

NZGROWER & ORCHARDIST®

VOL 99 | NO 08 | SEPTEMBER 2026

HORTICULTURE NEW ZEALAND

"WE CAN MAKE THIS WORK"

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LEADERS

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ON SHOW



JOHN DEERE

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On the cover:

Canterbury sprout grower Karen McGrath and husband Jason have build Southern Alp Sprouts over 30 years. See page 22.

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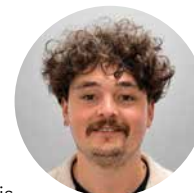
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Based near Matakana, Delwyn has spent most of her career in magazine production, journalism and writing. Time also spent as a commercial grower and agricultural tutor helped to focus her interest in recent years, including with *Our Land and Water - The National Science Challenge*. She visits Colin the chook's orchard on page 18.



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Amanda Gardner

Amanda is a food safety microbiologist with a strong interest in finding practical, innovative ways to make our food systems safer and more sustainable. She shares an update on her work at the Bioeconomy Science Institute and trials at Woodhaven Gardens focusing on emerging technologies such as cold plasma and light on page 54.



Aimee Wilson

Aimee is based in Alexandra and covers horticulture in Central Otago where she grew up. She still can't believe how many different varieties of fruit there are, compared to back in the 1980s - when it was mostly just Dawson and Moorpark. For this issue she meets Limited Service Volunteers on page 8.



Kate Gear

Research manager at Scarlatti, Kate has five years' experience in support facilitation and is known for creating high-quality visual outputs in real time. Kate's grandfather was a market gardener who also helped pioneer a carrot and parsnip washing machine. Read her work on page 37.



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Carly Gibbs

Carly has a background in community and national newspaper journalism - writing for leading New Zealand lifestyle magazines as well as horticulture publications. Carly lives in Te Puke, with her husband and two sons, on a kiwifruit orchard. Her catchup with Peter Omblor is on page 26.



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James is a former journalist who has written for newspapers and magazines in New Zealand and Australia. He works for agritech company HortPlus and runs Wellington media consultancy Last Word, which counts many other horticulture businesses and universities among its clients. On page 50, he explores risk-based vs calendar spraying.



Charlotte Wright

Charlotte is a senior policy advisor with HortNZ, based in Canterbury. She has spent more decades than she would care to mention working on environmental policy and projects for the primary sector. Charlotte provides an overview of what growers need to know about new resource management legislation on page 40.



INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP REGULARS

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RECOGNISING THE PEOPLE SHAPING HORTICULTURE'S FUTURE

The Horticulture Industry Awards at the end of July gave us a valuable moment to reflect on the calibre of people across our sector.

Bernadine Guilleux : HortNZ chair

After the speeches and celebrations, what has stayed with me is the depth of service, leadership and practical innovation that continues to strengthen New Zealand horticulture.

That was especially clear in the stories recognised through this year's awards.

Many of us in horticulture have seen trends come and go, and have watched the sector evolve through changing markets, policy settings, weather events and community expectations.

Through all of that change, one lesson has remained constant – innovation unlocks opportunity, time and time again.

We are often asked, "what is the next kiwifruit?"



One lesson has remained constant – innovation unlocks opportunity, time and time again

It is a fair question, because horticulture has always been shaped by ambition and breakthrough ideas.



But perhaps our next leap will not be one new crop. Perhaps it will be a broader and more diverse basket of equally strong-performing crops, with consistent quality across the board that maximise the opportunities within our existing trade agreements. Growers know that innovation is rarely one dramatic breakthrough. More often, it is the constant and uncompromising pursuit of new and market-tested varieties, better quality, greater consistency, longer shelf life and stronger production systems – and the skill to turn those improvements into market opportunities.

This year's recipients reflected that mindset. Their contributions showed progress built through practical action, collaboration, generosity with knowledge and a willingness to keep lifting standards for the benefit of all growers.

That is why recognition matters. Awards help us name the values we want to carry forward: service, leadership, innovation, resilience and shared responsibility for the future.

To every finalist, winner and nominee, thank you. After this year's awards, we can be proud of the excellence in our sector and confident in the people helping shape what comes next. ●





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GROWER ADVOCACY IN ACTION

This year's New Zealand Horticulture Conference was a great reminder of what our sector can achieve when it comes together.

Kate Scott : HortNZ chief executive

Around 800 people gathered in Wellington to share ideas, discuss priorities and celebrate the people driving horticulture forward.

The conference had a clear sense of purpose, from well-attended sessions and a standing-room-only political panel, through to the popular Industry Awards and gala dinner.

For me, it highlighted the depth of talent, commitment and innovation across commercial fruit and vegetable growing in New Zealand.

It was also a useful chance to take stock.

Growers are operating in a complex environment, with pressure from costs, labour, regulation, weather and market expectations.

Bringing the sector together matters because it allows practical experience from orchards, farms and packhouses to be heard alongside the policy and technical discussions that shape our future.

Beyond the conference programme, several policy developments signalled meaningful progress for growers.

“

The minor-crops pathway is another example of why horticulture needs policy settings that recognise the diversity of what we grow

The Government's changes to the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme are practical and balanced.

They recognise employers with a strong track record, provide appropriate flexibility for workers, and create clearer rules around cost recovery and worker protections.

A strengthened RSE scheme will help growers plan with greater confidence while ensuring the programme remains fair and transparent for workers.

Labour certainty remains one of the foundations of a resilient horticulture sector, and these changes are a positive step.

For many businesses, the ability to access experienced seasonal workers at the right time is the difference between getting a crop harvested well and watching value being lost.

That is why it is important that changes to the RSE scheme support both reliable workforce planning and good outcomes for workers and their communities.

Minor crop growers also received welcome news, with a new pathway announced by the Government to improve access to options for controlling pests, diseases and weeds. For many growers, access to effective crop protection tools is essential to maintaining productivity, quality and market supply.

The minor-crops pathway is another example of why horticulture needs policy settings that recognise the diversity of what we grow.

Smaller crops may not always have the scale to attract the same commercial investment in crop protection products, but they are important to regional economies, crop rotations, consumer choice and New Zealand's fresh food supply.

Together, these developments show advocacy on behalf of growers in action. They reflect the hard work of the HortNZ team and our product group colleagues behind the scenes, and the importance of staying engaged with ministers, officials and regional decision-makers so that policy settings are practical, workable and grounded in the realities of growing.





The Horticulture Conference attracted around 800 delegates in late July

HortNZ's role is to bring grower evidence, experience and solutions to those conversations.

Good advocacy is never about one meeting, one submission or 'thumping the table'.

It is about sustained engagement, strong relationships and making sure decision-makers understand the cumulative effect that rules and costs can have on individual growing businesses.

“

HortNZ's role is to bring grower evidence, experience and solutions to those conversations



Thanks to everyone who took part in the conference, contributed to the conversations and continue to support the work HortNZ is doing for growers. ●



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LSV graduates Richard and Kelesi from Christchurch at Webb's Fruit in Cromwell

GROWERS SNAP UP DEFENCE FORCE PROGRAMME GRADUATES

Increasing numbers of Central Otago orchardists have been employing graduates out of the government's Limited Service Volunteer (LSV) programme. It's filling a much-needed worker shortage in an area where unemployment rates are among some of the lowest in the country.

Aimee Wilson

CAJ Apples has been supportive of the LSV programme since after Covid-19 hit, and currently has three graduates - who have all moved to Central Otago from Northland and Canterbury.

LSV is a six-week work residential work-readiness programme delivered by the New Zealand Defence Force Youth Development Unit, in partnership with the Ministry of Social Development (MSD).

It supports NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) young people from across New Zealand to develop the skills, confidence and routines they need to transition into employment, training or further education.



"The horticulture sector is one of the largest employers of Burnham LSV graduates in Southern," MSD regional labour market advisor Tracey Harrison says. "We've had some fantastic outcomes over the past few years."

Central Otago growers became involved with LSV six years ago through MSD's Southern labour market team, and CAJ was among the first to employ graduates.

Last season Webb's Fruit in Cromwell employed its first Burnham graduate from Christchurch, and this coming season 45 South and CentralPac will be as well.

A total of 13 LSV graduates moved into the horticulture sector for the 2025/26 season.



Northland brothers Danny and Leo Siafa pruning on the Hydralada platforms under guidance of Hollandia orchard manager Storm Pinn and Earnsclough orchard manager Murray Booth

Of those, five are still based in Central Otago. Three have moved into permanent horticulture roles in other regions, and the remaining participants have transitioned into long-term sustainable outcomes.

Tracey says her first priority is to help New Zealanders into jobs, and to attract people into Central Otago, "because we have low job seekers in the region. So we just provide solutions."

Most of the growers will start by employing graduates for the season, and then if everyone is happy they will be offered permanent jobs.

Storm Pinn (25) came to work for CAJ six years ago during the pandemic through MSD's New Zealand Seasonal Work Scheme.

During the 2020 season, fruit growers needed to get crops off trees fast, but the borders were closed and the backpacker labour market had dried up.

