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# **The Governance of Sustainable Agriculture in New Zealand**

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## Abstract

The externalities associated with agriculture mean that a transition to sustainable farming practices by farmers is essential. However, there are complex relationships between those at the centre of any such transition and the structures of governance regulating, ordering and controlling socio-economic life. Underpinning a transition to sustainable agriculture, then, is a shift to a wide range of governance mechanisms not anchored in the sovereign state. A factor in favour of this shift is a significant change, in recent years, among the mechanisms that regulate agriculture and the agrifood sector.

This thesis examines the governance arrangements involved in sustainable agriculture, both positive and negative, with data from fieldwork in New Zealand. Drawing on two constructs from the theoretical and applied governance literature and the agrifood literature, I examine farmer perceptions of hierarchy, the market and networks, and the spatial locations of new forms of governance in regard to sustainable (or 'biological') farming practices<sup>1</sup>. I conclude by arguing that there is a strong case for considering governance as the new way in which agriculture is regulated, controlled and influenced. At the forefront of this devolution of power away from central government is market-based regulation and control. The implications of such restructuring for the proliferation of sustainable agricultural practices means the strengthening of market instruments is needed to bolster sustainable farming. Furthermore, funding by central government is considered necessary by farmers to establish a strong case for the success of sustainable farming practices.

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<sup>1</sup> See Key terms, page 9

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Approval for the research has been obtained from the appropriate University Ethics Committee for the fieldwork described in the thesis.

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**Table 1 Characteristics of the modes of governance**

**Table 2 Governance modes and locations**

**Table 3 Modes and locations of governance populated by data**