



THRIVING SOUTHLAND
CATCHMENT GROUP
FARMER AND STAKEHOLDER
Annual Survey

2024



**THRIVING
SOUTHLAND**

*Tōnui ana te whenua. Tōnui ana te takata.
A thriving, prosperous land. A thriving, prosperous people.*



Agriculture & Investment Services

Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua

thrivingsouthland.co.nz

THRIVING SOUTHLAND IS

*A community-led group
in the Southland region
with an overall vision
“to create a prosperous
Southland, healthy people,
healthy environment from
the mountains to the sea.”*



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Summary

- » There were 201 responses to the survey and in keeping with previous surveys, most respondents of the 2024 survey were male farmers who had been farming for 10-plus years and run sheep, beef, sheep and beef, dairy or dairy support farms.
- » Most respondents were European New Zealanders although an increasing percentage identified as Māori.
- » Most respondents were representatives of the Mataura River catchment.
- » Similar to previous years, the 2024 respondents' main goals over the past five years have been to increase profitability (up 6% on 2023), improve wellbeing, and increase farm business resilience and productivity. This year, reducing costs increased as a goal (67%, up 18% on 2023) suggesting many respondents are affected by New Zealand's current 'cost of living crisis'.
- » More farmers are now looking at wintering systems as a Good Management Practice (GMP) compared to 2023 (8% increase). Overall, the most common GMPs to be adopted continue to be fertiliser use, application and placement, paddock selection for wintering, and riparian planting and buffers.
- » In keeping with previous years, most respondents source Good Management Practice advice from other farmers (67% compared to 65% in 2023), sector support (54% compared to 45%) but fewer are gaining GMP advice from Catchment Group events (49% compared to 57% in 2023).
- » The majority of respondents said they had or were developing a Farm Environment Plan (FEP). Most respondents referred to their FEP occasionally with a reduction in those who refer to it regularly by 13% compared to 2023.
- » The most common things respondents monitor on-farm continue to be fertiliser placement, rainfall, growth rates (grass, crops) and soil. Of note, there has been an increase in water monitoring on-farm with more farmers now monitoring water sediment (24%, up from 13% in 2023) and sediment loss/capture (21%, up from 11% in 2023).
- » Respondents rate their own farm's water quality as excellent (56%) or good (31%). Their reasoning for this rating was similar to previous years, personal perception and good GMP. Of note is the increase in the rating based on water quality testing or monitoring compared to 2023.
- » Just 10% of respondents rated the water quality across Southland's waterways as excellent, while 48% rated it as good, 34% as fair and 6% as poor.
- » Last year's survey found more respondents feeling optimistic. This optimism has dropped off in this year's survey with 36% of respondents reporting feeling optimistic about the future some of the time (down 4% from 2023). Respondents, however, reported taking part in more social activities outside of work.
- » More than 60% of respondents stated they had provided support to other farmers over the past year through practical assistance, discussion groups, and events.

- » Certainty of information related to rules and regulations, their timeframes, and how to apply these on-farm remains the principal area of information and support wanted by respondents. More farmers are also looking for information on succession planning.
- » The 2024 survey included a new question around future goals. Over 70% of participants knew the next steps towards future goals with 24% unsure and 6% who did not know their next steps.
- » The most common resources requested were speakers and experts (57%), science (52%) and rules and legislation support (52%). Of note, more respondents sought practical support for on-farm change (56%, up 13% from 2023) while fewer participants wanted farm systems specialists (37%, down 10% compared to 2023).
- » There appears to still be limited interaction between Catchment Groups and local iwi although the level of engagement seems to be improving year-on-year.
- » Thriving Southland continues to be pivotal in providing opportunities for people to join and support Catchment Groups and farmers. More than a quarter of respondents reported access to leaders, science, research and information from Thriving Southland was beneficial.
- » There is still uncertainty among respondents as to the level of interaction between sector/ industry groups and Catchment Groups. Just under a third of respondents felt sector groups/ industry associations collaborated at a moderate or high level with their Catchment Group in 2024 (32% collectively), which was comparable to 2023 but lower than 2022 (39% collectively).
- » Similar to the past two years, in 2024 respondents felt members of Catchment Groups were welcoming to newcomers, focused on solutions and understanding issues, and provide an environment where views could be expressed.
- » Respondents rated, to a moderate or high degree, that Catchment Groups were well-led (80%), well-coordinated (80%), and well-run overall (78%).
- » Respondents in 2024 stated they were proud mostly of their sustainability efforts and producing a quality product. Notably, many respondents also noted pride in their historical links to the land and responsibility to improve the land for future generations.
- » The 2024 survey also collected feedback from respondents on Thriving Southland as an organisation, its work, and suggestions for improvement.



Background

Thriving Southland has conducted this survey annually since 2021. It is targeted at Southland farmers, Catchment Group members and stakeholders, and is designed to collect information on their environmental practices, knowledge and understanding of the role of Thriving Southland, how they want to be engaged with, and on what topics.

It is important farmer opinions and attitudes are monitored on a regular basis to ensure Thriving Southland:

- » is delivering what is required in the work programme
- » is engaging with Catchment Groups and the wider community at an appropriate level
- » remains up to date with Catchment Group support needs and opinion
- » can prepare for anticipated future Catchment Group needs.

Objectives

The survey seeks to understand:

1. The demographic of respondents
2. Farmer pride
3. Uptake and use of Farm Environment Plans
4. Areas being focused on for on-farm change and/or improved environmental outcomes
5. Understanding of Southland's water quality
6. Good management practice (GMP) habits and attitudes
7. What ongoing support would be beneficial for farming businesses?
8. Farmer personal wellbeing
9. Awareness of Catchment Groups and their functionality
10. Awareness of Thriving Southland and its functionality
11. Connection to Iwi

Methodology

The survey was emailed directly to Thriving Southland contacts in February 2024 via Survey Monkey. There were 201 responses, a drop from last year's high of 280.

Total Survey Respondents

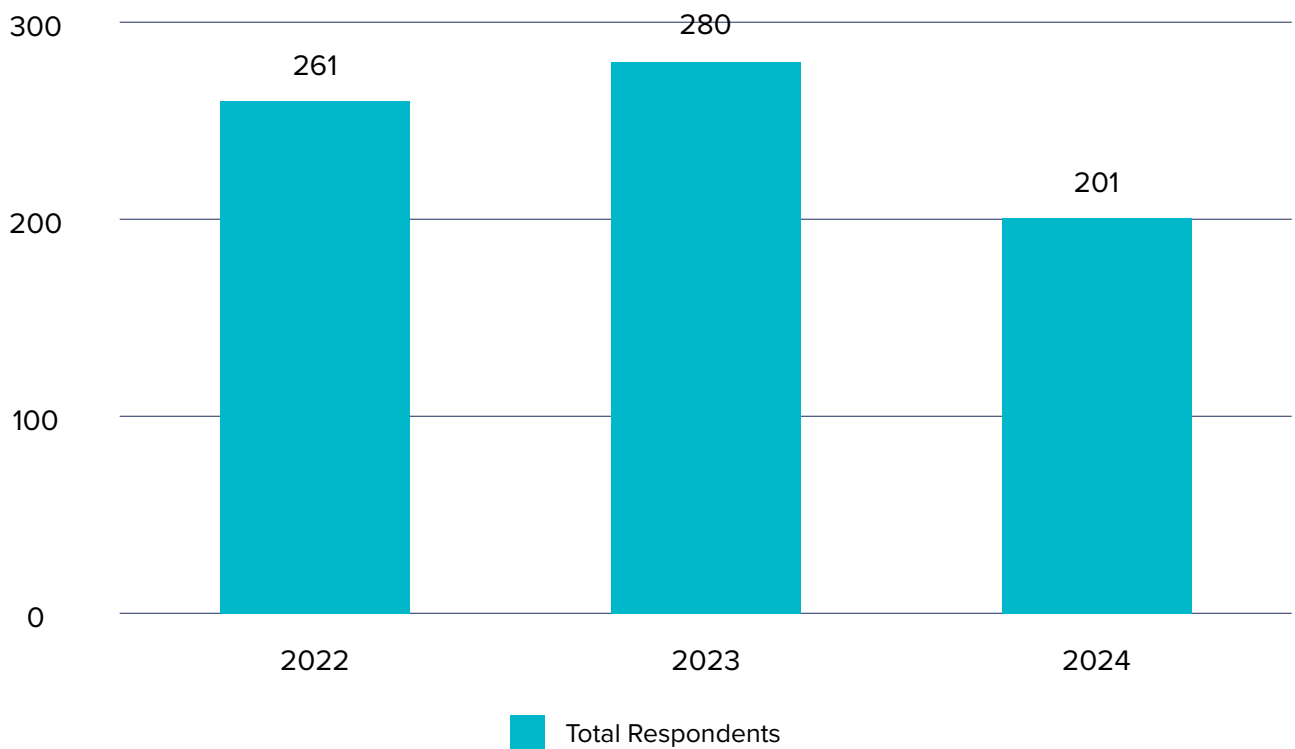


Figure 1: Total number of survey respondents



**SURVEY
RESULTS**

Farm details

This section presents the general information collected on participating farms/ farmers, including role on-farm, years in farming, gender and ethnicity, as well as Catchment Group and farm type.

Role on-farm

As in previous years, the majority of respondents from 2024 identified as farm owners, managers, staff, sharemilkers, contract milkers or contractors. Of note, in comparison to 2023, this year's survey saw more on-farm staff respond (66% compared with 58% last year) and more community members engaged (15% compared to 9% in 2023); while fewer responses were obtained from consultants / support sector staff (10% compared to 18% last year) and councillors/council staff (1%, down from 5% last year).

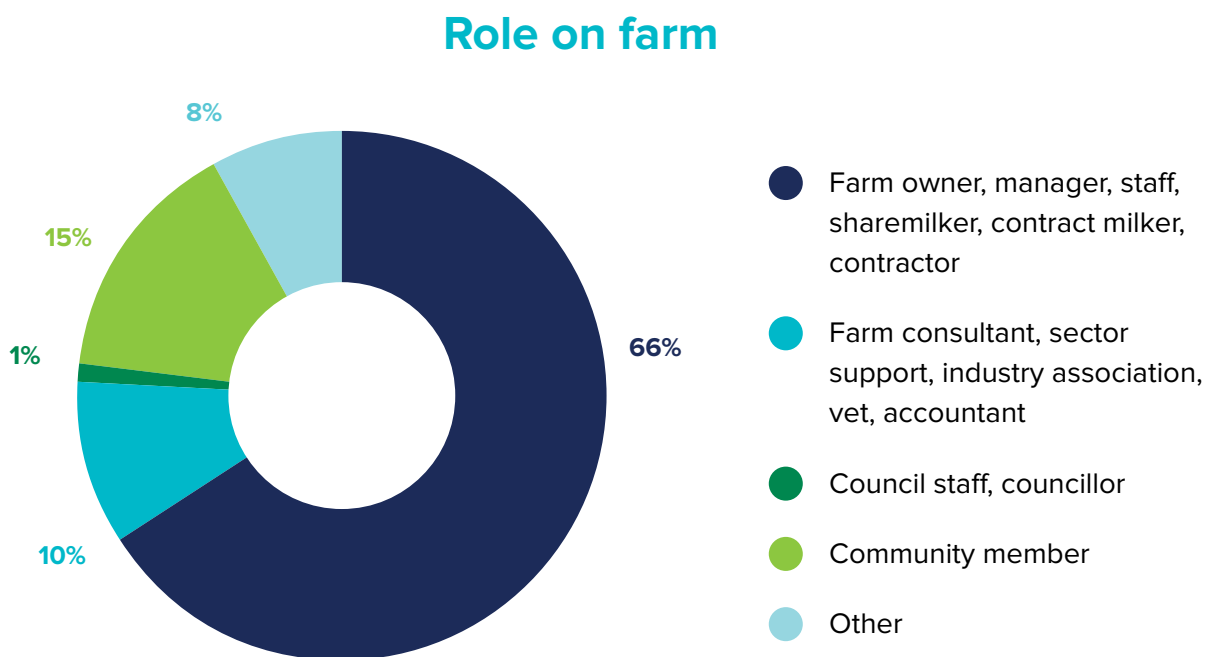


Figure 2: Role on-farm (n=200)

Years in farming

Of the respondents in 2024, 91% of respondents have farmed for 10 or more years, similar to 2023 (90%).