MSD stepped in to help, and one of its first initiatives was to move job seekers across the country to fill the gaps in every growing region.

When the season ended, Storm decided to enrol in the LSV programme and was then offered a permanent job at CAJ in Earnsclough.

He worked his way up to becoming orchard manager at its Hollandia orchard in Earnsclough and hasn't looked back.

Originally from Linwood in Christchurch, he says his original career path was in nursing but when that didn't work out, he headed south.

He loves the climate and the quiet community of Alexandra and Earnsclough, quite a contrast to where he grew up in a busy Christchurch suburb.

Along with Burnham, there are LSV programmes in Auckland and Wellington. MSD will be involved in upcoming graduations at the end of August and then work with Central Otago growers to place them into seasonal employment.

"It's important to get young people involved in horticulture and really push to make that happen, as there are huge opportunities for them to move up the ladder - which many people don't realise," CAJ Earnsclough orchard manager Murray Booth says.

Northland brothers Danny and Leo Siafa recently started working at CAJ in Earnsclough.

Danny (20) came in November 2025 after graduating from Burnham, and older brother Leo (22) arrived in July 2026 - he attended both the Auckland and Wellington LSV programmes on two separate occasions.

For Danny, it was a toss-up between the fisheries industry or horticulture, and with memories of a family summer holiday in the south as a child, he chose Central Otago.

He loves the scenery and the harsh winters, and started "buzzing out" when he experienced his first hard frost.

The transition from Whangārei to Alexandra wasn't too difficult as he had been pretty independent from his days of attending boarding school and living away from home as a teenager.



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Leo was looking for an opening in the New Zealand Navy but, after graduating from the LSV programme, he went back home for three years to work in his family's security company.

Recently he decided to start looking for something new "and I just wanted to get out of my comfort zone," and move away from home.

CAJ offers workers accommodation onsite and job security, while the LSV programme provides employers with work-ready graduates with life skills to handle the pressures of a day-to-day job.

The graduates say it's a tough military-based six-week programme, but also gave them real life skills such as first aid, forklift and vehicle driver licensing – as well as teaching them discipline and routine, leadership and teamwork skills.

Storm now goes back to Burnham to talk to other graduates, and encourages them to give horticulture a go.

"It's great for anyone looking for a refreshing restart."

Murray says many of the graduates don't realise what goes into growing an apple. "It's not just about picking the fruit."

He gets them involved in spraying, driving machinery, as well as the thinning and pruning – and keeps them interested.

Storm lives with his partner on the orchard and is now integrating well into the community as a rural firefighter. He's starting to make good friends his own age.

Meanwhile, up in Cromwell, Simon Webb has been teaching his LSV graduate how to drive a car – after he arrived November 2025 with a new learner licence.

The orchard provides the perfect place to start before they head out onto the busy highway.

Onsite accommodation is important as for many recruits it will be their first time living away from home. Then, if they transition into a permanent role on the orchard, they can look at going flatting.

"They need that in the beginning to get on their feet," Simon says.

He and wife Trudi interviewed five LSV recruits and then took on two for the season – one now has his brother also joining them from Christchurch – who started in May.

"He's quite a capable young lad. We are lucky that down here there should be nobody unemployed in Central Otago. But it's tough for these guys having to start out on their own and moving to a whole new area."

Southern Labour Governance Group chair Kris Robb – also manager of Clyde Orchards – has been involved with LSV graduates for the past season – with huge success.

"We ended up with a group of four LSV graduates working for us over the summer – three relocating from the North Island and one from Mid-Canterbury.

"With assistance from MSD and Primary ITO the four graduates completed a Level 2 Certificate in Primary Production in their time with us, and two of the four have stuck around and are a great asset to our team."

Kris says LSV graduates have made a conscientious decision to make a life change when enrolling in the programme.

"They have moved out of their comfort zone, challenged themselves and come to us with increased confidence, discipline and are a motivated work-willing group.

"Whilst having a number of graduates obtaining longer term roles within the industry is an added bonus, it is not our primary reason for being involved in the programme.

"It is symbiotic relationship where we are able to provide an employment stepping stone to a full-time role or study, while the graduates assist us when labour requirements are high."

He says recruitment and retention of seasonal and full-time staff is just one function of the Southern Labour Governance Group.



CAJ Hollandia orchard manager Storm Pinn (second from right), an LSV graduate from 2020, with recruits Danny and Leo Siafa from Northland, and MSD regional labour market advisor Tracey Harrison (left)

“

It's great for anyone looking for a refreshing restart

"The group has represented the Southern regions' horticulture and viticulture industries at regional job fairs, facilitated orchard and packhouse visits for high school, polytech and university groups and is a means of information transfer between the likes of MSD and growers for initiatives such as LSV." ●

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Ceed general manager Nathan Waites says team leadership is the biggest challenge for the pipfruit industry workforce

PEOPLE LEADERS DON'T GROW ON TREES

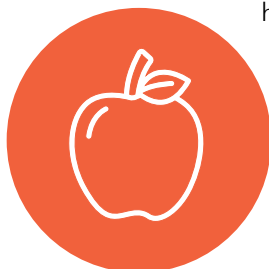
Every season, the pipfruit sector leans on a limited pool of team leaders to supervise the workforce as it scales up for harvest. Nathan Waites, general manager at Ceed, says the industry needs to focus on effective pathways to attract, upskill and retain talented future leaders.

The horticulture learning pathway is under review through the Food and Fibre Industry Skills Board, which will include on-the-job training qualifications.

Gaining skills on the job has always been part of horticulture. Good growers know they need to develop and build their own talent within. But as the pipfruit industry increasingly shifts to large corporate growers and investment fund ownership, career pathways for young leaders have changed dramatically.

Competitive market for small talent pool

Nathan Waites, general manager at Hawke's Bay orchard management company Ceed Ltd, says he is looking for staff who can take responsibility with effective communication and interpersonal skills.



"I always find strong team leadership skills the biggest challenge when the time comes to scale up for harvest. Anyone can be taught how to set up a mower or clean the filters on a sprayer but the skills required to lead a team of workers is very different and a lot more difficult."

The pipfruit industry in Hawke's Bay has a competitive labour market, especially for skilled or leadership roles.

"I don't think the industry has ever been seen as 'sexy'. Attracting talent has always been difficult so the talent pool is often small."

Due to labour constraints, particularly around harvest, those young workers who do enter the industry can find themselves rising quickly to leadership roles. That in turn creates an expectation that is not always commensurate with experience.

"A lot of younger staff now want to fast track their career path but don't always want to do the hands-on 'boring' tasks like pruning and thinning," Nathan says. "The challenge is to get them thinking about what is going on in the big picture and the impact their actions can have on the final product. Once they understand this and see the impact at harvest time, it can be really changing for their engagement."

Orchard management model

Not every grower can offer the depth of career progression that large corporate growers can, and the competitive market can make it more difficult to retain staff and invest in education.

Nathan says orchard management services can provide labour security without the hassle of recruiting, training and retaining a workforce themselves. Ceed provides a full orchard management package to pipfruit growers of all varieties – a management practice familiar to many kiwifruit orchard owners, including investors and fund managers.

The company was born out of Rockit Management Services Ltd (RMS) when Monarch Platform purchased all RMS assets from Rockit Global Ltd in October 2025. As a subsidiary of the Monarch Platform, which is well established in

horticulture, especially in Marlborough, Ceed sits alongside vineyard management company Ukko, workforce management software company Tatou and Hortus, which is known for supplying seasonal staff through the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme and was recently named RSE Employer of the Year at the New Zealand Horticulture Conference in Wellington.



WORKFORCE TRAINING REVIEW

The Food and Fibre Industry Skills Board is currently reviewing horticulture qualifications, micro-credentials and standards to better meet today's workforce needs. Employers and learners are invited to contribute.

For more information or to express your interest, visit: foodandfibreisb.nz/horticulture-review/



When black spot threatens...



Ceed's business is in executing the tasks, not in selling fruit, so its core assets are people and machinery

"The purchase [of RMS] has given Ceed the chance to really lean into our years of knowledge and expand outside of our core Rockit™ business into other varieties, hoping to add value to conventional growers through our learnings, while importantly giving our employees the chance to expand their knowledge base as well as build in some diversity and resilience to the business."

Ceed employs 41 permanent staff across Hawke's Bay in three geographical management sectors from orchard hand level through to orchard, technical and operations management roles.

"Through harvest we can have up to 450 pickers through our sister company Hortus and partners as well as up to 20 seasonal support roles employed directly within Ceed."

Recruiting at entry level

Generally, candidates that apply for orchard roles at Ceed seldom come with a lot of experience or horticulture qualifications, Nathan says. For entry level roles, the company is focused on candidates with the right mindset.

"Most of our recruitment at the entry level happens during the seasonal intakes where Monarch's support and networks kick in. Those that prove themselves during the intense harvest period often end up with a full-time position following.

