

LETTERS "NZ Farmers Weekly"  
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# Playing political football over farm sales to foreigners

THE Head to Head debate on selling farmland to foreigners (*Farmers Weekly*, February 10) was interesting in that National's Maurice Williamson woefully played political football, content to let his case rest on slugging Labour for hypocrisy over the process, which the Labour Party imposed, and for its 180-degree turn since being in opposition.

So from Williamson's argument it's seemingly and simply a Labour versus National issue for voters.

As a swinging voter who over the decades has voted National, Labour, even way back Social Credit and Values, I see alternatives as shown by the arguments of New Zealand First's Richard Prosser.

Obviously he and NZ First do care.

I regularly see through Campaign Against Foreign Control of Aotearoa's excellent bulletin the list of sales of land to foreigners.

The list contradicts Williamson's weak defence that the Overseas Investment Office does not rubber-stamp applications. Noticeably he fails to quote the percentage of applications declined.

Williamson failed to even mention the important fact that young NZ farmers wishing to get on the land are thwarted by the high prices rich foreigners can and do pay.

Prosser, on the other hand, is commendably concerned the reality of competition from foreign buyers with bottomless cheque books will make it impossible for most New Zealanders to match the prices foreigners can pay.

And that introduces another aspect, which Williamson is silent on. Since 1984 Labour-led and National-led governments have failed to give genuine and proper support to farming.

That is astonishing, given farming is a major contributor to exports and the economy.

To the contrary, they dismantled much ongoing efficiency and

failed to address shortcomings.

Agriculture ministers like Labour's Jim Sutton and National's John Luxton, to name just two free market-obsessed ideologues, were instrumental in dismantling efficient, single-desk producer boards.

They shamefully stood idle and watched inefficient wool marketing dilute farmer returns. It was a case of disabling rather than enabling.

The end result is under a free-market regime of cut-throat competition among competing companies prices were driven down, with returns to meat and wool farmers eroded to a low level.

Consequently young adults of a farming couple see far more lucrative career options in urban NZ than by taking over the family farm.

And with returns to meat and wool farmers poor, who can blame farmers, particularly those heading to retirement, for selling at the high prices foreigners are prepared to pay?

Ironically, this year is the United Nations Year of the Family Farm, which NZ will celebrate. Also, it is election year.

**Tony Orman**  
Marlborough

## Part of the experience

WHILE the polemics between Richard Prosser and Maurice Williamson on foreign ownership of farmland stimulate a healthy debate, I suspect the reality lies somewhere in between these two extremes.

I stayed recently at Flock Hill Station, in Arthur's Pass, which combines tourism with the working high-country station.

Its owners are non-resident Americans who meet neither Prosser's nor Williamson's profiles by virtue of one defining action – appointing a Kiwi manager, JK, who promoted equal access and enjoyment of the station facilities for Kiwis and tourists alike.

In his view, meeting and mingling with Kiwi hunters, anglers and farmers is an integral part of a real Kiwi holiday experience for tourists.

**David Haynes**

New Zealand Federation of Freshwater Anglers president  
Nelson

## Letters to the Editor

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