How many years have you been directly involved in farming?

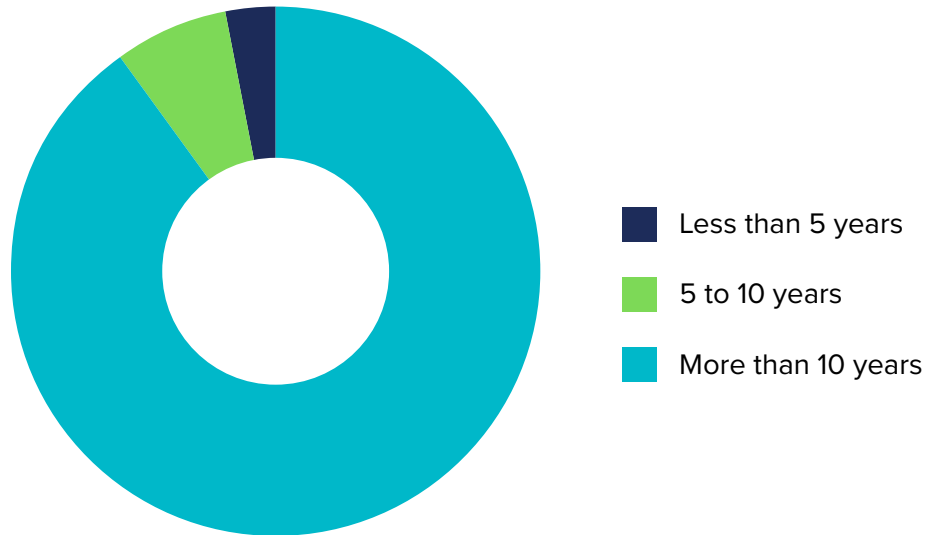


Figure 3: Years in farming (n=107)

Age

The respondents reflect a wide range of ages, similar to 2022 and 2023, with the top three age groups being 55 to 64 (25%), 45 to 54 (24%) and 35 to 44 (21%).

What is your age group?

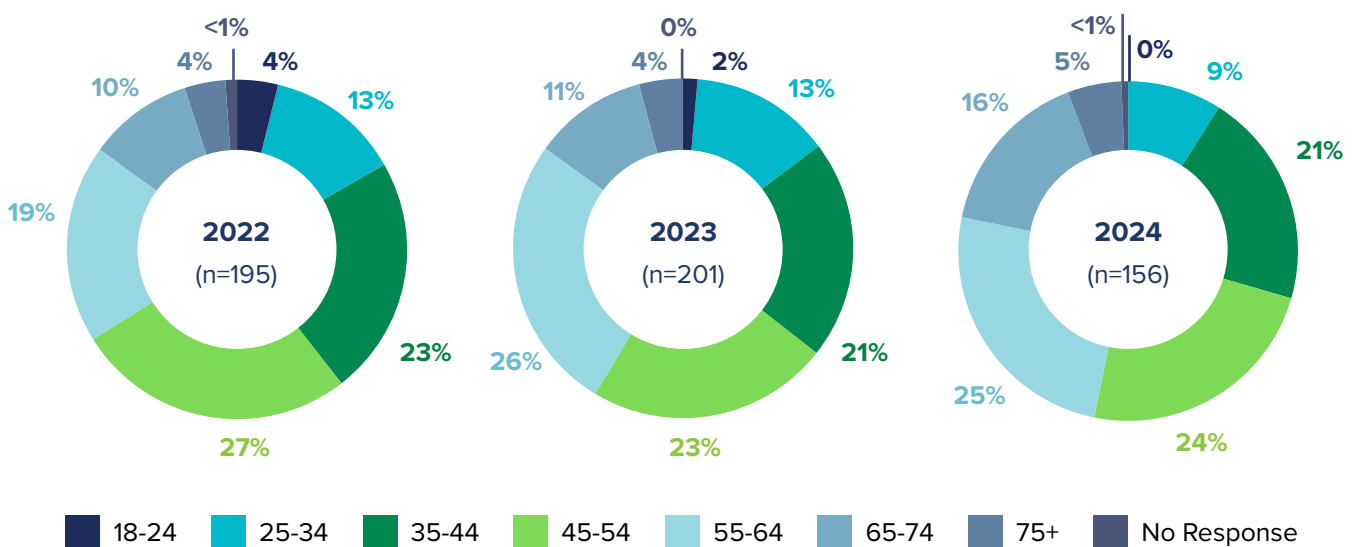


Figure 4: Age group

Gender

There were more male respondents in 2024 and 2023, unlike in 2022 when the respondents were equally divided between female and male.

What is your Gender?

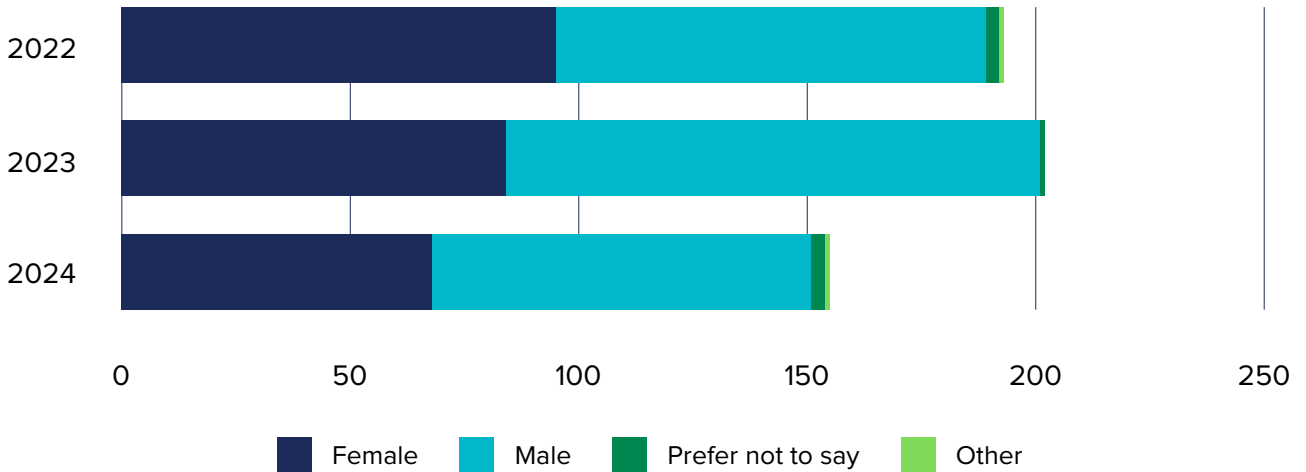


Figure 5: Gender¹

Ethnicity

Since 2022, the survey has asked respondents to identify their ethnicity. Most respondents identified themselves as European New Zealanders in 2024 (92%), similar to previous years (90% in 2023 and 87% in 2022). This year saw an increase in respondents identifying as Māori (7%, up from 3% and 4% reported in 2023 and 2022 respectively).

¹ n=193 (2022); 202 (2023); 155 (2024)

Type of farm

For the past three years, the majority of respondents were from sheep, beef or sheep and beef farms, followed closely by dairy or dairy support farms. Of note, while the survey typically has a low response rate among deer farmers, cropping and horticulture, forestry and horticulture, this year's survey received no responses from these farm types.

What farm type would you say mainly describes your farm?

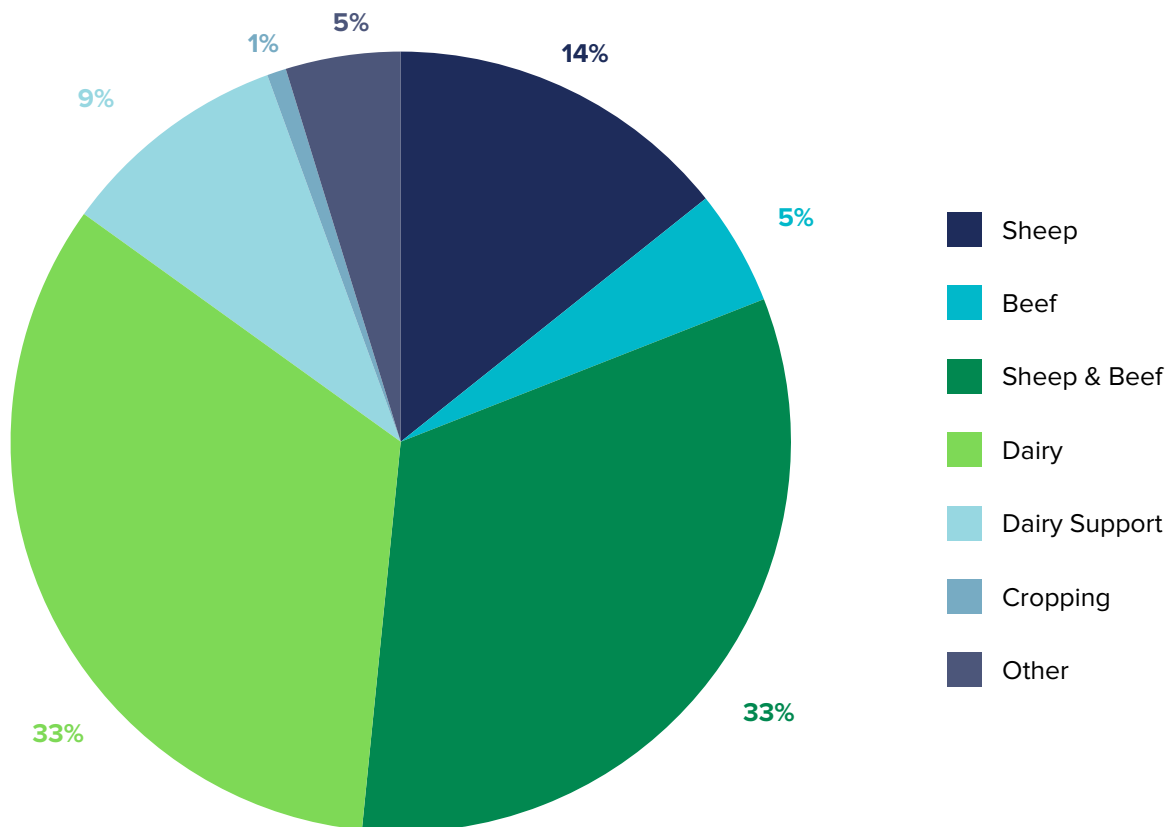


Figure 6: Farm type (n=126)

Catchment awareness

Respondents were asked what river catchment their farm linked to and their awareness of Southland's farmer-led Catchment Groups. As with last year's survey, most respondents were from the Maitava catchment (54), followed by the Aparima catchment (30) and the Oreti (23) catchment.