"Our business is in executing the tasks, not in selling fruit, so our core assets are our people and machinery to ensure things are done right the first time, on time. Because of this, we are focused on our values and these form the core of any hiring decisions. If a candidate doesn't align with these then they don't get hired.

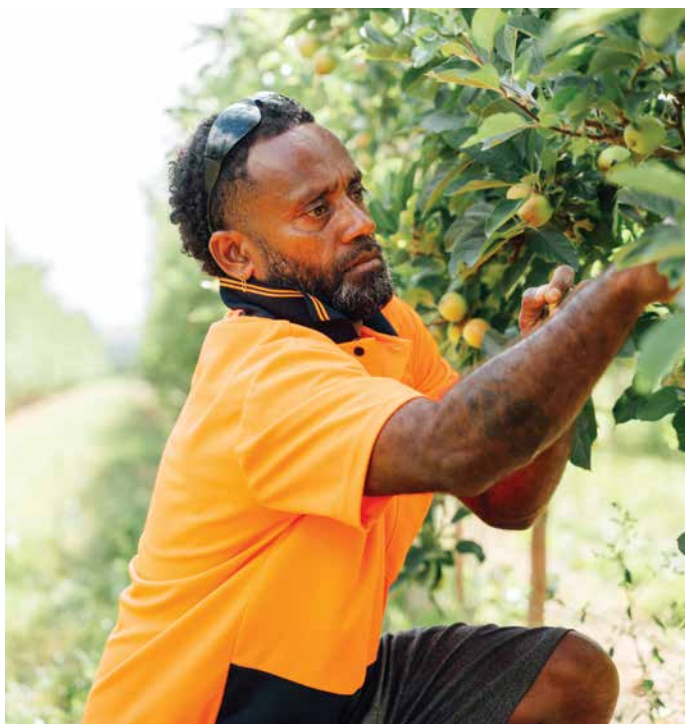
"Of course skills, experience and qualifications are important but without an alignment in values it always falls over. These values transcend industries so as long as a candidate can align here, the other skills can be taught."

Qualifications and in-house development

Ceed works with Eastern Institute of Technology Hawke's Bay to offer staff qualifications in horticulture certificate and diploma programmes. It's part of an internal skills-based framework that outlines career paths for Ceed staff.

"It's transparent for everyone with pay rates included but it's strongly linked to leading others as the roles progress through to management. Our management team support it by providing learning opportunities and support on-the-job, as well as in-house training programmes run by Monarch for those at more senior levels including the 'step up' and 'breakthrough' programmes which run over longer periods of up to 12 months.





Hortus employee Roy Stevens from Vanuatu thins apples at Maraekāhaho sector

"It all links together through our 'Bingo' review process that everyone goes through, which is simple, to the point and completely transparent so everyone knows how they are tracking and where their growth opportunities can be found."

“

Of course skills, experience and qualifications are important but without an alignment in values it always falls over

Nathan's own story of progression through to general manager is a case in point. Although he has a family background in horticulture - his grandfather was a grower and his father managed an orchard sector for Mr Apple for close to 50 years - it wasn't a career path he thought he would follow.

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Danielle Sammons, Ceed assistant manager at Crown Sector on Matapiro Road close to Crownthorpe and former second place getter at the 2023 Hawke's Bay Young Fruit Grower competition

"School holidays were often spent on the orchard, thinning and picking apples to earn money to fund my weekends," he says. "After having worked as a sales rep in another industry for five years and then living overseas and working primarily in labouring jobs for two, I came back at the end of 2009 and spent an apple harvest on the forklift and never looked back.

“

One thing I don't think will change is the need for people who care and have a passion for growing for good fruit

"The science behind everything and constant innovation and opportunities, as well as the fact no two seasons were the same, was really appealing," he says. Now, 17 years later, the industry is still evolving.

"Over the next five years I expect technology will play a greater role with things like crop scanning, automated vehicles, AI and drones becoming more prevalent and there are always new ways of doing things from a technical point of view, which is what makes the industry so interesting.

"One thing I don't think will change is the need for people who care and have a passion for growing for good fruit and who have the skills to problem solve, adapt, learn, deliver and have fun. This is where we need to remain focused so that we're ready to take advantage of the changes as they come." ●



William Horsefield, foreman at Ceed, competing at this year's Hawke's Bay Young Fruit Grower competition. He is currently completing a Level 5 Diploma in Horticulture



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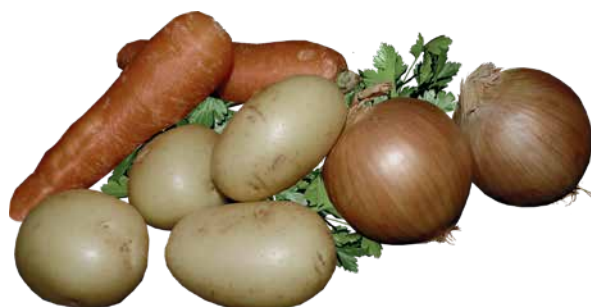
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Kathy and Ross Woods planted up their orchard from scratch 32 years ago

GETTING ON TOP OF BIG TREES

Long-time Northland growers say persistently low returns on avocados mean managing harvests at height still makes more sense than investing in new stock.

Delwyn Dickey

Wander around Kathy and Ross Woods' avocado orchard at Maungakaramea, and you'll likely spot pink paint on many of their trees. Rather than a sign of older devotees of Barbie, the paint indicates which branches are getting the chop.

Both former veterinary surgeons who owned a practice in Whangārei, Kathy and Ross are long-time locals and have lived on the property for 32 years.

Originally a rather rundown stock-grazing block, the place was awash with thistles. The former owner had also run Limousin cattle which had wrecked most of the gates and fencing on the 23ha of land.

While it needed quite a lot of work when they first moved in, the 1920s house has plenty of character with trimmings and doors of rimu and Oregon Redwood, and stained-glass windows.

The house has stayed toasty warm over winter as the wood burner works its way through an endless supply of felled avocado tree branches.

Out in the garden brown shaver hens share their space with silver speckled Sebright bantam chicks.



Strutting around and clearly in charge is Colin – the patriarch of the flock, fondly named after the Woods' Tauranga-based avocado consultant Colin Partridge.

The gardens were one of the drawcards for the couple because Ross's grandmother had fond memories of visiting them when she was young on gardening bus tours that were held around the district.

While the orchard may also have quite a bit of clay in the soil, an old scoria quarry on the property points to the area's volcanic origins – as part of the dormant Whangārei volcanic field.



Rather than felling and replanting Ross is mostly trimming branches

Planting up avocado trees, which are vulnerable to phytophthora root rot, on free-draining volcanic soil was the gold standard to help prevent phytophthora.

The tropical avocado trees, which live to 100 years and reach 20m in height, have thrived in the volcanic soil and are now reaching enormous proportions.

There are nine New Zealand manufactured Hydralada machines on the property that can reach a height of 6.4m. Operating the machines with their feet leaves the workers' hands free for picking.

But the first 15ha planted are now too tall for the top fruit to be picked and are also out of reach of the sprayer.

“

The tropical avocado trees, which live to 100 years and reach 20m in height, have thrived in the volcanic soil

Trees would usually be removed at this stage and young trees planted, as the couple have done on several blocks of poorer performing trees. But with depressed prices for avocados in recent years, Ross has decided instead to hone his chainsaw skills, and has been trimming the trees to get them down to a manageable height.

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The trees are now too big for pickers to reach the upper fruit



Ross appreciates how the Kubota enables him to mulch while facing forward unlike on a tractor

This has also kept their 95HP Kubota skid steer, with a front-mounted FAE mulcher, very busy.

While it's a loud beast of a machine, it's easy to manoeuvre among the trees, and Ross is able to raise and lower the boom to capture some of the higher branches.

“

Rather than an irrigation scheme, Kathy and Ross rely on bore water with three consented bores on the property

The lower returns have seen some of Kathy and Ross's neighbours, also with older trees, exiting the industry instead of going to the expense of replacing their trees. Others have diversified, replacing some blocks with other crops – kiwifruit a popular choice despite the big licensing fees.

Buying neighbouring land over the years has seen the property expand to 35ha. Planning to stay in avocados, and with cattle currently running on a spare 10ha, the couple are also considering bringing another crop like tamarillos onboard, along with finding efficiencies.

Shelter around the orchard comes in the shape of pines, cryptomeria and casuarina, with the Hass avocado trees.

There are an assortment of pollinisers – mostly Bacon, Zutano, Ettinger and Edranol, with much of the fruit sold to Whangārei-based Lynwood Avocado Nursery for seed.

The younger trees in the orchard all come from the Lynwood nursery.

Rather than an irrigation scheme, Kathy and Ross rely on bore water with three consented bores on the property, and around half of the orchard area irrigated.

This should put them in a good position to weather extra dry conditions this summer and autumn expected with El Niño.

When one of the bores had to be abandoned a few years ago, they forked out \$100,000 to get resource consent and drill a much bigger bore.

They have three adult children, and although hopeful the property will stay in the family when they retire, having this new consent and bore should also work in their favour should they decide to sell. It will give a new owner a good opportunity to diversify or expand in the future.

