

New Zealand's Wool project aims to put money back in farmers' pockets

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New Zealand's strong wool could bring a sustainable bounce back into soft upholstery and woolgrowers' bank accounts through a new project seeking an alternative to synthetic fillers.

The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI's) Sustainable Food and Fibre Futures (SFF Futures) fund is committing \$790,000 over three years to a project led by Wisewool aimed at increasing the market potential of woollen knops – the small, light fluffy balls used as a filler ingredient.

"This project has the potential to improve returns to our strong wool producers and provide an environmentally friendly alternative to existing products made from synthetic materials," says Steve Penno, MPI's director of investment programmes.

"Wisewool will also conduct research and development of needle punched wool blanketing, which can be used in residential and commercial furniture upholstery, insulation for the apparel industry, bedding, and futon markets."

Henry Hansen CEO Wisewool says the project will predominantly focus on working out the right components and blends to create a range of woollen knops for different products.

"We've discovered that when used in large quantities as a filler ingredient, woollen knops increase the bounce-back and compression resilience of the fibre.

"Weâ??ll continue researching and comparing the compression resilience of both wool and synthetic fibres, and will adjust our carding machines to produce various wool knop blends.

"Weâ??ll also conduct an environmental impact analysis and in-market testing."

Steve Penno says one of the main drivers for funding this project was its potential to provide an alternative, high-value use for New Zealandâ??s strong wool.

"The project also aligns with the goals of the sector and government Fit for a Better World roadmap, which aims to boost sustainability, productivity, and jobs over 10 years.

"Through SFF Futures weâ??ve invested more than \$14.69 million in 15 strong wool projects to date, from strong wool acoustic wall panels to strong wool-based adhesive bandages.

"By working together with industry leaders and innovators, and thinking outside the box, we have the opportunity to turn our homegrown wool industry around."