Which river catchment does your farm link to?

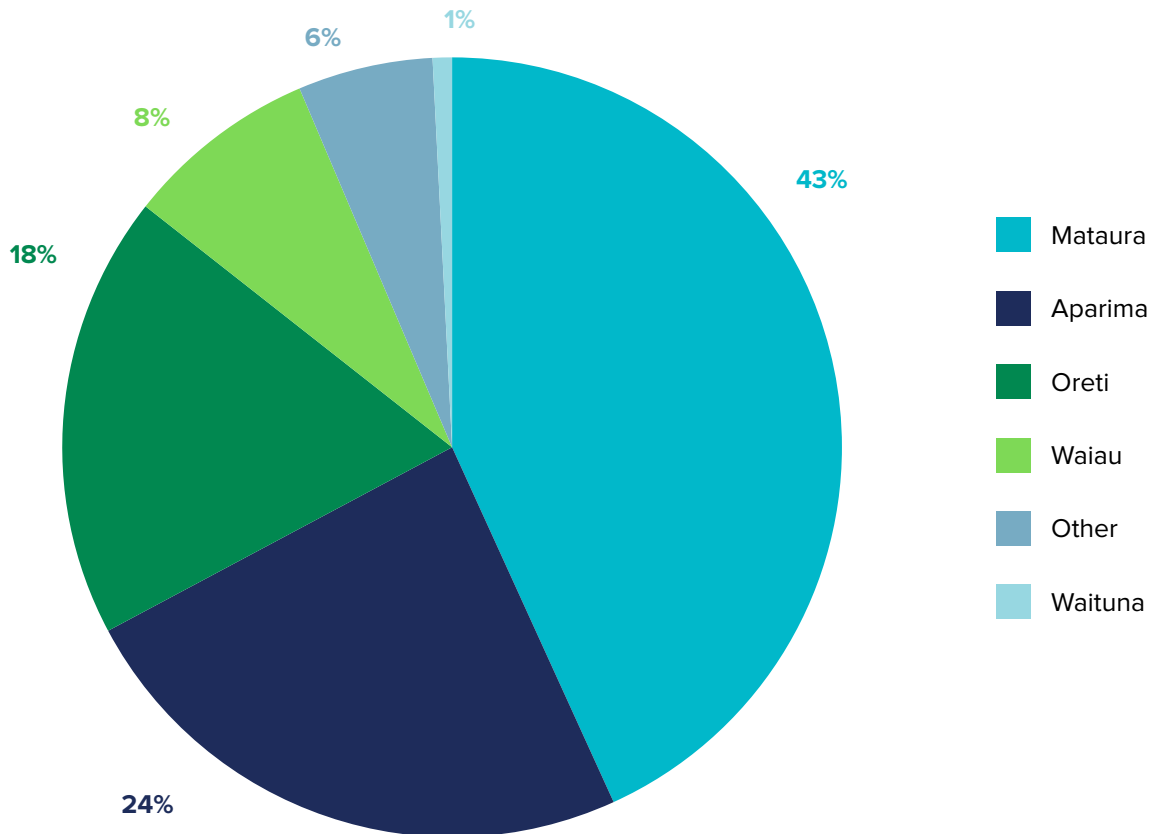


Figure 7: Catchment Group (n=125)

Overall awareness of Southland's farmer-led Catchment Groups remains high, although slightly lower than previous years with 97% of respondents aware of Southland's farmer-led Catchment Groups. This contrasts with a 99% awareness rate in 2023 and 98% in 2022. More than half of the respondents of the 2024 survey are members of a Catchment Group (53%).

Actions on-farm

This section presents information regarding actions on-farm, for example Farm Environment Plans, on-farm monitoring and Good Management Practices.

Main farm goals

In keeping with responses from 2023, this year respondents reported their main farm goals were around increasing profitability, improving wellbeing, increasing farm business resilience and productivity. Notably, reducing costs has increased as a goal (67% compared to 49% reported in 2023).

Q. Here are some areas of focus other farmers have said have been their main farm goals. Which (if any) have been yours in the last 5 years?	2023 (n=115)	2024 (n=104)	% change
Increase profitability	71%	77%	+6%
Improving wellbeing for my myself/staff/family	67%	66%	-1%
Increase farm business resilience	63%	64%	+1%
Increase productivity	58%	64%	+6%
Improve animal welfare	55%	56%	+1%
Reduce cost	49%	67%	+18%
Provide the next generation with options to farm (succession)	49%	50%	+1%
Improve water quality	48%	54%	+6%
Waste reduction	36%	41%	+5%
Improve biodiversity	33%	35%	+2%
Retain sediment	33%	38%	+5%
Reduce greenhouse gases, emissions, footprint	20%	15%	-5%
Diversification	18%	24%	+6%
Regenerative farming	14%	9%	-5%
Changing land use	10%	15%	+5%
Other	5%	3%	-2%
Organic farming	3%	4%	+1%

Table 1: Farm goals²

² Note that was a multiple-selection question, i.e., the respondent could give more than one answer. Percentages here therefore represent responses over sample, and will add to more than 100%.

Good Management Principles

As in 2023, this year's survey found the most common Good Management Practices (GMP) to be adopted in the last five years were fertiliser use application and placement, paddock selection for wintering, riparian planting and buffers along with wintering systems.

Wintering systems was higher for 2024 with an increase of 8% from 2023 and 3% from 2022 as was paddock selection for wintering (2024: 82% compared to 2023: 74%).

Q. In the last 5 years, have you adopted Good Management Practices (GMPs)? (Tick as many as you like)	2022 (n=107)	2023 (n=115)	2024 (n=107)
Paddock selection for wintering	82%	74%	82%
Fertiliser use, application and placement	79%	85%	89%
Strategic grazing	72%	64%	66%
Riparian planting and buffers	68%	73%	70%
Critical source area protection	67%	69%	66%
Wintering systems	65%	60%	68%
Nutrient budgeting	51%	46%	49%
Stocking rates or classes	45%	41%	50%
Improved effluent management and effluent system	42%	36%	37%
Infrastructure (please specify under 'other' below)	15%	13%	14%
Other	16%	20%	16%

Table 2: Good Management Principles³

³ Note that was a multiple-selection question, i.e., the respondent could give more than one answer. Percentages here therefore represent responses over sample, and will add to more than 100%.

Farm Environment Plans

Existence of FEP

Most respondents said they had an FEP. Of the 124 responses to this question, 86% said they had, or were developing, a plan. Only 14% didn't know or didn't have one.

Notably, the proportion with an FEP (or developing one) is lower than the past two years' responses (2023 and 2022: 91%) but a considerable improvement on 2021 when just 58% of respondents reported they had an FEP.

Does your farm have a Farm Environmental Plan?

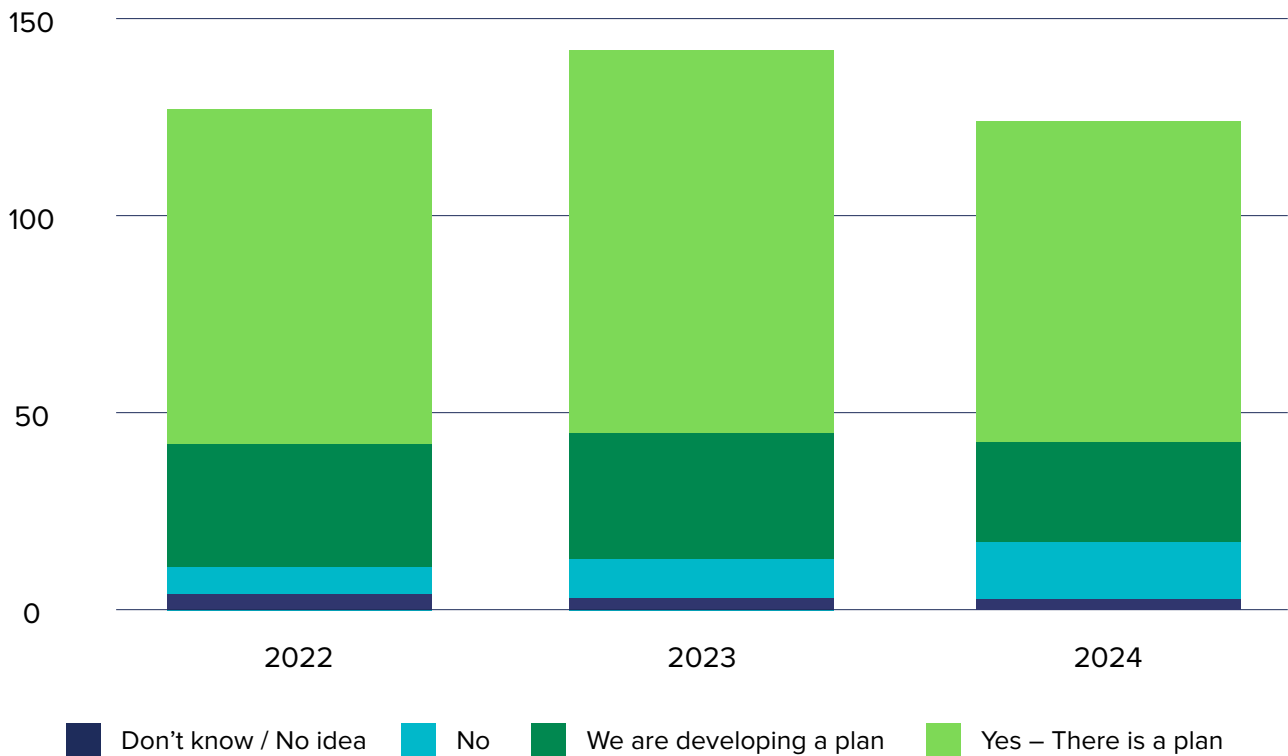


Figure 8: Farm Environment Plan

Use of Farm Environment Plans

The majority of respondents who have an FEP responded that they refer to it occasionally (66%). This is an increase compared to 2023 where 58% referred to it occasionally but comparable with 2022 (66%). The percentage of respondents who regularly refer to the plan has dropped by 13% in 2024 (9%) compared to 2023 (22%) and 2022 (18%).

If your farm has a Farm Environment Plan, do you refer to it regularly throughout the farming year?