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Colin is in charge of the orchard. He is named after the Woods' Tauranga-based avocado consultant Colin Partridge



Reductions in avocado orchard area are not just a mid-North thing, Ross reckons. Competition for land from developers as Tauranga expands, and also as the kiwifruit industry grows, is pushing up land prices in the Bay of Plenty and seeing more avocado growers selling up.

This should help to stabilise the industry, he says.

“

Ross and Kathy are looking forward to a good season

They are also confident increasing consumption globally will catch up with the increased production out of Peru and Chile, with lower prices at home seeing more locals trying avocado for the first time.

With Australian supermarkets looking for more product with a shortfall in local production, and plenty of developing flower clusters for spring pollination, Ross and Kathy are looking forward to a good season.

This will soon see plenty of backpackers and locals in the orchard, and all the Hydraladas busy.

And with the ever-present Colin keeping everyone focused and on schedule. ●

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Karen McGrath with husband Jason at Southern Alp Sprouts

FROM SPROUT STARTUP TO MAJOR SUPPLIER

Canterbury grower Karen McGrath has spent almost three decades building Southern Alp Sprouts, the family business she and husband Jason run near Christchurch, into the South Island's main sprout supplier to supermarkets and food service. After winning the Love of the Land award, she hopes it will finally bring recognition to an overlooked corner of horticulture.

Tony Benny

Canterbury sprout grower Karen McGrath hopes winning this year's NZI Rural Women Business Awards Love of the Land category for her service to horticulture will shine a light on a sometimes-forgotten part of New Zealand's food production sector.

"It was so lovely to have that recognition after almost three decades because sprouts have had no recognition in New Zealand. It's about public awareness and how good they are for you," she says.

Karen and husband Jason's Southern Alp Sprouts is based on the outskirts of Christchurch and is the main South Island supplier to both supermarket chains and food service businesses.

The business started in a Portacom on their lifestyle block near Springfield, a small rural town about 45 minutes inland from Christchurch.



"I used to work at Agriseeds (now Barenbrug) so I knew about horticulture and my parents loved gardening as well so I just had a feel for it. I just thought I'd start experimenting because I wanted to do something from home," Karen recalls.

"Jase was the mechanic at Springfield garage and he's very clever. He can just build anything, he's so amazing. This business wouldn't be what it is without him."



The Southern Alp Sprouts plant runs smoothly with 10 staff growing, harvesting and packing alfalfa, broccoli, onion, pea tendril, radish, mung bean and snow pea sprouts

Their initial set up was pretty rudimentary, Karen says, and included growing sprouts in trays, but as they got the hang of it they also found there was consumer demand so Karen upskilled her business capabilities with a management course.

"They gave me a mentor and he knew a sprout grower in Australia so we flew over and went to see him and his operations. He actually said, 'It'll make you go mad. Just go home, shut it down', because it is very demanding.

"But we were like, 'No, no, no, we can make this work', so we went home and really got into it."

They concentrated on keeping the quality high and the customers happy, working with MG and supplying smaller local businesses. In 2006 they started construction of a 900m² purpose-built facility and in 2008 they successfully tendered to become suppliers to Foodstuffs South Island.

"We just did it all ourselves; we've had no outside help, no partners, so it was a lot."

Initially they commuted from Springfield but with four daughters, including twins, under 10, that was difficult to sustain so they built a house near the sprout plant and moved closer to town. Their daughters have now grown up but Karen and Jason's lives are no less busy, with 6am starts every day and not much time off.



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"If we go on holiday, we often have to come back if we get text alerts about a breakdown, because there's water and machines moving all the time. Jason can fix anything but it's Murphy's Law – if he goes hunting or whatever there'll be a breakdown and I'm trying to fix it with instructions over the phone."

But for most of the time, 24 hours a day, every day, the plant runs smoothly with 10 staff growing, harvesting and packing alfalfa, broccoli, onion, pea tendril, radish, mung bean and snow pea sprouts, starting at 6am.

"The sprouts come out of the harvest at 27°C and [the harvest] needs to be below 5°C to be accepted by supermarkets. That's why we start so early."

They harvest, pack, chill, dispatch and deliver 20,000 to 30,000 units a week.

Karen is the Australasian representative on the International Sprout Growers Association board. As part of that, she travelled to a conference in Japan and took the opportunity to see how the industry operated there before they built their own plant.

"They are so far ahead of us with all the automation and everything so we scoped out how we wanted to lay everything out and we basically drew this up to be the most efficient."

While Jason was able to do much of the work himself, they imported specialised equipment from the United States and China to grow the sprouts round the clock, with each variety having different requirements.

The McGraths have done a lot of tweaking to their system to make sure the sprouts are as tender as they can be.

"The water is 22°C coming in so they're not shocked, the floor is heated, there's positive air, they have their light, their dark, everything's just optimal for them. That's taken a lot of working out, a lot of our own IP too," Karen says, adding with a laugh, "We've had so many fails, but, you know, that makes you stronger."

Named winner of the Love of the Land award this year, Karen hopes the profile of sprouts as part of the country's food producers will rise, pointing to two important factors.

The first is their high nutritional value. "Sprouts are just so nutrient dense. For example broccoli sprouts are about 40 times more potent than mature broccoli. In our industry, they're called tiny but mighty. They contain the fibre, proteins, all the vitamins and minerals that your body needs."

"It's so healthy and that's what gets me up every day, producing fresh food for people. And it's just so easy, like you just eat them straight out of a punnet. They say 50 grams is the ultimate for the day, which is nothing."

The other factor is their contribution to New Zealand's food security, with their operation not subject to the whims of nature that other producers sometimes suffer from.



Minister of Agriculture Todd McClay presented Karen the NZI Rural Women Business Award Love of the Land category at Parliament

"I just don't know how farmers have coped through all the natural disasters, like losing all their crops. We are just so lucky that we have everything controlled in here. And it's so consistent."

They aim to make the business environmentally sustainable, working to create what Karen calls a "big sustainable circle". They use water from their own bore, which is UV treated before use and rigorously tested at every stage of production.

They use solar energy on the roof to heat floors and water, their packaging is recyclable and they use locally produced seed, seed brokers, packaging and services wherever possible.

Wastewater is filtered and used to irrigate their land where they finish cattle which are fed on the 5t of green waste the sprout operation produces weekly. Most of the cattle are sent to Silver Fern Farms but one is kept each year for the freezer.

“

Broccoli sprouts are about 40 times more potent than mature broccoli

"It's like pure protein that they're getting, and the meat is just to die for, it's just so tender delicious."

Karen says she felt a little out of her element at the business award event at Parliament and was surprised to be presented her prize by Minister of Agriculture Todd McClay. But she did have her speech ready.

"I look forward to continuing to work alongside my dedicated team to ensure the sprout sector remains strong, resilient, and well-positioned for future generations," she said.

"I would like to dedicate this award to my husband, my four incredible daughters, my team at Southern Alp Sprouts and to all the women who came before us, forging a path in this industry and helping make opportunities like this possible." ●

GROWING BETTER BUSINESSES STARTS WITH GROWING PEOPLE

Horticulture is always looking for ways to do things better – better systems, better productivity, better quality and better outcomes. But sometimes the biggest opportunity for improvement isn't a new piece of technology or equipment. It's investing in the people already in your business.

Matt Bent, operations manager at Punchbowl, knows that both as a manager and a learner.

Matt has been studying towards Fruition's **Level 6 Diploma in Horticulture Production**, taking individual papers while continuing to work in a demanding management role. Along the way, as a direct result of this study, he has also taken on the additional responsibility of **continuous improvement lead** at Punchbowl.

After taking a break from study following the arrival of his and his partner's baby, Matt is back studying again, a good reminder that professional development doesn't always need to follow a straight line.

For employers, that flexibility matters. People can complete individual Fruition Diploma papers as **micro-credentials**, gaining skills they can put to work immediately and build those papers over time towards the full Diploma.

The next paper, **Continuous Improvement in Horticultural Industries**, gets right to the heart of a challenge facing every horticultural business: how to identify opportunities to improve, solve problems systematically and make change stick?

It's learning designed to come back into the workplace, not stay in the classroom.

Punchbowl has also supported staff through Fruition's **Emerging Leaders** micro-credential.

Matt sees the programme from a manager's perspective, while the people completing it tell the story from the other side. Matt states that he's "heard plenty of positives" and he feels the leadership value in the staff who completed the course has increased exponentially.

Learners' feedback includes:

“

Best course that I've ever gotten to do!

“

We really enjoyed this pilot course and enjoyed the experience.

“

Lucky to be chosen by our employer – we are the chosen ones!

That sense of being invested in is important.

Emerging Leaders is aimed at people starting to lead others or showing the potential to do so. It builds practical skills in self-awareness, resilience, communication, team engagement and dealing with the very real pressures that come with leading people in horticulture.

For a business, that creates capability deeper in the organisation. For the learner, it can create confidence, new perspectives and a clearer idea of where their career could go next.

