

HILL COUNTRY FUTURES

Farmer Perspective series

Regenerative agriculture



We have had the privilege of listening to a range of people involved in hill country farming. This article is part of a short series that provides insights on some of the biggest sector issues our interviewees identified.

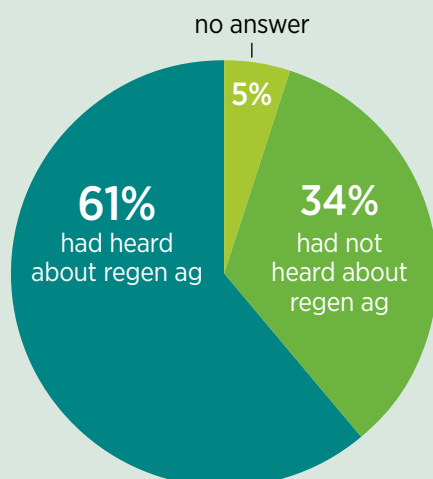
There is an increasing interest in regenerative agriculture (regen ag), both in New Zealand and internationally. Regenerative agriculture has the potential to bring improved environmental, social and economic outcomes to farming. However, it is important to investigate regenerative agriculture to understand more about the movement and if it has a role in helping future-proof hill country farming.

How well known is regenerative agriculture?

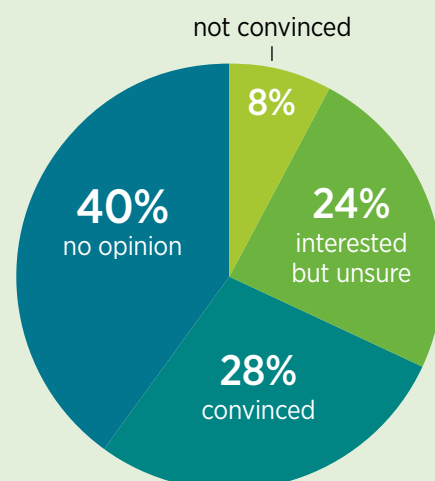
10% of interviewees mentioned regenerative agriculture unprompted, but

28% of all interviewees (farmers + non-farmers*) mentioned regenerative agriculture unprompted

Of the representative farmers who were asked directly about regenerative agriculture:



Of the 61% of representative farmers who had heard about regenerative agriculture:



*Non-farmers includes B+LNZ assistants, rural professionals, policy makers and researchers

What attracts farmers to regenerative agriculture?

- Aligns with personal values
- “Old way” of farming increasingly difficult with regulations
- Market opportunities
- Helps to create autonomy in an era of uncertainty
- Positive climate action
- Peer-to-peer learning



How is regenerative agriculture developing?

Creation of a community

The change that is being created by the regenerative agriculture movement is broader than just farming practices. It is creating a supportive and empowering community.

This community is dispersed throughout New Zealand and internationally.

This community performs trial and error practices on farm, and then shares these learnings and failures.

Farmers are sharing their knowledge as they learn it through grass-roots farmer-led workshops, field days, and online discussions.

But some are hesitant

How can we define it?

The lack of a firm definition of what regenerative agriculture was a significant obstacle for many - but only for interviewees that were outside of the regenerative agriculture community. Within the community there was reluctance to create a definition for fear that it may be too prescriptive.

Why the term “regenerative”?

Some interview participants were strongly opposed to the use of the phrase “regenerative” in the context of hill country farming because they felt it implied that existing practices are “degenerative”.

Where’s the evidence to say it works?

Opponents feel that there is insufficient scientific evidence to justify a sector-wide promotion of the approach. They cite how few scientific studies have been undertaken on regenerative agriculture in New Zealand and globally.