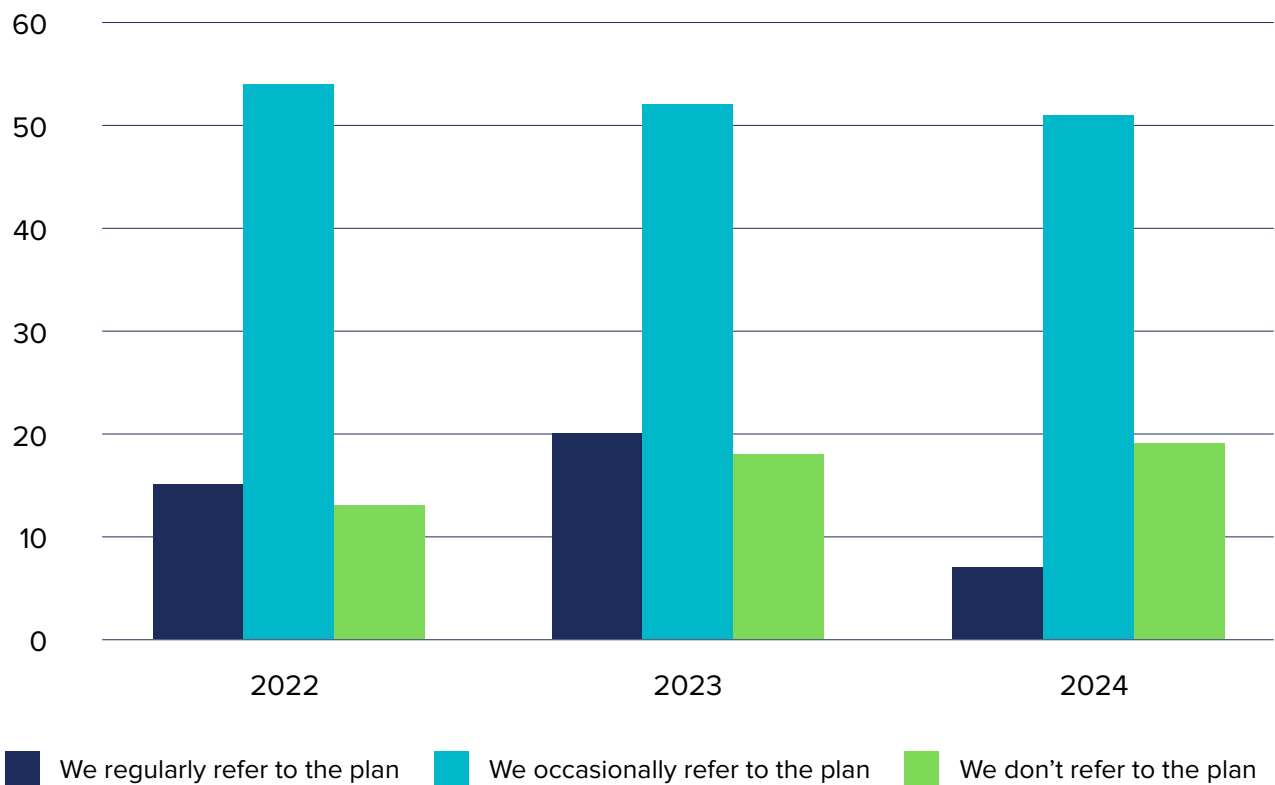


Figure 9: Farm Environment Plan usage⁴

⁴ n=82 (2022); 90 (2023); 77 (2024)



Monitoring on farm

The most common things respondents monitor on-farm are fertiliser placement, rainfall, growth rates (grass, crops) and soil. This is in keeping with responses from the past two years' surveys.

Of note, monitoring of water sediment (24%) and sediment loss/capture (21%) increased for 2024 compared to 2023 (13% and 11%).

What do you monitor on farm?

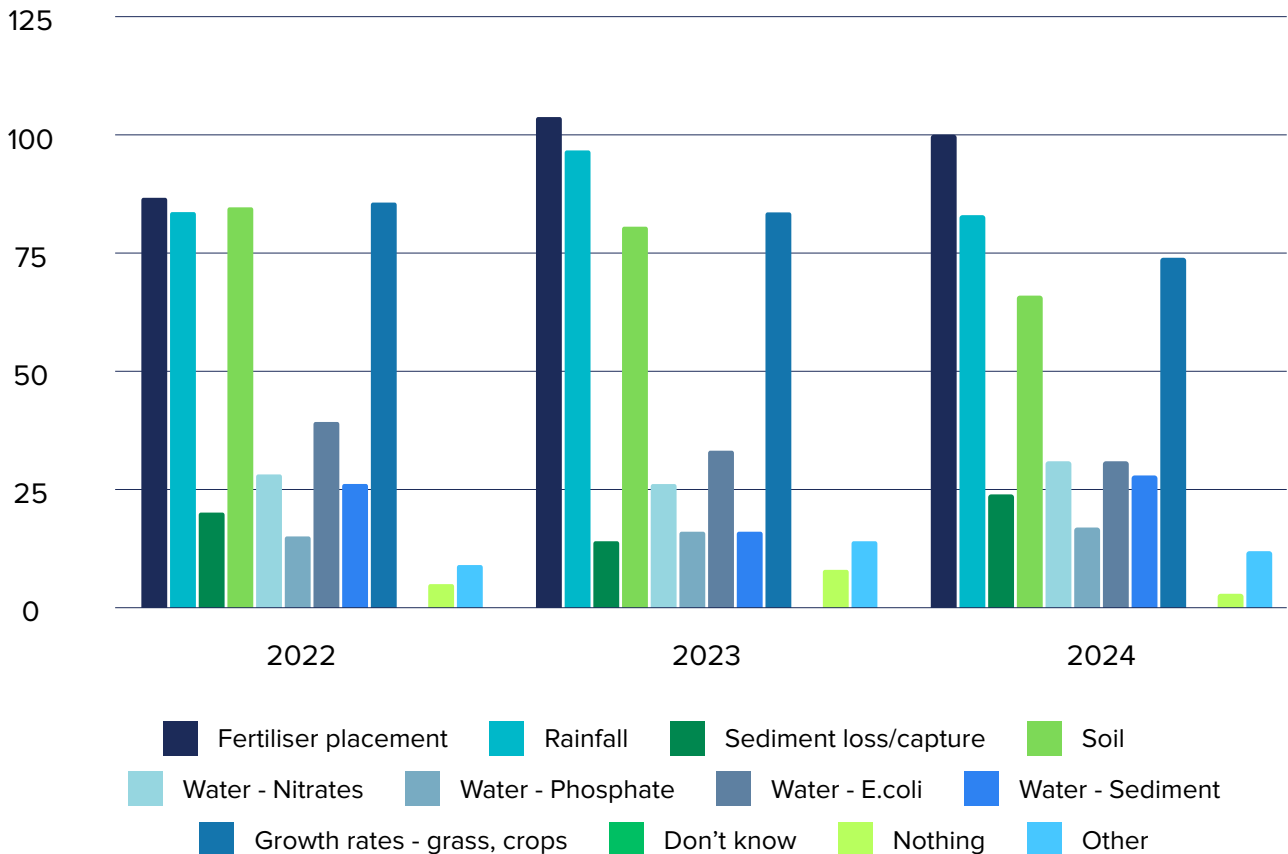


Figure 10: Monitoring on-farm

Farm water quality and Southland water quality

As in previous years the majority of respondents for 2024 rate their own farm's water quality as either excellent (56%) or good (31%), with few rating it as fair (8%) or poor (1%). The reasoning for selecting this rating was personal perception (26%) and implementation of good management practices (23%).

Of note, the rating based on water quality testing or monitoring increased in 2024 (21%) compared to 2023 (16%) and 2022 (19%).

How would you rate the water quality on your farm?

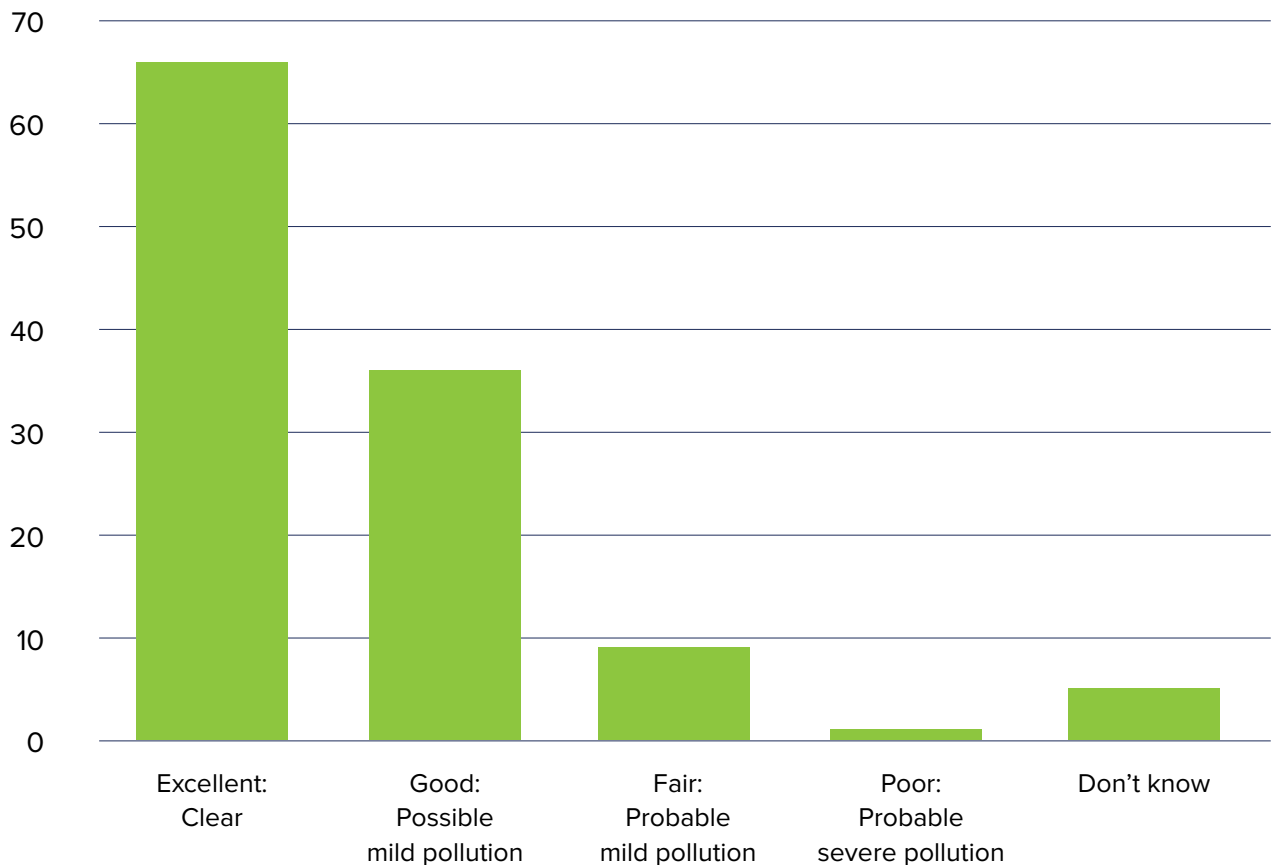


Figure 11: Water quality on-farm (n=117)

Why did you select this farm water quality rating?

