



# 2026 Election Manifesto

## Executive summary

Horticulture is one of New Zealand's fastest growing and most valuable sectors.

The industry produces healthy food for New Zealanders and the world, generating \$7.54 billion in value across domestic and export markets - all on less than 0.1 per cent of the country's land area.

A thriving fruit and vegetable sector supports the health of New Zealanders, strengthens communities and underpins a resilient, sustainable economy.

Growers work hard to bring nutritious produce from orchards and fields to New Zealanders and customers in our global markets every day by investing in new technology, adapting to changing climate conditions and by finding more efficient ways to grow fruit and vegetables.

With your support, the sector can continue to grow, innovate and build resilience to future challenges, while also contributing to the overall prosperity of New Zealand.

The right policy settings will enable growers to invest with confidence, expand production, adopt new technology, lift productivity and respond effectively to climate and market volatility.

This will help ensure New Zealanders have access to healthy food year-round, support the 40,000 plus people employed in the industry, enable thriving regional communities and maintain horticulture's position as one of the country's most sustainable, high-value sectors.

The following policy priorities will help our sector succeed:



Strengthen biosecurity and access to crop protection tools



Support food production by cutting red tape and duplication



Sustainable and enduring water security and climate adaptation



Build a skilled and sustainable workforce



Ensure fair, competitive grocery markets



Invest in critical infrastructure that enables horticulture

The Aotearoa Horticulture Action Plan (AHAP) is a partnership between industry, Government, Māori and science.

The plan has a goal to double the farmgate value of horticulture by 2035, a target that will make a significant contribution to doubling the value of food and fibre exports over the next 10 years.

To achieve this, we seek continued Government partnership with AHAP and support for growers through the retention of a dedicated minister, ensuring the sector has the leadership and policy focus that is essential in achieving these ambitious goals.



**\$4.99bn**

horticulture export revenue



**\$7.54bn**

value of the horticulture industry value chain



**40,000+**

people employed in horticulture



**Horticulture™**  
New Zealand  
Ahumāra Kai Aotearoa



**\$2.55bn**

domestic spend



**80,000**

hectares of horticulture land (approx)



**5,715**

hectares of Māori owned horticultural land



## The outcomes New Zealand needs

### 1. Healthy food for all New Zealanders

New Zealanders should be able to access fresh, nutritious fruit and vegetables. To achieve this, growers need practical, reliable rules that make it possible to grow food at scale, invest in new production and meet demand. A strong domestic food supply is essential for public health, cost of living pressures and national wellbeing.

### 2. A resilient food system

Horticulture is already one of New Zealand's key forms of food production, but the sector faces increasing climate, biosecurity and market pressures. Strengthening resilience through better water security, sustainable infrastructure, strong biosecurity systems and access to modern crop protection tools will ensure we can keep growing food in a changing world.

Energy is also a critical constraint. Growers need a clear, practical and affordable pathway to reliable energy to support current production and future growth.

Rising energy costs, uncertainty about the transition away from natural gas for greenhouse growers, and a lack of viable alternatives are undermining confidence and delaying long-term investment decisions.

Greenhouse growing is critical to New Zealand's food security. It enables the year-round supply of fresh produce, strengthens resilience to extreme weather events and supports market diversification and export opportunities.

Without a planned and fit-for-purpose transition, escalating energy prices and the high capital cost of new infrastructure will continue to hold growers back, putting our food supply at risk.

We need a coordinated transition to low-emissions energy that recognises the realities of commercial growing, provides certainty for investment, and keeps the sector competitive - so New Zealanders can continue to access fresh, locally grown fruit and vegetables.

### 3. Strong regional economies and secure jobs

Horticulture is central to the success of many regional communities. When growers thrive, rural communities thrive through stable employment, local investment and vibrant businesses that support families and the wider community including schools and health care facilities. A secure workforce and clear policy settings will help growers invest for the long term and build economic strength across the country.

