

The Power of Collaboration in the Groundspreading Industry

Article: Rose Hyslop | Images: Kylie Stenton

In the competitive world of agricultural groundspreading, one might assume that companies operating in the same region would view each other as rivals. However, in North Otago, a group of spreading businesses has embraced a different approach—collaboration over competition. This cooperative spirit was on full display during a recent discussion with key operators in the area, including James and Kylie Stenton of Mainland Spreading, Matt Campbell of Campbell Spreading, and Nick Hyslop of Hyslop Groundspread, as they reflected on their experiences and the benefits of working together while picking up around 5600 trays (they say it felt like 10,000) from the Schultz family's Weston property as part of the final phase of Allister Holmes' SFFF research project about "Reducing off-target fertiliser application and increasing crop performance by improving blended fertiliser spread uniformity".

A Culture of Cooperation

Rather than engaging in cutthroat competition, these operators have chosen to foster relationships based on mutual respect, knowledge sharing, and camaraderie. James and Kylie Stenton, who have been in the industry for 15 years, alongside Matt Campbell, a newer entrant with five months in business, and Nick Hyslop, a long-standing key figure, illustrate that cooperation is not about tenure but about mindset.

The key takeaway from their discussion was simple: "We've all got way more in common than not. So why wouldn't we just get along?" This philosophy has created an environment where spreaders can share insights, seek advice, and support each other during busy periods.



The Role of Groundspread NZ

All three operators are members of Groundspread NZ, an association that aims to improve industry standards and provide a unified voice for spreading businesses. For some, like Kylie, membership was never a question. "If you're in the industry, you just join up and do your part to make the whole industry work better." This sentiment highlights the commitment to collective progress rather than individual gain.

Membership in Groundspread NZ comes with responsibilities beyond just participation—members are expected to uphold industry best practices, contribute to ongoing discussions about improvements, and advocate for responsible spreading techniques that benefit both the environment and the agricultural sector.



Challenges and Opportunities

While collaboration has its advantages, the groundspreading industry faces significant challenges, particularly in the areas of environmental regulations and product quality. As regulations tighten, businesses must adapt to ensure compliance while maintaining efficiency. The inconsistent quality of spreading products poses an ongoing challenge, raising questions about accountability and the need for higher standards across the board.

Beyond regulatory concerns, the operators delved deeper into product quality. They noted that while the concept of a well-formulated blended fertiliser is promising, the reality on the market is mixed. James and Kylie Stenton expressed concerns that many products still vary widely in both formulation and performance, making it difficult to achieve the precision needed for optimal crop results. Matt Campbell remarked that while some newer products incorporate advanced technology and tighter quality control, others lag behind, compromising application accuracy. Nick Hyslop highlighted that the advanced data from the SFFF study has exposed these quality

gaps, emphasising that manufacturers must focus on more rigorous testing and quality assurance to bridge the gap between research-driven ideals and market realities.

The Value of Research and the Reality of Blended Fertilisers

A major discussion point was the role of research in shaping the industry's future. The current Sustainable Food & Fibre Futures (SFFF) study, led by Allister Holmes, is now in its advanced stages and is delivering deeper insights into industry practices. This study goes beyond merely reducing off-target fertiliser application—it is rigorously evaluating how improved blended fertiliser spread uniformity can boost crop performance and enhance environmental sustainability. Using state-of-the-art sensors and digital analytics, the SFFF research gathers comprehensive data on machine performance and application accuracy.

Early findings indicate that while advanced blends have the potential to maximise crop yields and minimise waste, the performance of many products currently available is inconsistent. The operators agreed that the research underscores both the promise and the shortcomings of today's blends, reaffirming the need for continued innovation and quality improvements in the market.

The Future of Spreading in New Zealand

Looking ahead, the operators agreed that fostering relationships within the industry and maintaining high standards will be crucial. "Farmers in our region have extremely high expectations, and we have to reflect that," noted Kylie Stenton. For other spreading businesses across New Zealand, the North Otago model offers a compelling case for collaboration. By working together, companies can enhance their knowledge, improve industry standards, and navigate challenges more effectively. As Matt Campbell summed it up, "Just be friendly. It makes everything easier."

Final Thoughts

In an industry where precision and reliability are paramount, the cooperative approach taken by these North Otago spreaders demonstrates that teamwork isn't just good for business—it's essential for progress. With the current SFFF study shedding new light on both the potential of blended fertilisers and the pressing need to improve product quality, there is renewed optimism that ongoing research and collaborative innovation will drive the groundspreading industry toward a future where both product excellence and sustainable practices are the norm.