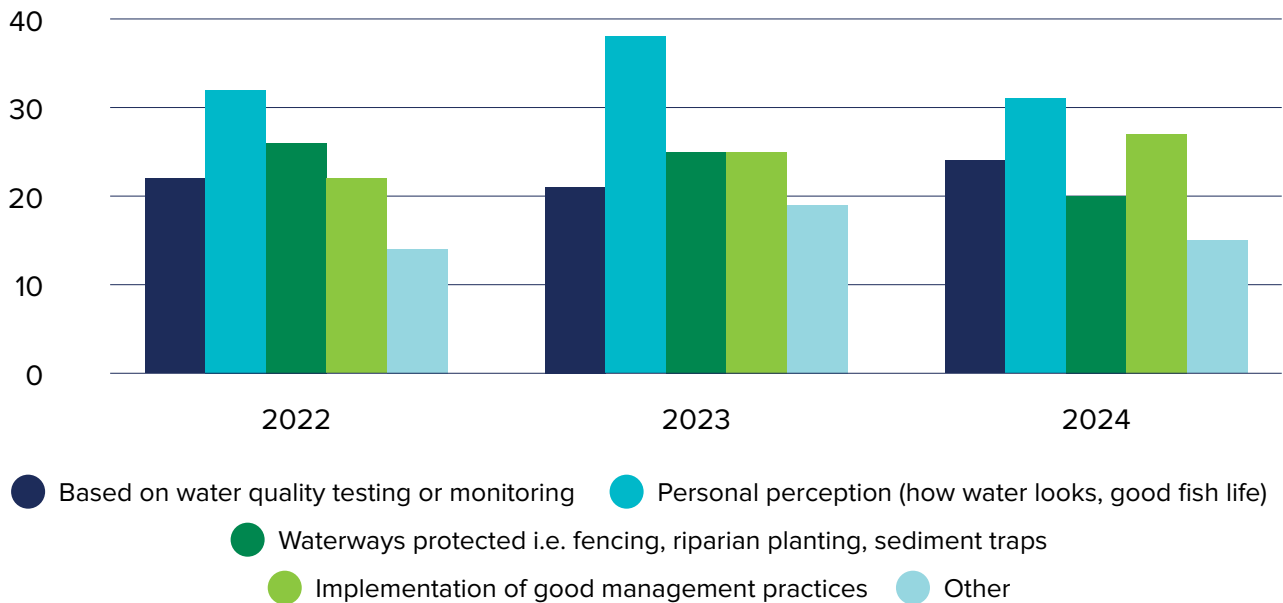


Figure 12: Reasons for selecting the water quality they did for their farm⁵

When it came to rating the water quality across Southland’s waterways, the results were markedly different with only 10% rating as excellent, 48% rating as good, 34% rating as fair and 6% rating as poor.

What’s your view of water quality in Southland waterways overall?

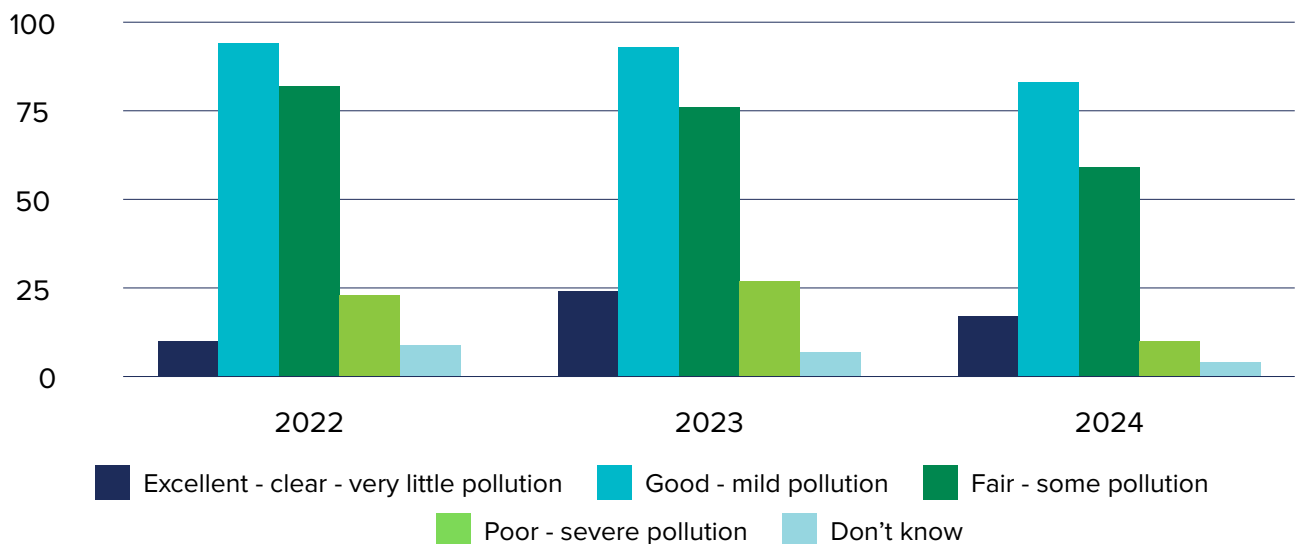


Figure 13: Southland water quality⁶

⁵ n=116 (2022); 128 (2023); 117 (2024)

⁶ n=218 (2022); 227 (2023); 173 (2024)

Wellbeing

The majority of the respondents felt optimistic about the future some of the time (36%, down from 40% in 2023) and often (32%, up from 30% in 2023).

The same percentage of respondents are connecting with people outside of work/home often this year as 2023 (43%) and more are taking part in social activities outside of work often (36%, up from 31% last year).

Making decisions easily was happening often (50%) or some of the time (34%). Respondents felt relaxed some of the time (37%) and often (36%), comparable to last year's responses (39% and 37% respectively).

Thinking about the last two weeks, how often did you feel...

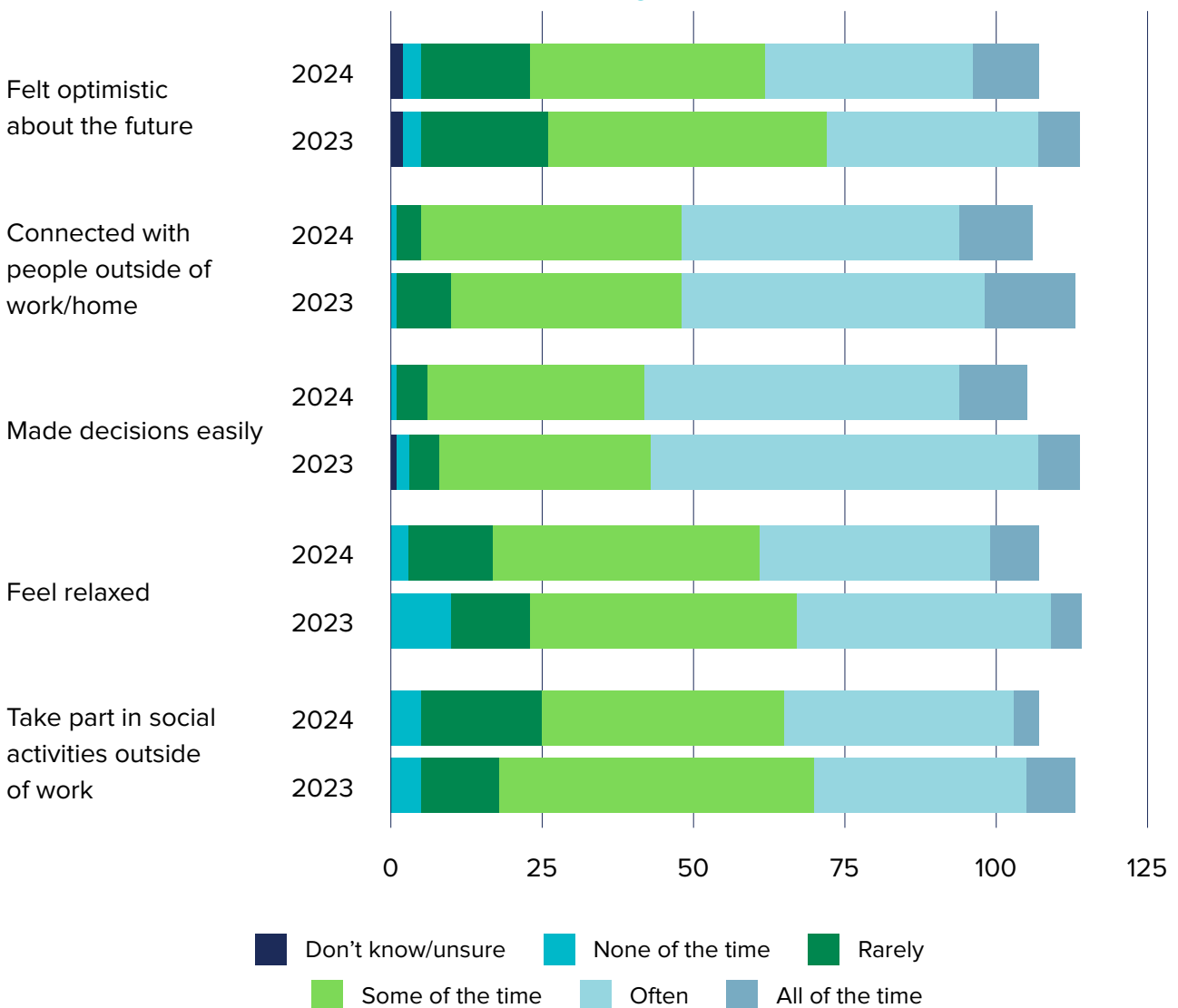


Figure 14: Comparable wellbeing questions⁷

⁷ n=114 (2023); 107 (2024)

Most important thing you learnt from Thriving Southland in the last year

In comparison to previous years where this question has fielded more than a hundred responses (n=113 in 2022, 120 in 2023), just 94 respondents in 2024 gave insights as to what they had learnt from Thriving Southland in the past year.

Of these, a third reported that Thriving Southland was pivotal in providing opportunities to join and support Catchment Groups and farmers. More than a quarter of respondents reported access to leaders, science, research and information from Thriving Southland was beneficial.

Just four respondents mentioned Thriving Southland-facilitated events while around 20% of respondents answered that they had not had any interaction, hadn't learnt anything or were unsure.

	2022 (n=113)	2023 (n=120)	2024 (n=94)
Leaders/improve farming practices	12	16	10
Funding support	1	0	2
Tactical, e.g. Native seeds, recycling, fertiliser use	6	5	4
Opportunities/ support for CGs/ supporting farmers	36	32	31
Science/research/information/experts	12	21	13
Takes time for change	2	2	2
Events	8	10	4
International perceptions	1	1	2
Nothing/not sure	21	26	21
Other	17	11	5

Table 3: The most important thing you've learnt from Thriving Southland

Respondents identified a number of positive learnings. The following is a sample of responses:

About the organisation

- » “They are committed to helping Catchment Groups and farmers achieve their goals of improving their environment.”
- » “There is a wealth of knowledge that we can tap into.”
- » “They are recognised as a leader.”
- » “They are well represented in the community and helping the public perception that farmers are doing a lot to improve their surroundings.”
- » “That without the support of an awesome team at Thriving Southland, coordination of Catchment Groups would be much more limited with fewer positive outcomes for the community.”

Knowledge and information

- » “Knowledge about environmental highlights within our catchment, knowledge on the rural sector, changes, regulations and way to improve, and planting.”
- » “The ACE project tool online is a great library of information.”
- » “Types of soil in the catchment area.”
- » “Waterway DNA.”

Events

- » “I found the event held at Connect Centre in Otautau with a summary of the projects showed me the level of professionalism and local input. I could see there were scientists investing, farmers investing, and industry investing, and that was a great combo.”
- » “The events are insightful linking customers to requirements for on-farm change.”



