

1899

Farmer's Union established

## Story: Farmer and grower organisations

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(Smith & Kelly, 2009a)

### Formation of the Farmers' Union

At the end of the 1800s farmers began to form political groups, culminating in the setting up of the New Zealand Farmers' Union. The first branch was constituted at Kaitiāia on 1 September 1899, and the first national conference was in July 1902.

In 1905 the union promoted political candidates who would benefit farmers' goals. It helped oust the Liberals in 1912 in favour of the Reform Party, headed by farmer William Massey. The Farmers' Union eventually took over the political role of A & P associations, which subsequently became limited to organising annual shows.



Farmers' Union meeting notice



'Massey's cossacks'



Satirising Pederson



Rural protest

#### 'Cossack' farmers

The 1913 Wellington waterfront strike took place against a background of industrial unrest. Striking watersiders, after being locked out by their employers, took over the wharves. The Farmers' Union organised groups of farmers, most of them on horseback, to converge on the ports. Prime Minister William Massey enrolled them as special constables to forcibly remove the strikers. This led to rioting, which was violently stopped by the police and 'Massey's cossacks'.

### Political role

The Farmers' Union motto was 'principles – not party', but inevitably it supported parties that shared its ideology. After backing Massey's Reform Party, the union was rewarded with the 1912 and 1913 Land acts, which gave farmers on Crown leasehold land the option of purchasing it freehold. This had been a major issue for the union in the run-up to the 1912 election. The union also backed Massey during the 1913 Wellington waterfront strike, organising people to evict strikers who had occupied the wharves. By this time the Farmers' Union was a national organisation. It published the *Farmers' Union Advocate* from 1906 to 1924, and later *Point Blank*.

### Formation of Federated Farmers

In spite of the political clout wielded by the Farmers' Union, rural political representation was not unified. The New Zealand Sheepowners' Federation and other smaller producer groups tended to compromise farmer solidarity. In 1944 the Farmers' Union and the Sheepowners' Federation registered the name Federated Farmers of New Zealand. Their first provincial meeting was in 1945, and the next year they became an incorporated society.

### Federation structure

Federated Farmers represents farmers from 24 regions. It is made up of seven industry groups: meat and fibre, dairy, goats, high country, rural butchers, grain and seed, and beekeepers. The Wellington office is responsible for policy, advocacy, lobbying and advisory services, and a president acts as the federation's public face and spokesperson.

#### 'Fart tax'

In the early 2000s Federated Farmers fought a high-profile public campaign against a government proposal to impose a tax on farm animals to fund research into methane emissions from livestock. The

federation called it a 'fart tax', and mounted such a strong campaign that the government scrapped the idea.

## Political role

Federated Farmers lobbies the government on a variety of issues, including legislation affecting land, stock, taxation, local body legislation, employment regulations and environmental concerns.

In the early 2000s Federated Farmers opposed the government plan to microchip all dogs as part of a campaign to control dog attacks. They argued that microchipping farm dogs was costly, and the dogs were not in a position to attack the public. When the regulation came into effect on 1 July 2006, farm dogs were exempt.

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