Who in your business is ready?

Not every development opportunity needs to start with someone asking for a qualification.

Sometimes it starts with a manager recognising potential.

Who is already asking good questions? Who is taking responsibility when things get difficult? Who could make a bigger contribution with some extra tools and confidence? And who among your existing managers would benefit from stepping outside the day-to-day operation and looking differently at how the business works?

Those are the people worth investing in.

Continuous Improvement in Horticultural Industries starts with orientation on **8 September**, is available online or in person in Tauranga, and can be taken as a stand-alone Level 6 micro-credential or as part of Fruition's Diploma in Horticulture Production.

Fruition also offers the **Level 4 Emerging Leadership in People, Food and Fibre Industries** micro-credential for the people who will help lead our industry next. Our next courses are in the Bay of Plenty starting 1 September.

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Matt Bent
Operations
Manager,
Punchbowl

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When challenges arrive, Peter Ombler says the industry's strength lies in the people close to the vines and the relationships between them

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR KIWIFRUIT GROWERS?

Few growers have seen New Zealand's kiwifruit industry change as much as Peter Ombler. So what does he see coming for the collective export model, finding another gold, our exposure to China and our future leaders?

Carly Gibbs

As the industry celebrates another record harvest, Tauranga grower, former consultant and industry leader Peter Ombler is reflecting on more than four decades in kiwifruit - an industry he helped steer through defining moments, from the move to a collective export system and the development of the pest-management programme KiwiGreen, to Psa and the emergence of Zespri SunGold™.

Peter was a founding member and second chair of Kiwifruit Vine Health during the Psa outbreak and served as President of New Zealand Kiwifruit Growers Incorporated.

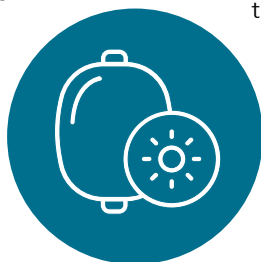
He was appointed a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to the kiwifruit industry in 2013, received Horticulture New Zealand's Bledisloe Cup in 2017 and the Fresh Carriers Hayward Medal in 2026.

Through it all, one principle has guided him.

"Never start at the production end. Start with the consumer and work backwards."

Building a global brand

This year, New Zealand harvested about 225 million trays of kiwifruit - its largest crop on record.



The foundations of that success were laid decades earlier during the boom-and-bust years of the '80s, when exporters undercut one another, and returns tumbled, showing the need for a united approach to selling kiwifruit.

Peter says that experience helped shape the collective export model known as the "single-desk system," under which kiwifruit is marketed offshore through Zespri rather than competing exporters selling against one another.

He remembers produce company Turners & Growers making "a real earnest crack" at the single desk. But he has never doubted that New Zealand is better off selling its kiwifruit collectively than competing against itself overseas.

"As a small country a long way from our markets, we're too far away to be chipping at each other once we get there," he says.

"Look at what's happening in the market this year. Conflict in the Gulf and tariffs have disrupted our sales programme. What would happen under a multiple-exporter model? Someone drops their pants in the market, and the price goes down.

"It all goes on a boat, then it goes to market, and we all hold hands and go together. That is the strength of this industry."

That collective model, Peter argues, also gave the industry the confidence and resources to invest for the long term - helping make kiwifruit one of the country's strongest-performing primary industries.

The Gold3 turning point

Peter sees Gold3 - marketed as Zespri SunGold - as one of the best examples of that investment paying off.

"We would never have had a portfolio of new varieties ready to roll out when Psa hit Hort16A if we hadn't had a breeding programme that produced Gold3. And why did we have a breeding programme that produced Gold3? Because Zespri had guaranteed supply through the single-desk model and could afford to commit the money to a world-class plant breeding programme."

When Psa devastated Hort16A, the gold variety grown at the time, Gold3 was ready to take its place.

Tested by crisis

When the bacterial vine disease Psa swept through orchards in 2010, it threatened livelihoods and family orchards built over generations.

"But I never believed there wasn't a way forward, genuinely," Peter says.

He did, however, learn a harsh reality: "The world can change very quickly."

Peter remembers anxious growers packing The Orchard Church in Te Puke during a meeting at the height of the crisis.

"I remember sitting in the front row thinking, 'Now's my time. Now's the time - growers need a grower.'"

Although he hadn't planned to speak, he walked onto the stage and found a leadership capacity he hadn't known he had.

"I didn't know it existed in me. I had to find it very quickly because I was aware I was in a position where people depended on me."

Psa also reinforced something Peter had long believed - the industry's strength lies in the people close to the vines and the relationships between them.

"Whether we have big corporate growers or mum and pop growers, the family operations naturally have greater control over what they do; they're more likely to have a direct connection with what they're producing and with satisfying the consumer. If we forget ourselves in that space, we're at risk.

"Relationships matter."

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Peter Ombler at home in his orchard in Bay of Plenty

Peter had seen the value of collaboration before. In the '90s, he was involved with KiwiGreen, bringing growers, scientists and consultants together to tackle pest management – the kind of collective thinking he believes the industry will need as it faces its next test.

Facing the next challenge

SunGold transformed the industry, but one day the plant variety rights protecting it will expire.

"There will be a day when it's free for all, and anyone can grow it anywhere, and New Zealand's advantage in that regard will be gone. That's an obvious challenge that is coming."

He says finding another gold won't be easy.

"New varieties are coming, and that's great, but there won't be many that have been like Gold3. That's been a freak."

Peter says its combination of high yields, competitive growing costs and strong consumer demand will be hard to replicate.

"It ticks all the boxes."

For now, growers don't appear nervous. Gold licences sold for \$684,000 a hectare this year, suggesting they remain, as Peter puts it, "extremely confident."

"But it's a challenge coming in the next 10 years," he says.

Yet gold's expiry is only one of the uncertainties ahead. Other threats could come from climate volatility, changing markets or global competition.

"Neither you nor I know exactly what they're going to be. Is it going to be a significant threat from China? It is only one market. Europe is pretty strong these days, and the United States is becoming strong.

"I think it's quite appropriate that we should be reducing our exposure to China. There's evidence that other industries which have become overexposed to China have suffered the consequences of that. If you become too dependent on any market, you're at risk."

Whatever form the next challenge takes, Peter keeps coming back to the consumer. That thinking, he says, should also guide Zespri's decision on whether to commercialise Green146, a potential complement to Hayward.

"There has to be a compelling enough reason for me to put a chainsaw through perfectly good vines and start again. The focus must be on delivering a better eating experience for the consumer."

Making those decisions well, Peter believes, ultimately comes down to leadership. Asked what matters most in a leader, Peter doesn't hesitate.

"Integrity. More than anything, integrity."

As orchard values rise and corporate investment grows, he believes preserving the industry's collaborative culture will require "exceptional" leadership.

The collective export model itself cannot be taken for granted.

"We are, quite literally, a stroke of a pen away from that disappearing in Wellington at any time."

Growing his own way

Despite decades in boardrooms, he has never lost his connection with growing.

After studying at Otago and Lincoln universities and spending seven months in Canada on an agricultural exchange, he moved to Bay of Plenty to forge his own path.

“

The focus must be on delivering a better eating experience for the consumer

He started on minimum wage in the kiwifruit industry and met his future wife, Gwen, at Trevelyan's packhouse.

Today, he is still hands-on among their green and gold vines.

"As I've dropped off various roles, I've come back to growing. I enjoy plants. I notice things in plants. I notice nature."

His advice to younger growers is simple.

"If you've chosen to grow, you're a grower. Do it and do it well."

After four decades of change, Peter has few illusions about the challenges still to come – but plenty of faith in the industry's ability to meet them.

"One thing I do know," he says. "We'll deal with it." ●



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EXCEPTIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS HONoured IN 2026 HORTICULTURE INDUSTRY AWARDS

Five awards were announced at the New Zealand Horticulture Conference Industry Awards and Gala Dinner in Wellington on 29 July. The awards were presented in recognition of outstanding contributions to commercial fruit and vegetable growing in New Zealand.



**PETER
REYNOLDS**

**HORTICULTURE
BLEDISLOE CUP**

The Horticulture Bledisloe Cup, the premium industry award in the horticulture industry, was awarded to Pukekohe-based grower Peter Reynolds of TA Reynolds Ltd. Peter has made a significant and lasting contribution to New Zealand horticulture through decades of leadership in vegetable growing. He has championed sustainable farming practices, improving soil health, reducing environmental impact and strengthening grower capability.



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**THE PRESIDENT'S
TROPHY**

The President's Trophy, which aims to celebrate and develop inspiring leadership within the horticulture industry, was presented to Ben Smith, general manager at T&G. A former Young Grower of the Year and Young Horticulturist of the Year, Ben's career reflects the full pathway from emerging talent to industry leader, driving excellence in growing systems and sustainable production.