### 4. A fair, competitive domestic market

A well-functioning food system requires fair trading relationships. Growers need a grocery sector where prices, contracts and practices support viable businesses and reward efficiency and quality. Ensuring competition, transparency and reasonable compliance expectations will help growers succeed and deliver better outcomes for consumers.

The Government should require margin reporting and key data provided to the Grocery Commissioner, like in banking, to ensure transparency, competition, and better outcomes for both growers and consumers.

### 5. Stronger export market access to underpin growth and prosperity

New Zealand horticulture is a globally competitive sector that supports jobs and regional and national economic growth. We need policy settings and international trade agreements that improve our access to high-value export markets, reduce trade barriers and safeguard the country's reputation as a trusted provider of premium fruit and vegetables. Strong market access opportunities are critical to enable continued investment, innovation and sustainable growth across the sector.



# HortNZ's election priorities

To deliver the outcomes New Zealand needs, HortNZ has identified a set of clear priorities.

These priorities reflect the sector's most pressing challenges and the areas where Government action would create the greatest impact for growers, consumers and regional communities.

These priorities translate into practical policy actions Government can take to strengthen New Zealand's food system, improve resilience and support growers to keep producing healthy food for all New Zealanders.



## 1. Strengthen biosecurity and access to crop protection tools

A prosperous and successful horticulture sector requires strong biosecurity border protection, rapid biosecurity responses, and timely access to modern, effective, and environmentally responsible crop protection tools.

### Policy actions:

- Increase investment in biosecurity border protection and early detection systems for high-risk pests and diseases.
- Establish faster approval pathways for new crop protection tools.
- Prioritise applications that matter most for growers, using international harmonisation and trusted regulator data to streamline approvals.
- Modernise the regulatory framework to allow rapid response approvals during emerging biosecurity threats.
- Direct science funding to high-risk, high-reward programmes to boost horticulture's success and meet our biggest challenges.



## 2. Support food production by cutting red tape and duplication

Food security depends on a planning and regulatory system that backs domestic food production, cuts unnecessary duplication, and gives growers the confidence to invest and adapt to changing conditions. Our sector needs solutions that are practical and fit for purpose.

Growers are committed to meeting environmental and food safety standards, but the current system is often inefficient, inconsistent and costly. Streamlined processes, clear national direction and recognition of trusted industry standards can reduce compliance burdens while maintaining strong outcomes.

### Policy actions:

- Establish a long-term consistent national approach to land-use, freshwater and climate planning that recognises food production as a national priority.
- Reduce duplication by aligning regional and local rules and ensuring councils consider the impact of proposals on fruit and vegetable production.
- Streamline consenting and compliance pathways for horticulture - including workers' accommodation, glasshouses, irrigation schemes and water use/discharge.
- Strong and enduring policy that stands the test of time and election cycles.
- Introduce national direction for commercial vegetable production that allows for crop rotation and fixes the unintended consequences of regional rules.
- Implement an approach to Freshwater Farm Plans that recognises trusted industry assurance schemes, and delivers practical, and achievable outcomes for growers without duplication or increased compliance costs.
- Require all Government agencies to assess the cumulative impact of new regulations on domestic food production and affordability.



### 3. Sustainable and enduring water security and climate adaptation tools

Secure long-term access to water, investment in community-scale storage and policy settings that support climate adaptation are essential to maintaining production and protecting the sector from increasingly frequent climate events.

#### Policy actions:

- Enable community-scale water storage through simplified regulatory settings to reduce the burden on freshwater systems.
- Flexible water allocation for land-use to enable climate adaptation.
- Include an objective for food production in national direction for freshwater.
- Access to climate adaptation tools including technology that addresses changing growing conditions and reduces loss.
- Plan for the long-term resilience of New Zealand's food supply in the national Climate Adaptation Plan, including flood protection and drought preparedness, to safeguard domestic and export food production.
- Targeted science and innovation investment, recognising their role in diversifying New Zealand's food system and strengthening regional resilience.



### 4. Build a skilled and sustainable workforce

A secure workforce underpins the future of the sector. Immigration settings must reflect the realities of horticulture. The Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme needs long-term certainty, and pathways must support the development of skilled workers and technical specialists.

