



Official Release

Rescue Helicopter Launches 'Heli Livestock' to Save Rural Lives

For immediate release: Tuesday 27th May 2025

Hawke's Bay farmers, local livestock agents and major meat companies are banding together to get behind the launch of the Rescue Helicopter's latest rural fundraising initiative.

'Heli Livestock' enables farmers the option to support their local rescue helicopter service the best way they know how - through the sale proceeds of fat, cull or store livestock.

Its launch on June the 1st marks the start of what Hawke's Bay Rescue Helicopter Trust Chief Executive, Andy Quayle hopes will signal a more sustainable and long-lasting funding stream for the service, from the region's captive farming fraternity.

"'Heli Livestock' presents a fresh opportunity for our rural community to make a different kind of contribution, knowing the proceeds from livestock sales are not just helping the rest of the rural community in their time of need, but the proceeds will benefit the wider geographical coverage of the rescue helicopter service.

“This includes the purchase of much needed specialist equipment to help our local crew on medical or rescue missions, day or night.”

‘Heli Livestock’ initiator, George Neilson of Neilson Livestock says a recent pilot with several local farming clients offering to pledge livestock has had 100 percent uptake.

“As a long-time supporter of the rescue helicopter and a farmer/livestock agent myself, I was keen to utilise my network to help in any way that I could, so started killing a few lambs in March through Wilson Hellaby. I quickly recognised how logical it would be to make this readily available for farmers all over Hawke’s Bay.

Once I put the word out with fellow agents, everyone was quick to back it.

“This is an exciting new concept for the service and if every farmer in Hawke’s Bay was able to pledge a couple of lambs, either fat or store or a cattle beast (if they felt generous!) every year, the revenue potential for the rescue helicopter is huge.”

Hawke’s Bay’s Rescue Helicopter crew conduct around 400 lifesaving missions every year, with rural and remote missions accounting for approximately 40 percent of air medical rescues.

As one of the first farmers to pledge to ‘Heli Livestock’, the decision was personal for farmer and shearing contractor Heath Kingston.

“Running several large shearing gangs is a busy business and not without its risks. Anything can happen on any given day resulting in accidents from electrocution from hand pieces, to medical events.

“The service can’t always save every patient they rescue, but we know that their service delivers the best medical care within a crucial space of time, giving critically injured patients the very best chance of survival.

“I sincerely hope that farmers do get in behind this initiative. I know I will.”

Maraetotara farmer Eddie Palmer is an hours’ drive from town and says when one of his farm workers needed the chopper a few years ago, the response was rapid.

“Getting knocked over in the yards by a sheep had incapacitating consequences for one of Te Aratipi Station’s shepherds, who was left immobilised with severe back and knee pain. The chopper arrived within minutes and airlifted him straight to Hawke’s Bay Hospital.

“Supporting ‘Heli Livestock’ with some of our farm’s lamb proceeds is a no-brainer because you never when you, or someone you know, will need it.”

From June the 1st Hawke’s Bay farmers will be invited to register their interest to support ‘Heli Livestock’. Hansen Livestock Director, Simon Hansen has not hesitated to get onboard to help facilitate the campaign.

“This is a simple and uncomplicated way for farmers to give back, turning livestock into a vital lifeline for their rural communities. Hansen Livestock and Cloud Yards proudly backs this initiative because we know how critical this service is. We look forward to seeing some awesome support shown by rural Hawke’s Bay.”

From point of trade or sale, PGG Wrightson Area Livestock Manager, Neil Common and his team are also lending their weight to the cause.

“Myself and the PGG Wrightson Livestock team are very excited and proud to support this great new fundraising initiative. The rescue helicopter is an absolutely critical service to our rural community and clients throughout the region. Having personally experienced the service saving a person’s life at an on farm sale last year, I know that we couldn’t be without it.

“Our PGW Livestock team look forward to supporting and promoting the sale of any livestock donations on behalf of the rescue helicopter, so I encourage farmers to contact one of our team for any further information. We’re here to assist!”

To get behind ‘Heli Livestock’, simply contact your livestock agent or affiliated meat company to make your pledge today.

Livestock agents keen to be part of ‘Heli Livestock’ can get in touch with HBRHT’s office on (06) 878 1630.

HBRHT would like to thank the following meat companies and their agents for their support:

Neilson Livestock

Wilson Hellaby

Hansen Livestock

Cloud Yards

ANZCO Foods
PGG Wrightson
Silver Fern Farms
Affco
Ovation
Alliance Group
Carrfields
Redshaw Livestock

ENDS.

For more information please contact:

Alisha Neilson
Marketing, PR and Communications Manager
Hawke's Bay Rescue Helicopter Trust
021 672 718
alisha@hbhrt.org.nz