

Media Release

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Survey dispels some lifestyle myths

Lifestylers on small holdings are not necessarily inexperienced at rural living nor prone to moving house more often than any other residents in our District.

More often than not they come from a rural background and have no intention of moving on in a hurry.

These are some of the findings of a survey of small block holders conducted in May and June of this year designed to discover 'what prompted these people to live on a relatively small area of land in the District's rural zone'.

600 owners of small holdings ranging in size from 2 ha to just under 8 ha were selected at random for the survey. 437 questionnaires (73%) were returned.

Policy and Strategy Manager Simon Markham says this is a great response rate and the survey's results go some way to dispelling the many myths around "lifestyle block" owners.

"The survey results show a high percentage of the respondents had previous experience of rural living before settling on their small holdings."

"A third had moved to their present property from a farm or another small holding which suggests they at least had a pretty good idea of what they were getting into."

But in 80 percent of all households at least one adult member surveyed has also spent five or more years of their childhood living on either a farm, in a rural village or township, or on an urban property with a rural outlook.

Simon Markham says that suggests many of those who move into cities for work or other opportunities eventually find their way back to an environment they valued as kids and know at least something about.

Environment - including climate, space, clean air, views - and lifestyle - including having animals, space for a garden and for children to do things are listed as the main reasons people choose to live on small holdings.

Simon Markham believes the findings go some way to countering the myth that lifestylers are a bunch of fly-by nighters who don't know what they are about and when the going gets too hard simply hightail it back to the city.

"On the contrary the survey results show they are committed to their land and to their new communities.

"They shop locally and engage in the full variety of recreational, cultural and community activities in the District."

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Nor he says are they churning over their properties any faster on average than those in any other property owning group.

Relatively few, less than a third, have indicated they might make a change within the next five years, and a large proportion of those are over 60 and naturally uncertain about their future on a small block.

The majority (86.6%) also stated they were happy with the size of their property. Half were concerned about further subdivision in the rural area – they either didn't want it, or wanted it restricted to just 4ha lots.

Simon Markham says another thing the survey highlights is the huge diversity of economic activities and on-going opportunities for land use by these small block holders.

37.1% are already engaged in home-based enterprises such as consultancies and backyard businesses – with arts and crafts to worm farming listed.

One in six is also actively engaged in horticulture, with many also running some sheep, cows, horses and poultry.

“While there is clearly a big difference between having a few sheep to keep the grass down and raising sheep for real return, what this variety shows is the land is not, as many feared, being completely lost to productive use.

We are not simply seeing 10 acres being landscaped. The land remains capable of productive use, whether it is currently being actively farmed or not.”

By far the majority of those surveyed are very happy with their property enjoying both the lifestyle and the environment.

Travel is their main dislike and they would like to see an improvement in the quality of rural roads.

But by far the biggest issue is the poor level of telecommunications.

86% are connected to the Internet – most via dial up.

Most are unhappy with the speed of their connection. Where it is acceptable they complain it is unreliable and they frequently experience outages.

A number would switch to broadband if the service were available in their area.

The survey asked about responses to rising fuel prices and was conducted at a time when it was costing \$1.70 a litre to fill your tank.

Only a small percentage of respondents (15%) indicated fuel prices would be a reason to consider either changing jobs or moving from their small holding but a majority report already having changes their travel behaviour, making on average fewer trips.



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The survey is one of the few of its type in the country giving detailed current information about the small holding phenomenon.

It is part of a programme of ongoing monitoring of change in the District conducted by the Waimakariri District Council to ensure the Council and interested observers are well informed

It was prompted mainly by rapid growth in the number of small holdings being created in the District since the release in December 2003, of the decision on a Variation to the Proposed Waimakariri District Plan making widespread provision for 4 hectare holdings.

The change confirmed 4ha as the minimum lot size for subdivisions as a controlled activity and dwelling house development as a permitted activity. While there was a big surge in applications in 2004-05 the decline since then suggests the interest may have peaked.

Overall survey results will be shared with agencies such as Environment Canterbury Transit NZ and Telecommunications companies.

A Dunedin Masters student is also incorporating detailed results on travel by small holding households into his thesis on transport planning.

“These are preliminary findings only. There is still more work to be done analysing the data further for comparison with results from the recently released survey of the District’s new residents and the survey of rural residential dwellers on a half to two hectare lots currently being completed.

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