

750 words

NZ farming gets greener as Agpac recycling scheme takes big strides forward

Product stewardship was the theme of the day when Minister for the Environment Dr Nick Smith helped unveil the latest advances that crop packaging specialist Agpac has made in its recycling programme.

Nick Smith spoke at the November 10th launch of a purpose-built baler Agpac has commissioned to process used agricultural plastic in the South Island.

At the event Agpac also announced it has entered into an exclusive agreement with Canterbury company Mastagard to recycle the used bale wrap and pit covers it collects throughout New Zealand. Mastagard has installed a \$5 million plant to clean and reprocess agricultural plastic.

“These initiatives are part of the future for New Zealand’s most important industry,” Nick Smith said. “On July 1st, the Waste Minimisation Act came into effect. A key part of the Act is product stewardship.

“Companies are expected to take responsibility for the full life of their products, not just manufacture and sales. This includes removing waste at the end of the product’s life-cycle. Agpac is taking a lead in developing this broader view.”

“New Zealand’s agricultural exports are coming under increasing scrutiny regarding their sustainability and environmental impact. Currently 10 to 20 percent of agricultural plastics are being recycled and we need to increase that to 100 percent.”

The launch of the new baler took place at the property of Tai Tapu contractors Robert and Grant McCarthy, where it will be based. It is the second machine Agpac has built to compact and bale the waste plastic it collects from farms throughout the country.

The first is at the Matamata property of agricultural contractors Helen and Roger Slattery. The Slatterys provide the collection point for all plastic from North Island farms. The McCarthys will bale all the plastic collected from South Island farms. Agpac recycling manager Chris Hartshorne said the new baler has several improvements over the earlier model.

“This baler was engineered by David James, who works closely with Robert and Grant McCarthy. While it will operate at their premises most of the time, it has been designed to fit on the back of a truck so it can be easily transported. They could, for example, ship it to Southland to compact plastic collected there.”

Agpac has established a network of contractors who will collect plastic from South Island farms, and several of them were on hand for the launch of the new baler.”

Chris Hartshorne said product stewardship is more than just handing over a cheque and expecting someone else to discharge your responsibility.

“Product stewardship is a partnership that includes us the distributor, our customers, the recycling industry and the reprocessors who create new products from the recycled material.

“Reprocessors require a consistent waste stream to operate profitably, and we hope farmers will embrace the opportunity we offer so that we can provide the recycling industry material they can use. The alternative is an environmental tax and this would be a setback for product stewardship schemes.

“We are seeing higher volumes of cleaner plastic coming through our collection network. Farmers are densely packing their collection liners, and this means they can cut collection costs to between \$.27 and \$.50 per wrap.”

Also present at the launch of the new baler was Mastagard general manager Sebastian Stapleton. In his comments he applauded Agpac for the rapidly increasing volumes of waste plastics it collects and said that the new plant his company has installed has the capacity to reprocess virtually all silage plastic Kiwi farmers consume.

“At best estimate about 4000 tonnes of used agricultural film is being burnt or buried in the New Zealand landscape each year, something no one can be proud of,” Sebastian Stapleton said.

“Mastagard now has the only facility in this country that can wash, dry and extrude agricultural film. It can process more than 4000 tonnes a year, converting it into high quality plastic pellets.

“We now have two messages for farmers. One is that they need to take sustainability seriously and join the Agpac recovery scheme.

“The second is that they need to consider where the material is being recycled. There is a significant risk that waste plastic shipped to Asia will be processed in environmentally reckless and inhumane conditions.”

Mastagard’s reprocessing plant also has the ability to handle agrichemical plastics, and Agpac will expand its recycling programme to include agrichemical containers.

For more information call Chris Hartshorne at 03 338 2400-.

