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Tour puts farmers on the road to fitness

The Tour de France it's not – but farm consultant Ian Handcock of Waitakaruru is urging farmers to ditch their quad bikes for pedal power in the lead-up to the **Fit4Farming Rural Cycle Tour**. From 18 March to 2 April next year, a 20-strong peleton of farmers and sponsors will ride on country roads from Ngatea to Bluff. Along the way they'll be joined by supporting riders; and special community events such as local cycle rides will be hosted at the stopover towns.

The vision of the Farmstrong 'Fit4Farming' initiative is to inspire New Zealand to be the fittest farming nation in the world. As campaign manager, Ian hopes Hauraki will lead the way, in an industry where increased automation, mechanisation and management focus have greatly reduced the need for physical exertion. A lifestyle of sitting on tractors, quad bikes and at the office desk has put farmers at high risk of heart disease, weight problems, injuries, burnout and depression.

The effects have been compounded by less healthy eating habits and social habits, says Ian. "More time and money is being spent on information about the nutrient demands of a performance cow than on the person who has to manage that cow."

Ian grew up on a sheep and beef farm, and after 10 years as a builder worked on dairy farms in the Hauraki area, in roles including management and sharemilking. He has a first-hand understanding of the challenges, "I've been under stress, and have been helped by other people to take active time out and see that it made a difference." He says depression among farmers is rising, and physical exercise improves the ability to manage stress.

The 48-year-old's interest in farmers' fitness has been fuelled by discussions over the years with farmers who keep fit and energetic by doing manual work developing their farms, and through regular involvement with local sports clubs and community events. "I've been struck by the fact that some farmers can make time for themselves, while some can't seem to do it."

Last year Ian completed a research project for the Kellogg Rural Leaders Programme, gauging the physical activity and fitness levels of male dairy farmers, and the impact on their health and wellbeing. He carried out fitness assessments of 30 Hauraki Plains farmers; and monitored the heart rates of 11 individuals over a typical day's work in the dairy season. This showed that the farmers seldom exceeded a low intensity heart rate.

The results of Ian's study align strongly with the findings of DairyNZ's free 'Pitstop' health checks, in which 75% of farmers were shown to be at risk of cardiovascular disease. In both trials, three quarters of farmers had a body mass index above the World Health Organisation acceptable healthy level, and high blood pressure was evident.

NOT YOUR USUAL FARM BIKES: Ngatea dairy farmer Brian Pirie (second from left) and his daughter Ella test their pedal-power at Fieldays, as Fit 4 Farming member Barry Williams explains to Celine Pirie how the two-minute challenge works.



In short, there's now a gap between the level of fitness required for farming and the level required to maintain a fit and healthy lifestyle, says Ian. It was his Kellogg study and a long-held personal aspiration to bike the length of New Zealand that sparked the Rural Cycle Tour.

After Farmstrong's official launch in Wellington last month, its stand at National Fieldays in Hamilton drew plenty of interest. Ian talked with over 500 farmers there, and about 360 people – many in gumboots – took part in a two-minute cycle challenge promoting the tour. An associated cycle challenge is already underway: encouraging rural New Zealanders to commit to ride (or run or walk) a total of 4 million kilometres during this farming year. Pledges of kilometres can be made at farmstrong.co.nz/join-the-cycle-tour/.

Toyota, CB Norwood, Beef + Lamb New Zealand, and ANZCO Foods have joined Farmstrong as major sponsors of the Fit4Farming Tour. Sport Waikato is helping to get the event rolling, and the Hauraki District Council is providing traffic management for the first stage.

Mayor John Tregidga says the homegrown-on-the-Plains initiative is a fantastic way of promoting farmers' health. "When the peleton sets off for Cambridge on Day 1, I'll be riding the first leg from Ngatea to Kerepehi with members of the community who want to join in, and I'm writing to other Mayors on the tour route asking for their support." He also intends contributing to the 4 million-kilometre challenge by notching 12 km every time he walks the golf course.

Deputy Mayor Bruce Gordon, a farmer himself, commends Ian and all the tour's organisers and sponsors. He says the initiative is based on very sound reasoning, and physical fitness makes the mind sharper too.

"We can get caught up with the problem of time available to fit this in, especially during the busy seasons on the farm, but it is well worthwhile just to pledge half an hour a day to walk somewhere rather than take the quad bike."

We need your help!

Catch illegal dumpers and water thieves

Some commercial operators are allegedly doing their business at motorhome stations throughout the District. Others have been seen taking water from places they shouldn't. Both should be reported to the Council if spotted. Although the Council has a controlled waste station where registered users such as septic tank cleaners and porta-loo operators can dump their wares, some operators don't seem to be able to hold on until they get there. People who see these operators at motorhome stations often assume they're cleaning them out, when they're actually filling them up.

The Council has also received reports of water carts being filled up from fire hydrants. They shouldn't be. There are four fill points for authorised users throughout the District. These are located outside Council depots in Paeroa and Waihi and at Council water treatment plants in Waitakaruru and Kerepehi. Outside of those four places the only vehicles authorised to take water from fire hydrants are fire trucks. Anyone else is stealing from ratepayers, and if the water tank has been used to carry anything else there is also a risk of back flow and water supply contamination.

If you see a septic tank vehicle relieving itself at one of our motorhome stations, or anything other than a big red truck filling up from one of our fire hydrants (unless it's at one of our four authorised user fill points) please phone 0800 734 834 (from within district) or 07 862 8609 and let us know.

Wheel hazard on footpaths in Paeroa town centre

There are plenty of places to ride push bikes, skateboards and scooters in Paeroa – on the footpaths in the town centre isn't one of them. Recent reports of near misses between pedestrians and riders during community events like market days highlight the common sense behind Council's resolution to prohibit the riding of anything other than a wheelchair or mobility scooter on the footpaths in the town's main street. Throw State Highway 2 into the mix and you've got a wheel recipe for disaster.

To avoid any confusion around which wheels are welcome, and where, footpaths markings clearly showing no-go areas will be repainted over the coming weeks. In the meantime, please respect pedestrians by dismounting, or skirting the town centre altogether, on your way to the skate-park, cycle trail, school or footy practice.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Creative Communities Scheme funding for local arts



Applications for funding assistance to local arts projects and initiatives within the territory of the Hauraki District Council are now being received. The scheme's three funding criteria are:

- 1. Broad community involvement** – Your project will create opportunities for local communities to engage with and participate in arts activities;
- 2. Diversity** – Your project will support the diverse arts and cultural traditions of local communities, enriching and promoting their uniqueness and cultural diversity; and
- 3. Young people** – Your project will enable and encourage young people (under 18 years) to engage with and actively participate in the arts.

Application forms are available from the Council offices at: William Street, Paeroa; Rosemont Road, Waihi; Orchard Road, Ngatea.

Applications close 4:00pm Friday, 25 September 2015

for further information contact:
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07 862 8609
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Langley Cavers
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