

What If Trust Could Bring Value Back to the Farm?

*Inspired by the vision
behind WoolTraceNZ*

Story by Renee Meng

More than a Digital Product Passport

Imagine a scenario where each bale of wool on the farm is given a digital identity. From logistics, washing, spinning, manufacturing to retail, every participant provides verified information, creating a constantly updated digital record. By the time a garment reaches the consumer, this "passport" contains not only its place of origin but also the designer's curated story, production details, and options for future resale, repair, or recycling.

At first glance, WoolTraceNZ looks like another Digital Product Passport platform. But during this interview, Amanda, founder of WoolTraceNZ repeatedly returned to a different point.

*"Her goal is to bring the
value of the fibre back to
the farmer."*

Returning Value to the Farm

It began much earlier, on the sheep farms of Central Otago, where she grew up as the daughter of a stock agent. Decades later, after building a career in the fashion and film industries, she watched synthetic fibres dominate global markets while New Zealand wool steadily lost value. The contrast left her with a question that would eventually shape WoolTraceNZ:

*Why do the people who
create one of the world's
most sustainable natural
fibres often receive the
smallest share of its
value?*

Her answer was not simply better technology. It was a different way of thinking about trust, provenance, and how value moves through the global wool supply chain.

If consumers and brands value that provenance, then part of the premium should return to the grower.

She has even embedded this philosophy into WoolTraceNZ's intellectual property structure, with the intention that participating regenerative farmers will receive passive income from the platform's future profits as a long-term reward for good farming practices.

This is perhaps the most distinctive aspect of WoolTraceNZ.

Many traceability platforms promise compliance. Amanda talks about

Value Redistribution

Building Trust Infrastructure

Traditional supply chain management describes three major flows: physical flow, information flow and financial flow

WoolTraceNZ seems to be attempting to build something different:

Trust Infrastructure.

Rather than moving products, it moves confidence.

Rather than storing information, it attempts to provide verifiable evidence.

Rather than replacing existing supply chain systems, Amanda sees WoolTraceNZ as an additional layer beneath them, one that verifies what other systems cannot verify independently.

As she explained, existing organisations already prove traceability within their own networks. WoolTraceNZ aims to make that opportunity available to every grower, while remaining complementary to existing systems rather than replacing them.

Why Now?

Amanda believes timing matters.

Two major trends are creating demand.

The first is changing consumer expectations.

Consumers increasingly ask:

- Where did this fibre come from?
- Were the animals treated well?
- What happens to this garment when I'm finished with it?

The second is regulation.

Amanda expects the upcoming European Digital Product Passport requirements to make traceability increasingly necessary for brands selling into Europe.

If this happens, digital provenance may move from being a marketing advantage to becoming part of market access.

For WoolTraceNZ, this represents a significant opportunity.

Looking Beyond New Zealand

Although WoolTraceNZ begins with New Zealand wool, Amanda's ambition extends much further.

She sees opportunities to work with manufacturers in India, where traceability could help strengthen confidence in manufacturing quality and international trade relationships.

Her argument is simple.

Manufacturing capability alone is no longer enough.

The future competitive advantage lies in being able to prove what happened throughout the supply chain.

Challenges Ahead

The vision is compelling, but like many infrastructure innovations, success depends on adoption.

Several questions remain.

- Will enough growers see value in paying a subscription?
- Will manufacturers consistently contribute data?
- Will brands pay a premium for verified provenance?
- Will consumers actively use digital passports beyond high-value luxury products?

And perhaps the biggest question:

How does WoolTraceNZ differentiate itself from existing traceability platforms and enterprise data management systems as Digital Product Passports become more common?

Amanda argues that WoolTraceNZ is not competing with existing systems.

Instead, it provides the trust layer underneath them.

Whether the industry adopts that vision remains to be seen.

Reflection

After this conversation, I no longer see WoolTraceNZ simply as a blockchain

project or a Digital Product Passport platform.

It is an attempt to answer a much larger question:

Can trust itself become part of the supply chain's value creation process?

If provenance can be verified, if growers become visible again, and if that visibility translates into tangible economic returns, then trust is no longer just an intangible concept.

It becomes infrastructure.

And perhaps, one day, it becomes another asset flowing through the global wool supply chain alongside products, information and capital.

This is Story 07 from my ongoing project: “100 Stories of New Zealand Fashion”.

A journey exploring how New Zealand fashion brands, suppliers, educators, manufacturers, and industry leaders are navigating sustainability, resilience, ethics, and change from the inside.

More stories to come.

Special thanks to Amanda Bransgrove at WoolTraceNZ for generously sharing insights and perspectives during this conversation, which helped shape many of the reflections explored in this story.