

# We need climate action that builds ag

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[Guest writer](#)

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Internationally, farmers are rewarded for adopting technology to address methane, says Kate Acland.



New Zealand's agriculture sector is at a critical juncture, says Kate Acland – continuing down the path of destocking and land use change, or embracing investment in technology that will reduce methane emissions while ‘we maintain and even grow our production base’. Photo: Clare Toia-Bailey

**Reading Time: 3 minutes**

By Kate Acland, chair of Beef + Lamb New Zealand.

The recent announcement by the government that [agriculture is to be removed from the Emissions Trading Scheme](#) was met with widespread approval from the primary sector.

But it does leave the question of what next? It's clear that the government's intention is not to “do nothing”, and the expectation remains that agriculture should “play its part”.

A Beef + Lamb New Zealand (BLNZ) review of livestock numbers using the most up-to-date figures suggest that agriculture is well on its way to meeting, and in the case of sheep, exceeding the current 2030 methane targets.

But most of this reduction has happened due to a reduction in stock numbers through land use change and the planting of trees on productive land.

A price or a tax on livestock emissions is a blunt tool that would exacerbate this, risking the loss of our iconic mosaic landscapes and the important role that extensive hill country farming plays. Let's also not forget sheep and beef farms also help safeguard New Zealand's biodiversity.

Sheep and beef farmers are looking after a large portion of indigenous biodiversity, with 24% of the country's native vegetation cover on sheep and beef farms, second only to the conservation estate.

This reduction in stock numbers, particularly from our hill country, is not positive, it's not good for the New Zealand economy, and given that we are among the most carbon efficient producers of protein in the world, it's not great news for the planet either.

We need to find and embrace solutions that won't put the production of world-class beef and lamb at risk.

The country's methane targets are currently under review, and we're hopeful these will be reviewed based on the science around the warming impact of methane.

There are various views as to what these targets should be, but regardless, they won't be zero. New Zealand has emissions reductions to make and international obligations to meet.

As an agriculture sector, we're at a critical juncture. We can continue to make "progress" towards targets through de-intensification, destocking and land use change – or we can embrace the investment in technology that will reduce methane emissions from our livestock that will allow us to maintain and even grow our production base.

With the government making the call to remove agriculture from the ETS, we are now presented with an opportunity.

We need to do more of what we're best in the world at, not less. It's in no one's interest for the agriculture sector to shrink further in this country.

We are well placed to position ourselves as the most nature-positive red meat producers in the world, balancing climate, water and biodiversity.

We have several organisations and groups in New Zealand working to support that goal, with the help of investment from successive governments in finding methane mitigation technologies and improving animal efficiency.

Although most of these technologies aren't commercially available yet, science has shown that it's theoretically possible to reduce methane while maintaining production and product quality – so it's only a matter of time.

We should celebrate and champion these efforts, the scientists and the people and companies investing, because we know our competitors overseas are chasing the same goal.

But too often we see stones being thrown at those looking for the solutions that could open up the opportunity to maintain or grow our production levels and extract more value in the market.

BLNZ is currently undertaking a study of what other countries are doing in the emissions mitigation space. It's clear that customers are pushing their supply chains for action and farmers in other parts of the world are viewing this as an opportunity.

But the critical difference is farmers internationally aren't being taxed, they are being incentivised to embrace technology and are being recognised for their efforts.

Stories of New Zealand are intertwined with the stories of agriculture and of innovation. In fact, it's been innovation and a willingness by our farmers and growers to embrace change that has made our sector as strong as it is today. The current investment into methane mitigation is the next step in this change and innovation journey.

Brand New Zealand is by its very nature a country that cares about its environment. People will and do pay a premium for this. Right now, we have the choice: do we further grow this brand, or do we allow another country to take our place?