sadly Elvis passed away unexpectedly last Saturday while enjoying his afternoon collecting Kai for his Whanau. On the bright side he passed on a piece of land overlooking the Waikato River and Port Waikato in the shadow of Pukeotahina, near Te Kohanga.

Our family had the privilege of working alongside Elvis for 44 years, and we have many other loyal staff who we have worked with for 20 years and more.

My greatest fear is that this Plan Change will be one of the largest disruptors to rural businesses and communities that we live in. What will happen to the people such as the Elvis's of the world when it simply becomes more economic to import fruit and vegetables of dubious origin if our Policy Direction and implementation of rules destroys our sector.

Thank you for your time today and I sincerely hope that you as commissioners give serious consideration to the views of our sector and rural communities in general.

Kia Ora Katou