**KIWIFRUIT POSTHARVEST
INDUSTRY REFRIGERANT
DECARBONISATION PROJECT**

FMG SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION AWARD

The FMG Sustainable Innovation Award was presented to the steering group for the Kiwifruit Postharvest Industry Refrigerant Decarbonisation project, which tackles the challenge of transitioning away from high global warming refrigerants and ageing infrastructure.

The steering group is pictured above from left: Les Dimond (G4 Kiwi Supply), Sarah Lei (Trevelyan's), Lloyd Franks (Seeka), Ollie Hoare (HumePack). The award was presented by FMG chief marketing officer Pete Frizzell (right).



Backed by combined funding from industry and the Ministry for Primary Industries' Primary Sector Growth Fund, the project is helping the kiwifruit industry transition away from high-emission refrigerants.

The collaborative initiative between Bay of Plenty postharvest operators was launched in 2024, and has already delivered pilot upgrades across 29 systems, cutting potential emissions by more than 17,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent.

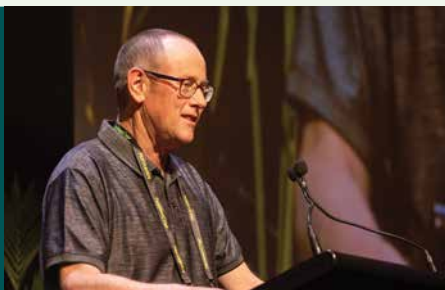
**DR RICHARD
BEDFORD****MANAAKI AWARD**

The Manaaki Award sponsored by Mr Apple was awarded to Dr Richard Bedford in recognition of his exceptional and sustained contribution to the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme since its inception.

Mr Apple head of RSE programme, Belinda Brans, presented the award, recognising his significant contribution to the RSE scheme over nearly 20 years.

Through his research, leadership and advocacy and ability to translate complex data into practical insights, he has supported informed decision-making, continuous improvement and strengthened outcomes for workers, businesses and communities.

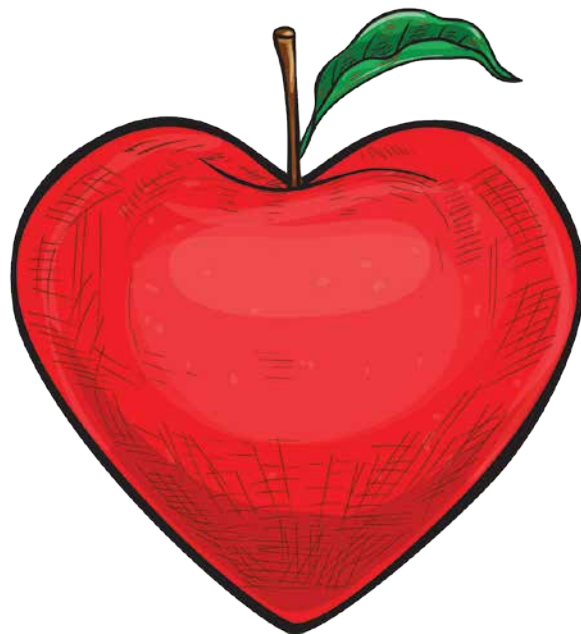
His work has also articulated the "triple win" model, highlighting the benefits of the scheme for employers, Pacific workers and communities, and New Zealand's economy.

**DR MIKE
CURRIE****INDUSTRY
SERVICE AWARD**

The Industry Service Award went to Dr Mike Currie, who leads the stage 2 new cultivar programme at the Kiwifruit Breeding Centre. Dr Currie has made an outstanding contribution to the New Zealand kiwifruit industry over more than 30 years. His applied science has consistently improved orchard productivity, fruit quality and grower profitability, with innovations widely adopted across New Zealand and international growing systems. He has played a key role in developing practical tools such as girdling, as well as advancing new cultivars and supporting programmes like Taste Zespri. ●



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PIC-PLUS FUMIGATION IN STONE FRUIT ORCHARDS

A Pic-Plus Fumigation trial was conducted in a replanted block within a stone fruit orchard located in Bay View, Hawke's Bay. The trial started in April 2025 and included a Soil Microbiome assessment and a Crop assessment. The objectives of the trial were to answer the following questions:

Does Pic-Plus improve stone fruit early tree growth?

The previous orchard was planted with 5 meters row spacing, while the redeveloped block was planted with

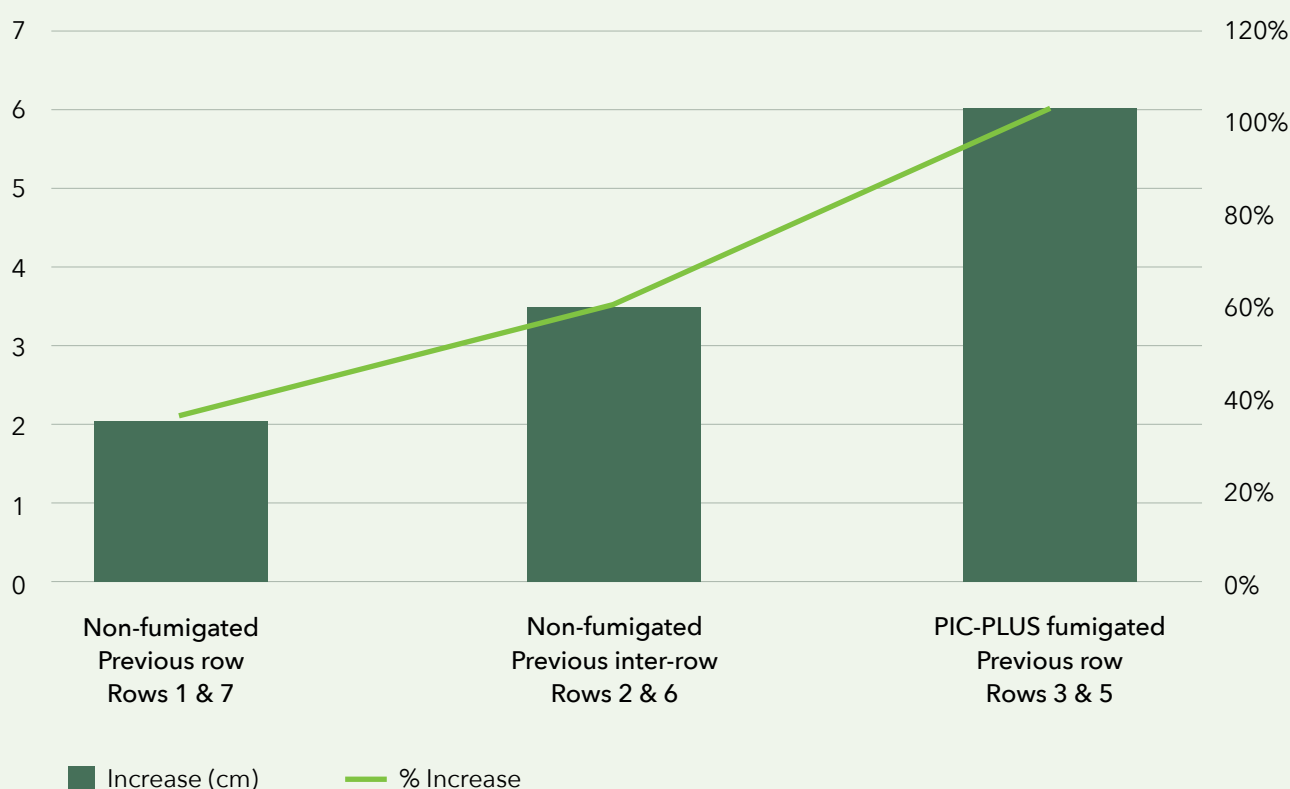
2.5 meters row spacing. The crop planted was Peach, variety Tatura Belle (Golden Belle) grafted onto GQ rootstock. The parameter evaluated was **trunk circumference** measured 20 cm above the graft union on 60 plants in **untreated rows** (corresponding to the **previous orchard rows**), 60 plants in **untreated rows** (corresponding to the **previous orchard inter-row spacing**) and 60 plants in **Pic-Plus fumigated rows** (corresponding to the **previous orchard rows**). The same plants were assessed a few days after planting, in July 2025 and one year later, in June 2026. The difference between the two assessments represents the increase in trunk circumference over the first year after planting.

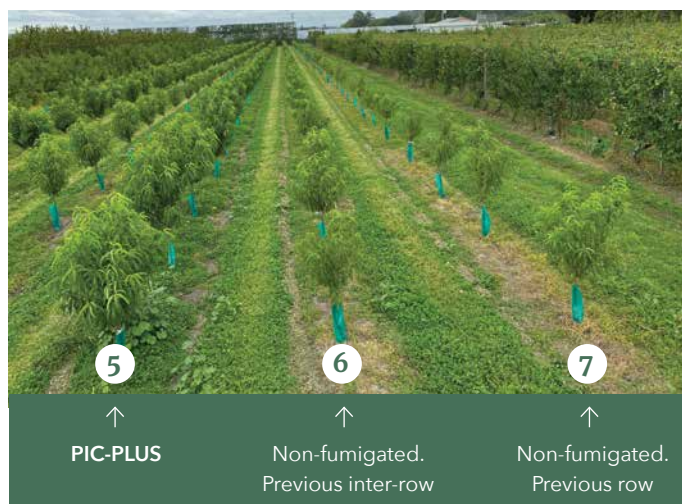
Trees planted in Pic-Plus fumigated rows showed an additional 2.5 cm increase in trunk circumference, equivalent to **72% greater growth** than trees planted in untreated rows (previous inter-row).