The RSE scheme is a critical component of the New Zealand horticulture sector, underpinning regional economies, enabling domestic supply, helping our Pacific neighbours and supporting the industry to drive export growth.

#### Policy actions:

- Conclude the RSE scheme review in 2026 to deliver enduring, sustainable policy settings that provide certainty for growers, workers and our Pacific partners.
- Streamline visa, recruitment, and compliance processes, accelerate digital systems, and uphold ethical labour mobility practices to protect New Zealand's global reputation.
- Provide robust business settings to enable long-term intergenerational investment in horticulture.
- Invest in education and training pathways for horticulture, including technology, agronomy and post-harvest skills.
- Continue to enable and grow Māori participation in the sector.
- Recognise skilled horticulture roles in immigration pathways, ensure labour market tests are simple and regionally responsive and make immigration levies fair and equitable.



### 5. Ensure fair, competitive grocery markets

A healthy domestic food system relies on fair trading relationships across the supply chain. Current market structures can systematically concentrate margin and shift commercial risk away from retailers and buyers and onto growers, with flow-on effects for grower viability, domestic supply and food affordability for New Zealand consumers.

Extending and enforcing the Grocery Supply Code, alongside stronger competition settings and better data transparency, will help ensure growers receive fair returns and consumers benefit from more competitive pricing and access.

#### Policy actions:

- Extend the Grocery Supply Code to apply to wholesalers and fresh-produce buyers, not just supermarkets, to strengthen protections across the full market interface.
- Strengthen enforcement expectations around unfair contract terms, including clearer rules on transparency, pricing practices, and risk allocation.
- Support greater competition and fairness in the food supply chain, including improved data transparency on fresh produce margins and trading practices through the wholesaler-buyer-retailer system.



## 6. Invest in critical infrastructure that enables horticulture

Efficient ports, reliable energy supply, strong rural roads, and modern digital connectivity are essential for growers and their rural communities to compete and respond to market demands. Investment in this infrastructure supports regional productivity and national food security.

### Policy actions:

- Future-proof ports, ensure container availability and build shipping strength to support export competitiveness.
- Upgrade rural roads and freight routes essential for transporting perishable produce.
- Ensure policy settings enable affordable, reliable regional energy supply to support packhouses, cool storage, greenhouses, and processing facilities.
- Reinvest Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) profits into decarbonising our food system to make energy transition possible.
- Expand support for precision agriculture, robotics, and digital traceability.

## A stronger future for New Zealand

The Ministry for Primary Industries' latest Situation and Outlook for Primary Industries (SOPI) report forecasts horticulture export revenue will rise five per cent to \$9.2 billion in the year to 30 June 2026.

Beyond export earnings, the sector plays a vital role in domestic food production and supports jobs across regional New Zealand.

Our future food security and economic resilience depend on a thriving horticulture sector that can keep delivering healthy, low-emissions food, strong regional jobs and significant export value.

With the right policy settings, horticulture can play an even greater role in shaping a more prosperous, sustainable and resilient future for Aotearoa.

A stronger future means a domestic food system that is secure and affordable, and able to withstand climate and market shocks.

It would mean growers can plan and invest with confidence, improve productivity and continue to meet rising environmental expectations. It means regional communities strengthened by stable jobs, reliable infrastructure and businesses that can grow and innovate.

A future-focused horticulture sector also supports New Zealand's long-term economic goals, from lifting productivity and diversifying exports to building a low-emissions economy with strong international competitiveness.

With consistent policy, fair markets, secure water and workforce settings and access to modern tools, horticulture can remain one of New Zealand's standout sectors, producing healthy food, generating value, helping build a better future for the country and supporting our Pacific neighbours.

By backing growers and removing unnecessary barriers, New Zealand can strengthen its food system, support regional growth and ensure horticulture continues to contribute to the wellbeing of all New Zealanders.

Horticulture New Zealand works with Government to create an enduring environment where growers thrive and New Zealand prospers.

For more information about commercial fruit and vegetable growing in New Zealand please contact:

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