FEEDBACK

Feedback

This section presents information that may guide Thriving Southland in the upcoming year, such as information on where farmers seek advice on Good Management Practice and what information and support they seek.

Source of Good Management Practice (GMP) advice

Similar to 2022 and 2023, in 2024 most respondents sourced GMP advice from other farmers (67% compared to 65% in 2023), and sector support (54% compared to 45%). There was a decline in the percentage of respondents who sourced GMP advice from Catchment Group events (49% compared to 57% in 2023).

Where are you most likely to seek advice on Good Management Practices?

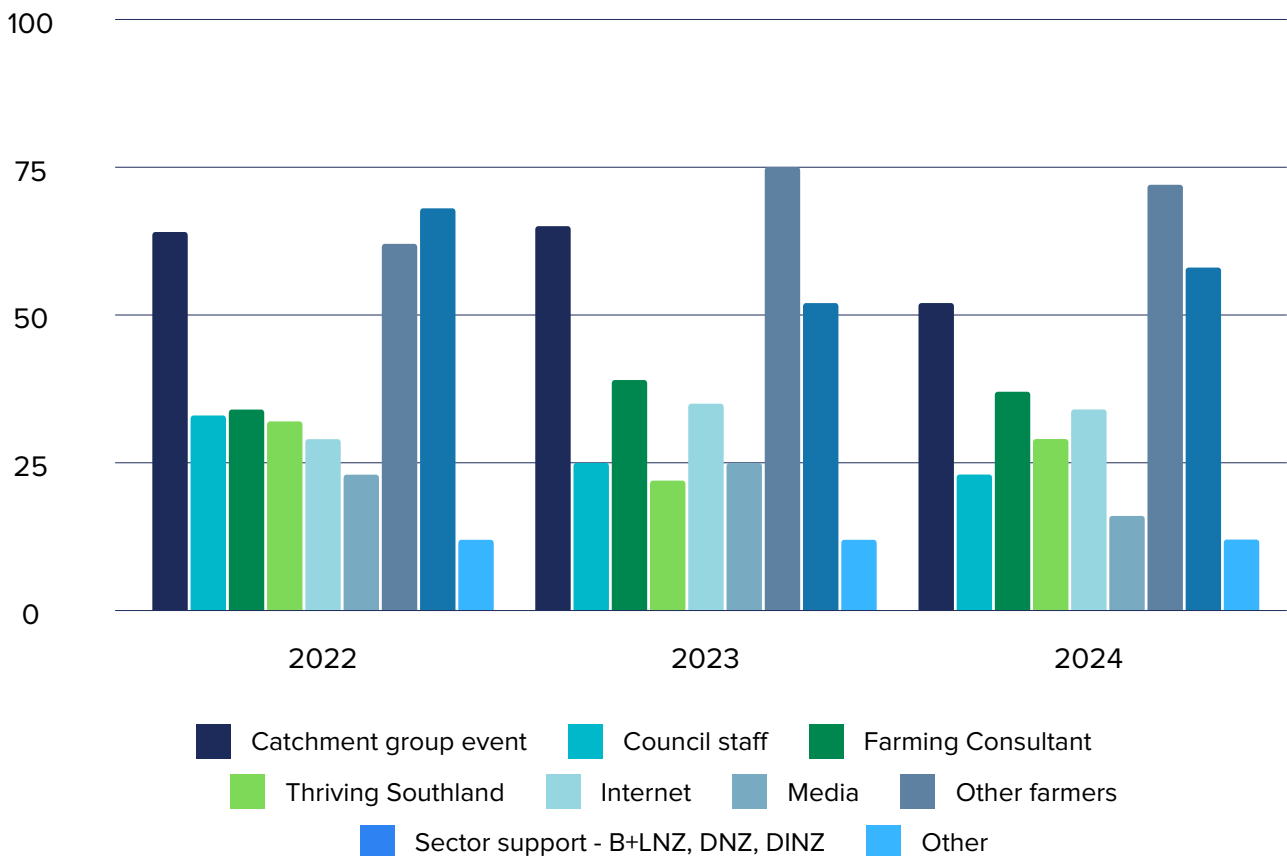


Figure 15: Source of GMP advice⁸

⁸ Note that this was a multiple-selection question in all years, i.e., the respondent could give more than one answer. Percentages here therefore represent responses over sample, and will add to more than 100%.

Supporting other farmers

The 2024 survey included a new question: “In the past 12 months how have you supported another farmer on their change journey or how has another farmer supported you?” 66 respondents answered the question with more than 60% stating they had provided support to others farmers through practical assistance, discussion groups, and events.

- » “We are part of a few discussion groups (public and private) and really enjoy the openness that there is with neighbours and other farmers in the district about various ideas for improvements, cost effectiveness and work involved in managing improvements (both short and long term).”
- » “We held a farm tour day where local farmers could come and have a look at our wetlands and native blocks, also took part as a buddy group in a recent farm study.”

Q. In the past 12 months how have you supported another farmer on their change journey or how has another farmer supported you?	2024 responses
Practical assistance / sharing farming practices and knowledge	12
Hosting, facilitating or attending events	10
Discussion (either individual conversations or as part of discussion groups)	13
Mentoring	1
Unspecified	4
Did not help or unsure	26

Table 4: Farmer Support (n=66)



Information and support needed for farming business

As in 2023, the majority of respondents of this year's survey wanted certainty around rules and regulations and their timeframes and understanding the expectations and timeframes of Local and Central Government rules and regulations.

Of note, there was an increase of 5% in farmers looking for information on succession planning compared to 2023.

Q. What information and support would benefit your farming business the most over the next 18 months? (tick as many as you like)	2022 (n=110)	2023 (n= 113)	2024 (n=104)
Certainty around rules and regulations and their timeframes	70%	67%	56%
Understanding current rules and regulations and how they apply to my farm	36%	65%	49%
Understand expectations and timeframes of Local and Central Government rules and regulations	55%	56%	56%
Interpretation of new relevant science	46%	43%	46%
Sharing farmer driven innovation	43%	47%	41%
Engagement with other farmers	42%	43%	38%
Understanding and addressing my farm's environmental changes	37%	42%	35%
Applying current rules and regulations on my farm	36%	49%	27%
Understanding consumer expectations and market trends	28%	28%	28%
Succession planning	26%	26%	31%
Attraction and retention of staff	25%	22%	12%
Information on climate change and its impact	21%	16%	11%
Engagement with processors/cooperatives	20%	22%	19%
Financial advice and planning	20%	24%	21%
Professional farm advisory services	18%	17%	17%
Engagement with local sector support	17%	18%	16%
Improving animal welfare	14%	16%	13%
Other	3%	3%	12%

Table 5: Information and support needed

Do you know your next steps towards your future goal?

In the 2024 survey we introduced a new question around goals. Over 70% of participants knew the next steps towards future goals with 24% unsure and 6% who did not know their next steps.

Q. Do you know your next steps towards your future goal?	2024
Yes	71%
No	6%
Unsure	24%

Table 6: Future goals⁹

Resources needed for catchment

The most common resources requested were speakers and experts (57%), science (52%) and rules and legislation support (52%).

Compared to 2023 there was an increase in participants wanting practical support for on-farm change (56%, up 13% from 2023) and fewer participants wanting farm systems specialists (37%, down 10% compared to 2023).

Q. What resources would support your local Catchment Group to thrive over the next 18 month?	2022 n=107	%	2023 n=111	%	2024 n=84	%
Science	60	56	54	49	44	52
Speakers and experts	55	51	60	54	48	57
Farm systems specialists	38	36	52	47	31	37
Practical support for on-farm change eg Farm Environmental Management Plans	60	56	48	43	47	56
Project funding support	54	50	50	45	33	39
Facilitation and extension support	43	40	39	35	30	36
Communication and engagement support	56	52	45	41	29	35
Rules and legislation support	48	45	50	45	44	52
Leadership upskilling	18	17	23	21	14	17
Health and wellbeing support	23	22	18	16	14	17

⁹ n=106 and will add to more than 100%.

Iwi connection

More respondents noted a link between local iwi and Catchment Groups in 2024 compared to previous years, although the level of “high degree” involvement is still relatively low (6%, up from 3% in 2023). Most respondents reported a limited degree of involvement with their local iwi (24%, up from 20% in 2023 and 13% in 2022).

When asked to what degree Catchment Group members are learning about what matters to iwi, only 16% said “not at all” (compared to 21% in 2023), while 46% (compared to 42%) said “don’t know/unsure”, and 28% (compared to 24%) saying to a “limited degree”.

Thinking about the linkages between your Catchment Group and local Iwi, to what degree are:

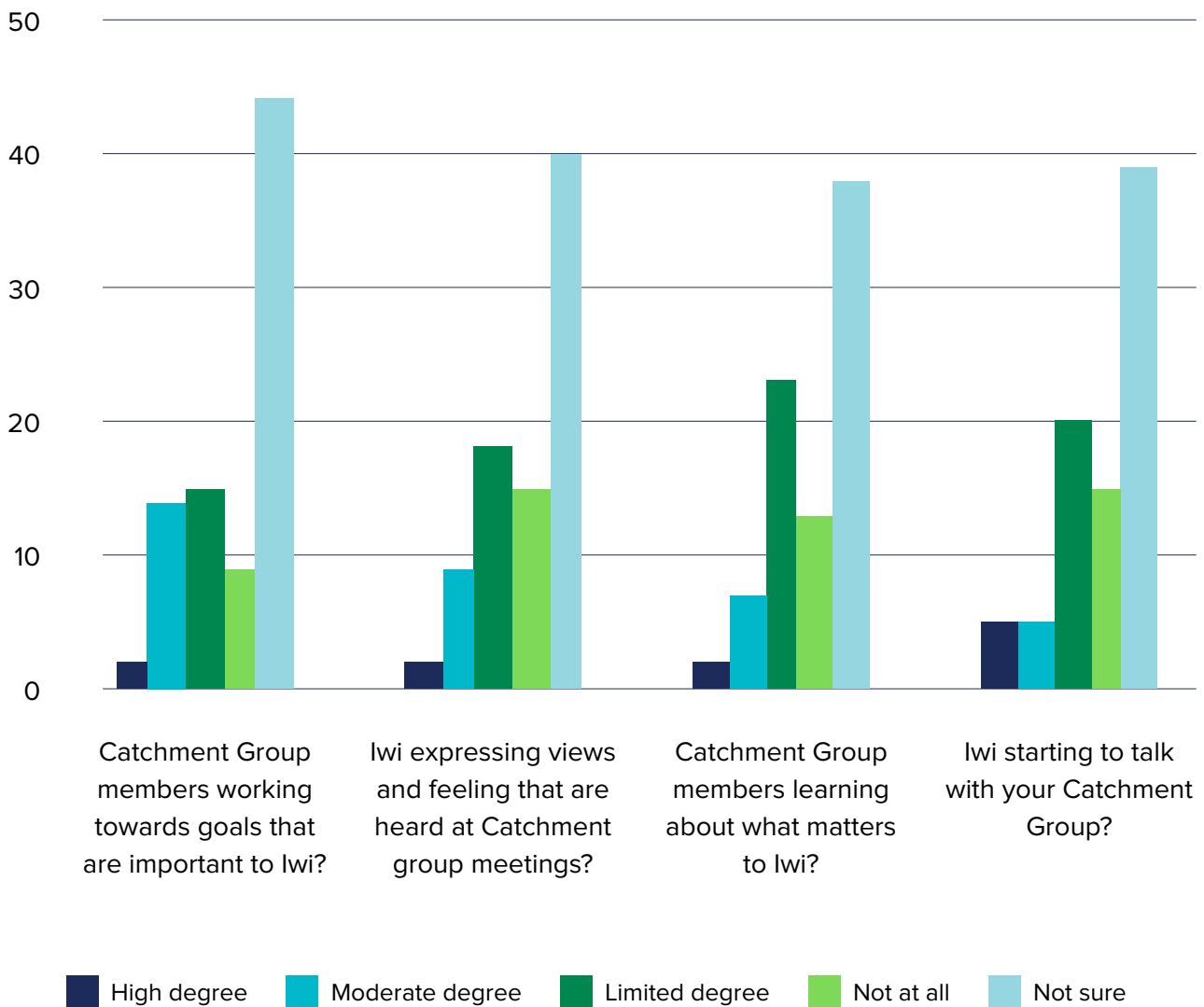


Figure 16: Iwi connection¹⁰

¹⁰ n=84

Effectiveness of Thriving Southland

Overall, while 27% of respondents believed Thriving Southland was effective in helping the Catchment Group achieve its goals and was working well to provide requested support to the Catchment Group to a high degree (33%), the level was significantly lower than reported in 2023 (41% and 40% respectively).