Trees planted in Pic-Plus fumigated rows showed an additional 4 cm increase in trunk circumference, equivalent to **194% greater growth** than trees planted in untreated rows (previous rows).

These results indicate that Pic-Plus fumigation significantly improved early tree growth.

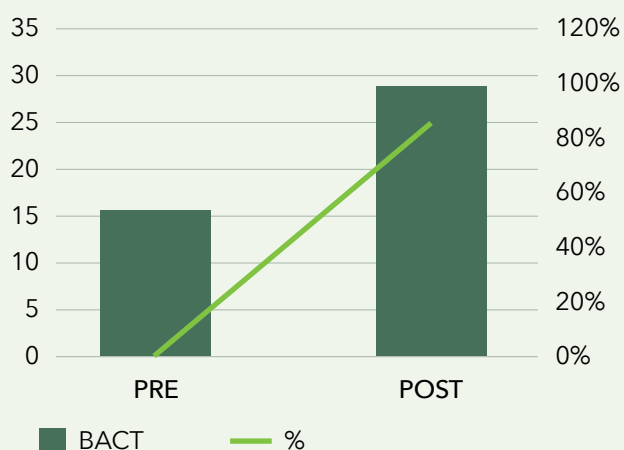
AVERAGE INCREASE IN TRUNK CIRCUMFERENCE FROM 2025 TO 2026





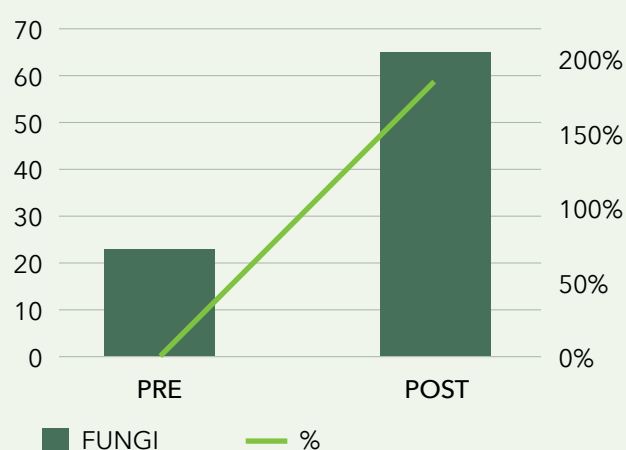
February 2026 showing fumigated and non-fumigated inter row and previous row Tatura Belle peaches

BENEFICIAL BACTERIA ABUNDANCE SHIFTS IN THE SOIL MICROBIOME FROM PRE- TO POST-FUMIGATION



Genera included: *Sphingomonas*, *Bacillus*, *Pedobacter*, *Flavobacterium*, *Gemmatimonas*, *Paenibacillus*, *Devosia*, *Pseudomonas*, *Mucilaginibacter*, etc.

BENEFICIAL FUNGI ABUNDANCE SHIFTS IN THE SOIL MICROBIOME FROM PRE- TO POST-FUMIGATION



Genera included: *Glomus*, *Puureocillium*, *Trichoderma*, *Aspergillus*, *Mucor*, *Penicillium*, *Mortierella*, *Metarhizium*

Does Pic-Plus affect beneficial soil microorganisms?

A Soil Microbiome assessment was conducted **before** and **after** fumigation. Soil samples were collected and submitted to Biome Makers for microbiome analysis. The abundance of the most representative **beneficial bacteria** **increased** by more than **80%**, while the abundance of the most representative **beneficial fungi** **increased** by **180%** following Pic-Plus fumigation. Beneficial soil microorganisms included genera such as *Trichoderma*, *Bacillus*, *Pseudomonas* and others. These results indicate that Pic-Plus fumigant not only controls soil-borne pests but also increases the abundance of beneficial soil microorganisms following fumigation. ●

The reports of Soil Microbiome and Crop assessment are available upon request.

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6 Waitane Place, Onekawa, Napier, New Zealand





FOOD SAFETY: WHEN IT GOES WRONG, IT REALLY GOES WRONG

How is the risk of Cyclospora, the parasite causing a serious outbreak in the United States, evaluated in New Zealand and how does research in New Zealand contribute to our gold standard food safety reputation?

Glenda Lewis : for the NZ Food Safety Science & Research Centre

'Lettucegate,' social media wits were quick to label it. One of the biggest food poisoning outbreaks in the United States has been linked to iceberg lettuce, contaminated by the microscopic parasite Cyclospora.

It has been deduced, but not confirmed, that the (bagged, shredded) lettuce came from Mexico, a grower that supplies a ubiquitous United States-owned fast-food chain. As at mid-August, there have been almost 11,000 reported cases of cyclosporiasis estimated to be attributed to this source, spread across 47 of the 50 States, and the outbreak is by no means over; two people with underlying conditions



have died. *Food Safety News* reports that some United Kingdom nationals returning from holidays in Mexico and the United States have fallen sick with cyclosporiasis.

It should be noted that food safety surveillance in the States had reduced as part of widespread cuts to government spending under the second Trump administration. The savings are likely less than one percent of the cost of the outbreak.

Here in New Zealand, this calamitous outbreak certainly quickened the pulse of our fresh food industry – champion of the beloved iceberg lettuce we grew up with, and which seems to have experienced a recent surge in popularity.

1950s and 60s cooks traditionally shredded their iceberg lettuce finely and served it with Highlander condensed milk dressing.

Fears were soon calmed by assurances that the risk of such an outbreak here is very low for several reasons. Damien Farrelly of the Fresh Produce Safety Centre Australia and New Zealand issued an advisory to that effect to stakeholders. Speed was important to get ahead of social media misinformation that could put consumers off buying lettuce and other fresh produce in New Zealand.

Chief scientist of the NZ Food Safety Science & Research Centre (NZFSSRC), Distinguished Professor Phil Bremer, knew just who to go to for assessment of any future risk from Cyclospora. His Otago University colleague, Bruce Russell, is one of the few researchers in New Zealand working across the full range of human apicomplexan parasites, from malaria to Cryptosporidium, Toxoplasma and Cyclospora.

Cyclospora, Bruce explains, belongs to the same broad group (the phylum apicomplexa) as two parasites better known in New Zealand: Cryptosporidia and Toxoplasma. All three produce hardened spore-like bodies called oocysts as part of their lifecycle. A single infected person can shed millions of these tiny oocysts, each containing infectious

COMMON CYCLOSPORIASIS SYMPTOMS

Watery diarrhoea	Bloating
Loss of appetite	Increased gas
Weight loss	Nausea
Cramping	Fatigue

sporozoites – four in Cyclospora's case. The sporozoites are only released once the oocyst is swallowed and reaches the digestive tract, emerging in the small intestine. Sporozoites are not released spontaneously in the environment.

Oocysts, and the parasites themselves, are tough. They cannot be destroyed by heat, cold, chlorine or other sanitisers, and washing is only partly effective. If untreated wastewater from humans contaminates water supplies, the oocysts can be ingested via drinking water or oocysts can transfer to food via contaminated water used in production (e.g. irrigation) or post-harvest processing (e.g. washing). Delicate lettuce leaves can easily be damaged by too much

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Otago University
researcher
Bruce Russell



Damien Farrelly of
the Fresh Produce
Safety Centre
Australia and
New Zealand



Chief scientist
of the NZ Food Safety
Science & Research
Centre, Distinguished
Professor
Phil Bremer

water pressure. There is obviously less risk with whole lettuces where the outer leaves are removed. The suspect lettuce in the United States was shredded, which could have helped spread contamination more evenly through the lot – remember lettuce is yet to be confirmed as the source of the outbreak.

Hence, the *only* way to guard against disease is to prevent the produce from becoming contaminated by using appropriate water for irrigation and processing, and ensuring good worker hygiene.

Importantly, Bruce says that *Cyclospora* is distinct from *Cryptosporidia* and *Toxoplasma* in that it only infects humans and so is only shed in human faeces, unlike the other two species which can infect a wide range of animal species and thus become more widely spread through the environment. And unlike *Cryptosporidia*, which are immediately infectious, *Cyclospora* oocysts need to 'mature' in the right conditions – at between 22 to 32°C for at least a week before they can become infectious. But the parasites are incredibly infectious once mature. Just one viable oocyst is needed to cause infection.

The obvious implication is that the lettuce associated with the United States outbreak somehow came into contact with human faeces-contaminated water or equipment, or workers who had not followed hygiene protocols. All things considered, including our excellent food regulation systems, we can indeed be confident that New Zealand is an unfriendly host for any *Cyclospora* that gets into the environment here.

