



Effluent technology set to lift dairy water efficiency

JAMIE THOMPSON

NUTRIENT EFFICIENCY is vital to Ravensdown as a component of smarter farming -- good for the bottom line and the environment.

Water efficiency is now a catch-cry and the dairy sector is being urged to lessen its water 'footprint'.

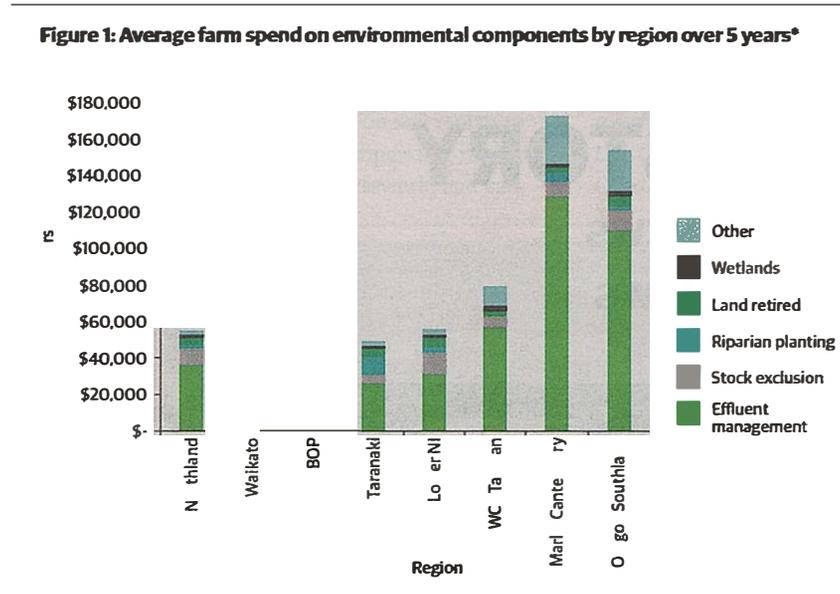
Crucial to this challenge is how effluent is managed. Recycling and reusing the nutrients in dairy shed effluent is good practice, showing that dairy farmers are doing the right thing. This comes with a price tag: 70% of dairy farmers' environmental spending

goes on effluent management (see graph).

Challenge to status quo

Well-managed effluent forms a key part of the nutrient cycle onfarm, but in spring when cows are calving and spring rains keep falling, effluent ponds can fill and the traditional and viable method of irrigating or spreading of effluent can become a headache.

This can lead to accidental breaches of discharge, resulting in potential leaching or run-off of nutrients into surface water, perhaps damage to a farmer's reputation and the risk of a hefty fine. In a cold wet winter, spreading effluent nutrients to keep ponds



under control can also increase the potential for nitrate leaching.

If farmers are also looking to use feed pads more in the winter to

avoid pugging, as a way to mitigate potential phosphate run-off, then effluent capture, treatment and reuse becomes even more important.

Recycling and reusing water

There are a few reasons why the ponds are at risk of filling up too fast -- reaching the danger zone.



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Without tackling the root cause, the temptation can be simply to build a bigger pond with all the costs and risks entailed.

Now a new generation of storage ponds is on its way which, with reporting, management and decision support tech-

nology, a farm would be able to easily track, show and improve its nutrient efficiency and water efficiency-- a win-win for all.

● Jamie Thompson is a Ravensdown effluent technology manager. This article first appeared in Ground Effect autumn issue.