There was a significant increase in the level of respondents stating they didn't know or were unsure of Thriving Southland's effectiveness in helping the Catchment Group achieve its goals (38%, up 10% on 2023) or its level of support (40%, up 11%).

To what degree is Thriving Southland:

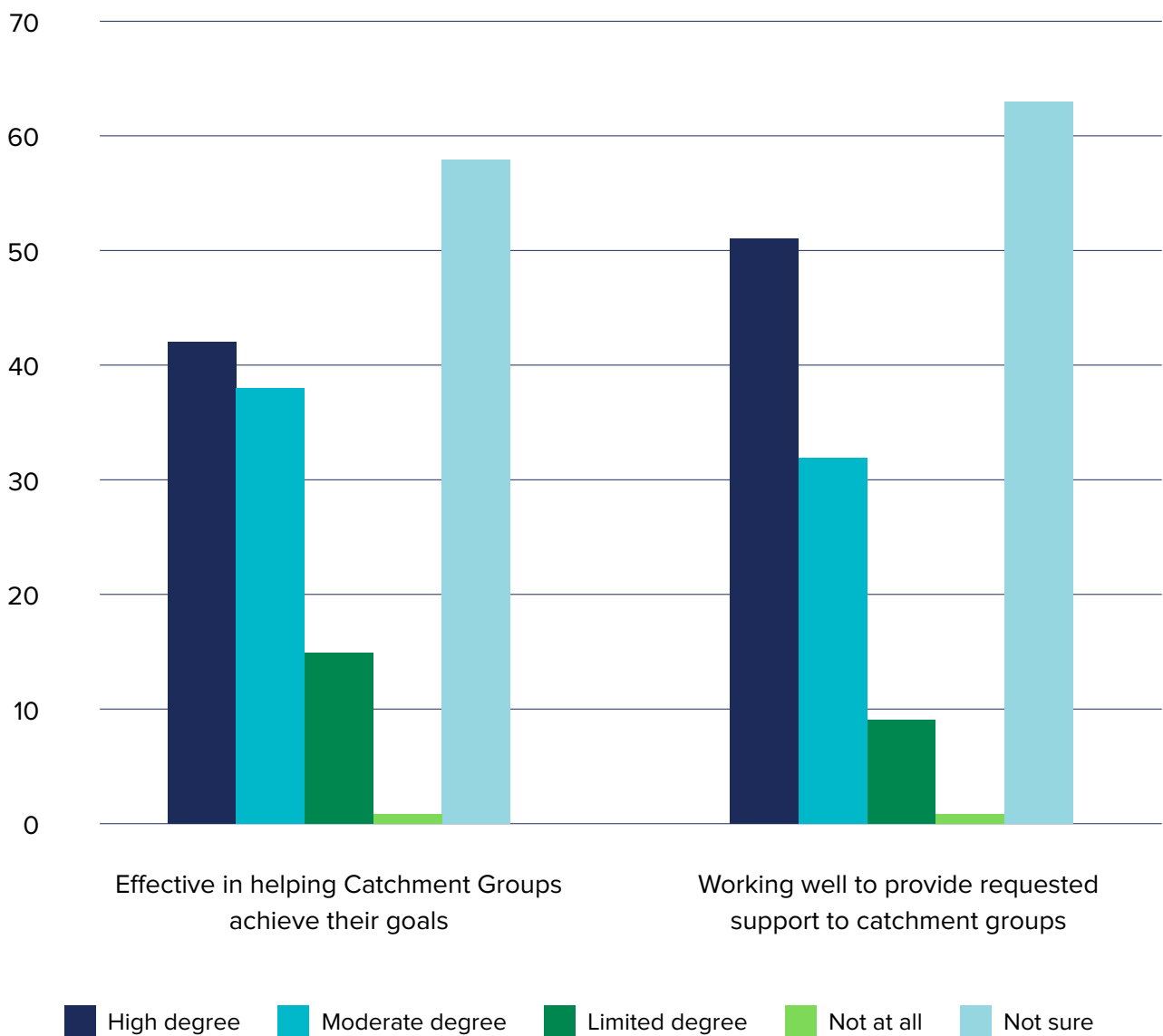


Figure 17: Thriving Southland effectiveness (n=156)

Collaboration of sector groups / industry associations

Just under a third of respondents felt sector groups/industry associations collaborated at a moderate or high level with their Catchment Group in 2024 (32% collectively), which was comparable to 2023 but lower than 2022 (39% collectively).

As in previous years, a significant number of respondents were unsure of the level of collaboration (2024: 49%; 2023: 41%; 2022: 42%), with sector groups / industry association.

To what degree do sector groups/industry associations collaborate well with the Catchment Groups?

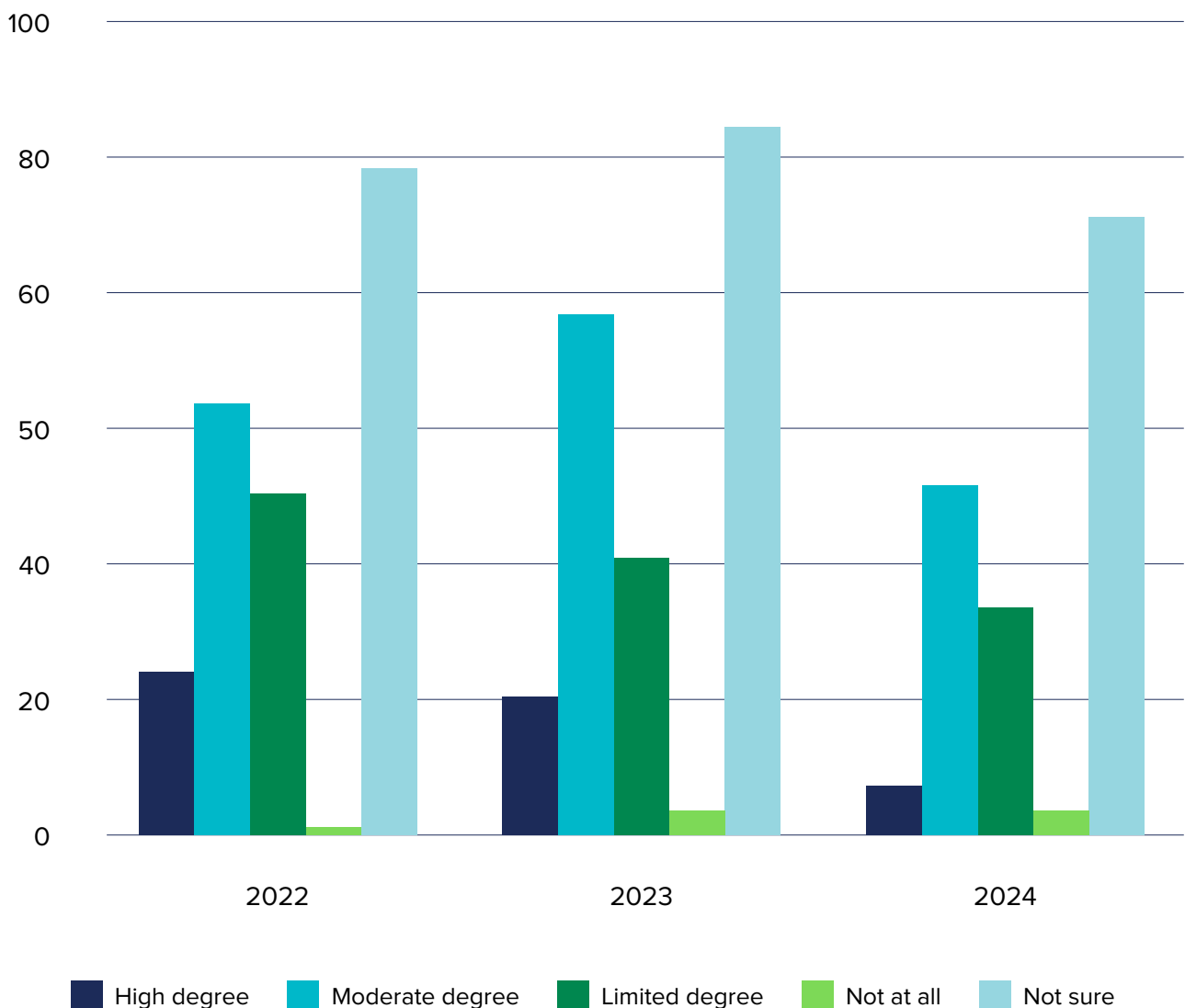


Figure 18: Sector group/industry association collaboration (n=156)

Catchment Group evaluation

Catchment Group members continue to work well together with respondents predominantly reporting a high degree of confidence in Catchment Groups making newcomers feel welcome, focused on solutions and understanding issues, and creating an environment where views can be expressed and heard openly.

To what degree can people in the Catchment Group work well together to:

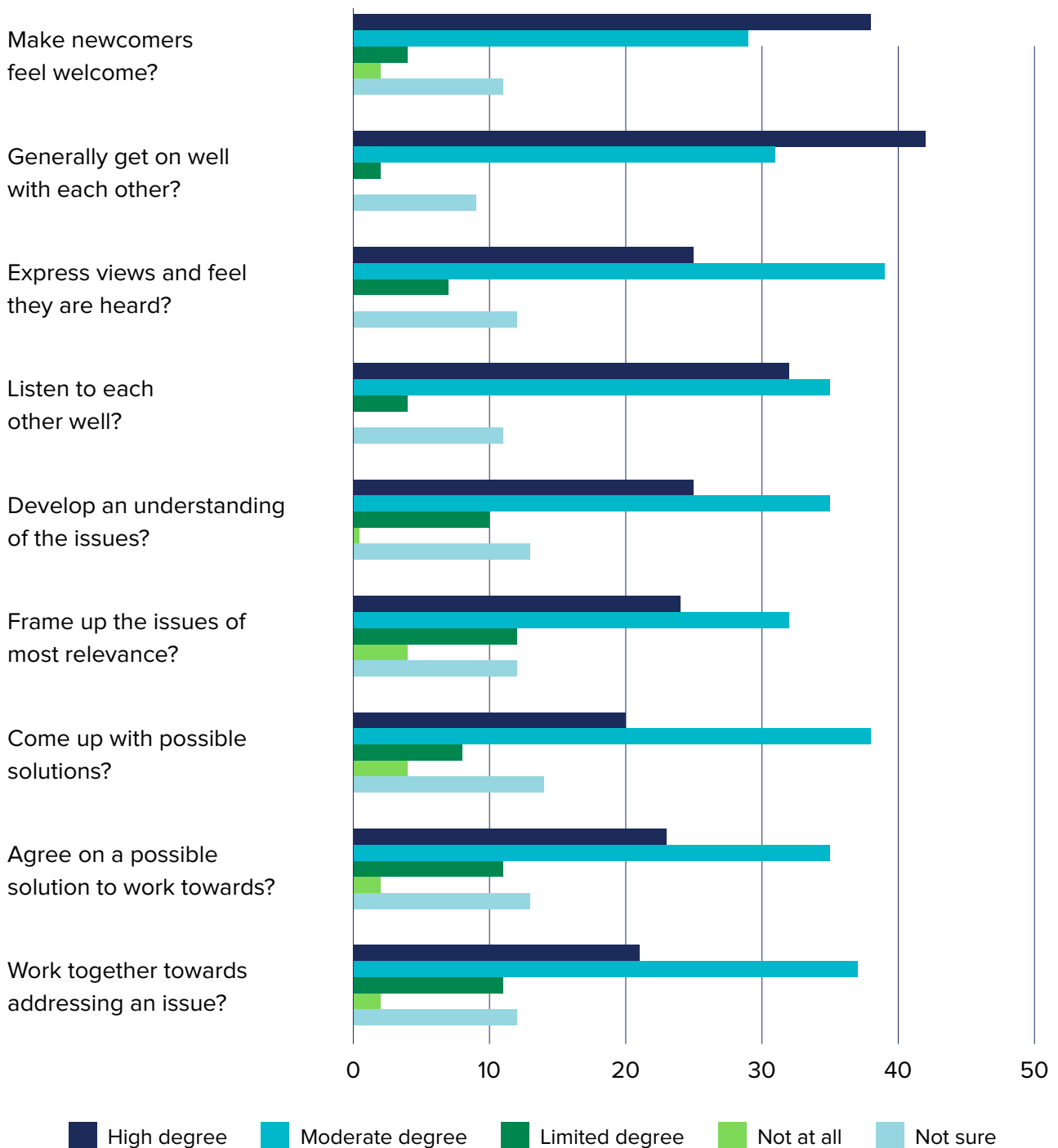


Figure 19: Catchment group evaluation (2024)

Continuing the theme from previous years, respondents in 2024 rated, to a moderate or high degree, that Catchment Groups were well-led (80%, up 1% on 2023 and 2022), well-coordinated (80%, up 3% on 2023 and 2022), and well-run overall (78%, down 1% on 2023 and 2022).

To what degree is the catchment group

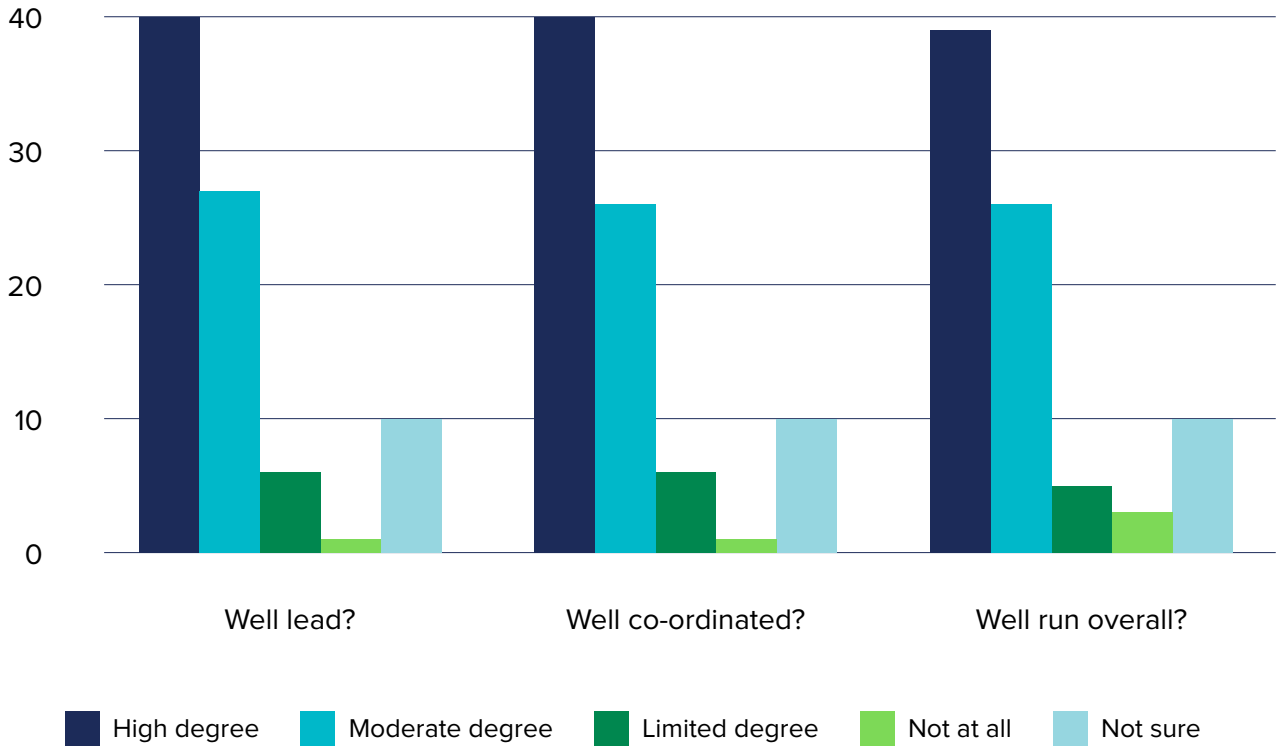


Figure 20: Catchment group evaluation (2024, n=83)



Pride – what makes you proud of farming

Sustainability efforts and producing a quality product shone through as the factors respondents were most proud of as a farmer in Southland, in keeping with responses from previous years. A number of respondents also noted pride in their historical links to the land and responsibility to improve the land for future generations.

	2022 n=98	2023 n=111	2024 n=111
Our sustainability efforts	39	35	20
Producing a quality product/stock	33	33	13
Feeding the nation/ world/ supporting the country	9	14	8
Our great community	12	4	6
Our historical connections to the land	6	7	8
Our animal welfare standards/love animals	11	11	7
Improving things for future generations	1	5	8
The lifestyle	14	19	6
The people	6	10	5
Dynamic industry/ innovation	8	8	4
Other	12	13	6

Table 7: Pride in farming in Southland¹¹

¹¹ Note that this was an open answer question i.e., the respondent could write in an answer. The data has been segmented aligning comments to these themes. Some comments included several themes so the totals will add up to more than n.

Further Comments

There were 41 further comments in the 2024 survey. These are a sample.

Complimentary of Thriving Southland:

- » “We appreciate everything Thriving Southland does for our communities.”
- » “The Thriving Southland business model seems to be well suited to the Catchment Group model, would appreciate more funding around community awareness as this wider engagement is an issue.”
- » “I see Thriving Southland as a great asset for farmers and the community.”
- » “I like the fact that you are getting people together to try and sort out identified challenges. Well done.”
- » “Farming is challenging and some can be negative, we all need to encourage those ones to look at it as a glass half full rather than half empty, or look for workarounds. I appreciate the support from Thriving Southland. It is good to see their involvement with individual catchments as well as bigger southland wide events. They are very good at raising profiles within the community.”
- » “The government required regulatory changes by the councils and the councils required farmers to get on board. I think there were some good reasons for the changes that were intended and I am thankful that Southland catchment groups had the support of Thriving Southland during this time and I hope that will continue going forward.”
- » “Keep up the great work!”
- » “I appreciate the help and support from the thriving southland team. Good job!”



Suggestions for improvement / to address

- » “Farmer engagement is the biggest issue facing us.”
- » “I would be interested in seeing the correlation between the money Thriving Southland spends and the environmental outcomes that are achieved.”
- » “The sooner our people understand that the drivers for continued sustainability are market driven the better. Too many people still thinking we should take a business as usual approach with limited succession planning on multiple levels.”
- » “I feel Thriving Southland spends all this money running ‘meetings’ and ‘catch ups’ but when everyone gets there nobody actually really knows why they are there so it just feels like a huge waste of time.”
- » “Very small group with strong leadership and motivation. Getting traction with the members of the catchment group is difficult.”
- » “Urban pollution is a major concern.”
- » “A lot of farmers in some of my social circles are pushing back against not only unworkable regulation changes, but all regulations. It will be hard to turn this attitude around. Regulation change without benefit will be hard sell.”
- » “I value results and accountability from publicly funded groups and expect to learn about past success, not just what goals, plans and busywork has been done.”
- » “Too many groups not communicating with each other, e.g. Dairy Women’s Network, Women’s Institute and Rural Women need to combine and work with Fed Farmers, YFC and Beef & Lamb NZ.”
- » “I find that there is so much information being thrown at us all the time that I just switch off and am not interested in much at all. Just carry on with what I know best, which is farming.”

An eagerness to be part of a Catchment Group:

- » “Will be good to see what we can get started in Fiordland. I know there is lots we can do.”
- » “As a local community member (lifestyle block) surrounded by dairy farms and working in as a ruminant nutrition specialist I would like to know if I can be involved with a catchment group and what I might be able to input or learn.”
- » “I admire the work being done and intend to start attending in local area but haven’t managed it yet.”

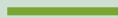
Focus areas

There are some clear areas for focus identified in the 2024 survey:

- » Reducing costs is a goal for farmers as they continue to be focus on profitability.
- » Farmers are increasingly looking at wintering systems as a Good Management Practice.
- » Whilst farmers have, or are, developing Farm Environment Plans these tend to be referred to occasionally rather than on a regular basis.
- » Water quality continues to be important with an increase in on-farm water sediment monitoring and sediment loss/capture this past year.
- » Farmers do not feel as optimistic about the future as they have in previous years but are engaging more with others and socialising outside of work as part of wellbeing.
- » Farmers continue to want certainty around rules and regulations.
- » Resources requested were speakers and experts along with science and rules and legislation support.
- » The increase in the numbers of those who did not know or were unsure of Thriving Southland's effectiveness in helping the Catchment Groups achieve goals, means there is an opportunity to increase the communication on the support to Catchment Group members.
- » There is a strong feeling of pride among Southland farmers, landowners and catchment groups, particularly their historic links to the land, ability to provide quality food and products to New Zealanders and improve the situation for future generations.
- » Engagement between Catchment Groups and lwi needs to continue to be fostered.
- » There is uncertainty about the level of support provided by industry groups and sector organisations and collaboration with Catchment Groups.
- » Thriving Southland is effective in helping Catchment Groups achieve their goals and are working well to provide requested support.



2024 Annual Survey



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