Phil nevertheless warns growers of the dangers of complacency. "Certainly, the risk of a cyclosporiasis outbreak is negligible here, but it is still important to follow good hygienic practices to protect consumers from the effects of other pathogens that can lurk in contaminated water."

Bruce reports that New Zealand has three times the rate of cryptosporidiosis in the United States, and eight times that of the United Kingdom. It's one of New Zealand's top five foodborne diseases. While the main transmission pathways for cryptosporidiosis in New Zealand are contaminated water or, direct contact with infected animals or an infected person, foodborne spread is always a possibility if produce comes into contact with contaminated water.

Disease prevention with these parasites all boils down to following good hygiene protocols. We know them very well, but it's a matter of ensuring everyone sticks to the rules. And that is why the attention of food safety practitioners has turned to the science of human behaviour, and how to incentivise a strong food safety culture.

Phil says, "We know plenty about the behaviour of pathogens, but we can't always be sure what people are doing when no one is watching and there's pressure to get an order out the door."

“

Disease prevention with these parasites all boils down to following good hygiene protocols

The NZFSSRC's role is to identify research gaps in collaboration with industry and commission and manage the research process through its national network of scientists and social scientists. The Fresh Produce Safety Centre helps to interpret what's needed and translates research findings into practical advice for growers, industry, retailers and food safety professionals. The food safety community is increasingly tight-knit.

Phil says, "It's not too grand a claim to say that the New Zealand economy relies absolutely on our gold standard food safety reputation." ●



Lauren Wilcox (left) and Adrienne Gedy - new research conducted for Women in Horticulture looked at pathways to governance roles

WOMEN ASPIRE TO GOVERN, BUT CAN THEY SEE THE WAY IN?

Women working in horticulture are telling us they want to be involved in governance. The question is not whether the ambition exists, but whether the industry is creating the visibility, development, networks and pathways that can turn that ambition into opportunity.

Kate Gear : Research manager, Scarlatti and Stephanie Wrathall, project manager Women in Horticulture

New Women in Horticulture research conducted for United Fresh NZ Inc. was carried out by independent research agency Scarlatti, based on 244 survey responses and 34 in-depth interviews with women and men across the horticulture industry. The findings point to a sizeable, untapped pipeline. Almost a third (32 percent) of surveyed women said they would like to be on a board. Yet only 9 percent had held a governance role, compared to 41 percent of men surveyed.

For the women who are ready for governance, the pathway isn't always clear. For example, one woman said, "I'm interested in moving into a governance role, but I don't know how to go about finding these roles." For

other women, having the opportunity to gain experience, networks and support that help them become governance-ready would be a beneficial opportunity.

“

32 percent of surveyed women said they would like to be on a board

However, the wider research suggests that access to those opportunities may also not be equal. Eighty percent of women reported experiencing gender-related challenges

or discrimination. The most common challenge was having to earn respect and be taken seriously in ways that men do not. Women described needing to be more prepared, defend their ideas more often and repeatedly prove their capability. This could be a sizeable barrier for women progressing towards governance. Governance appointments rarely begin with an out-of-the-blue application. Pathways are built over time through leadership experience, development opportunities, relationships and visibility. For someone already inside the right networks, those steps can feel natural. For someone outside them, they can be much harder to see and access.

One woman described how “a lot of development happens through a handshake or through networks.” If women are having to work harder to establish their credibility in the first place, it raises an important question – are they also getting the same invitations, introductions, encouragement and opportunities to build the experience that eventually leads to governance?

So perhaps the question for the industry is not simply, “Where are the women?” It is: “Are we making it equally possible for women to walk the governance pathway?”



Kate Gear from Scarlatti shared the research findings at the conference

As an organisation, it means promoting governance vacancies on multiple well-known channels and providing women with opportunities to understand what being on a board involves and what skills and experience they need to build. It’s also about showing women how they can develop these skills and experience, which can be done by providing them access to training, mentoring and networks.

Women also need individuals already around governance tables to share what they know and actively open doors. This can start small. Both men and women in governance could invite women from the sector for coffee and talk about governance, advise on how to land a first role, make an introduction or share what things they wish they had known five years earlier.

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

Review of Horticulture Qualifications



**Food
and Fibre**
Industry Skills Board

WHAT ARE WE DOING

The Food and Fibre Industry Skills Board (FFISB) is reviewing horticulture qualifications, micro-credentials and standards to ensure they are relevant, flexible and aligned with current and future sector needs.

WHY IT MATTERS

Industry feedback indicates that some qualifications no longer meet workforce needs. This review will update qualifications and standards due for review, and strengthen flexible, stackable pathways for learners and employers.

WHEN

JULY 2026

MARCH 2028

MAIN FOCUS:

Priority workforce and training needs

Pathways into higher-level roles and year-round employment

How seasonality affects training and qualification uptake.

Fit-for-purpose qualification structures

How micro-credentials could provide flexible entry and exit points

Whether transferable core skills at Levels 3 and 4 are feasible

GET INVOLVED

FFISB is seeking input from:

- Industry representatives
- Employers
- Peak bodies
- Education and training providers
- Learners



**REGISTER YOUR
INTEREST TODAY**

HAVE YOUR SAY



EXPRESSIONS CLOSE:
30 September 2026



SUBMIT YOUR EXPRESSIONS HERE:
foodandfibreisb.nz/horticulture-review



QUESTIONS?
qualifications@foodandfibreisb.nz



Jenny-May Clarkson shared practical tools for building confidence, managing pressure and making an impact at the Women in Horticulture workshop

At an industry level, those individual actions can be made easier by designing clear governance pathways, making development opportunities more visible to organisations and individuals, facilitating networking and mentoring events, and providing a central place where governance opportunities can be found.

“

Eighty percent of women reported experiencing gender-related challenges or discrimination. The most common challenge was having to earn respect and be taken seriously in ways that men do not

This isn't about handing governance positions to women simply to improve gender ratios. It is about making sure that women with the aspiration and potential to contribute have a fair opportunity to find their way into governance.

The ambition is there. The opportunity is to help more women turn that ambition into a seat at the governance table. ●



CONFERENCE WORKSHOP

The New Zealand Horticulture Conference hosted the well-attended Women in Horticulture workshop in July. This provided an opportunity to share the research findings with people from across the industry. Women appreciated seeing their experiences reflected in the research and felt it highlighted the importance of better understanding the barriers they face and where more support is needed. Jenny-May Clarkson then shared practical tools for building confidence, managing pressure and making an impact, followed by an opportunity to connect and strengthen relationships across the industry.

To learn more about the research and to join Women in Horticulture, visit unitedfresh.co.nz or scan the QR code.



A GENERATIONAL CHANGE TO RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

More than six years after government began its review of the Resource Management Act, a marathon effort to improve outcomes for growers may be on the final stretch. While it appears that Government has taken on board a lot of HortNZ's feedback (presented on behalf of growers), HortNZ continues to advocate for further improvements. Here, the HortNZ Policy team break down what growers need to know.

Matt Watson, HortNZ environmental policy advisor and Charlotte Wright, HortNZ senior environmental policy advisor



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 The Government has listened to growers' significant concerns raised in January; however, issues remain.
- 2 Consultation on national policy direction, which will provide more detail on how the Bills will be operationalised, will start soon.
- 3 Review your upcoming consent expiry dates and find out about transitional arrangements to the new system.

The way our cities, land and water are managed is undergoing its most significant change since 1991. The Government is proposing to replace the current Resource Management Act (RMA) with the Natural Environment Act and the Planning Act before the upcoming election in November. This will fundamentally re-shape the plans, rules and regulations that growers have to work within across New Zealand.

The changes are a reflection that resource management in New Zealand has long been a particularly challenging regulatory landscape, with the RMA criticised for confusing and inconsistent rules, high consenting costs, and failing to achieve desirable environmental outcomes.

Together, the intent of the new Bills is to simplify resource management, reduce consenting costs and delays, and improve environmental outcomes.

HortNZ has worked alongside a large number of growers and grower bodies throughout the long overdue reform process to highlight their concerns, and to advocate for a system that recognises horticulture as a key contributor to New Zealand's economic prosperity and regional wellbeing.

What has changed

We will now have two pieces of legislation instead of one. The Natural Environment Bill provides for the use of natural resources and the protection and enhancement of the natural environment, with the Planning Bill responsible for regulating the use, development and enjoyment of land.

The Bills establish a planning hierarchy, with national direction informing regional plans and consenting decisions (see figure 1). The intent is for the new Bills to set stronger direction for local government through national policy instruments. This differs from the existing system, which has produced a significant number of regional and district plans, each with its own unique rules.

HortNZ's position on the Bills

The first iteration of the Bills was released in December 2025. HortNZ made submissions in January 2026 on behalf of growers. These submissions supported the Government's intent of implementing a simpler, less expensive and less time-consuming system, which also achieves better outcomes for communities, development and the environment, but raised concern that this intent was not reflected in the wording of the Bills.

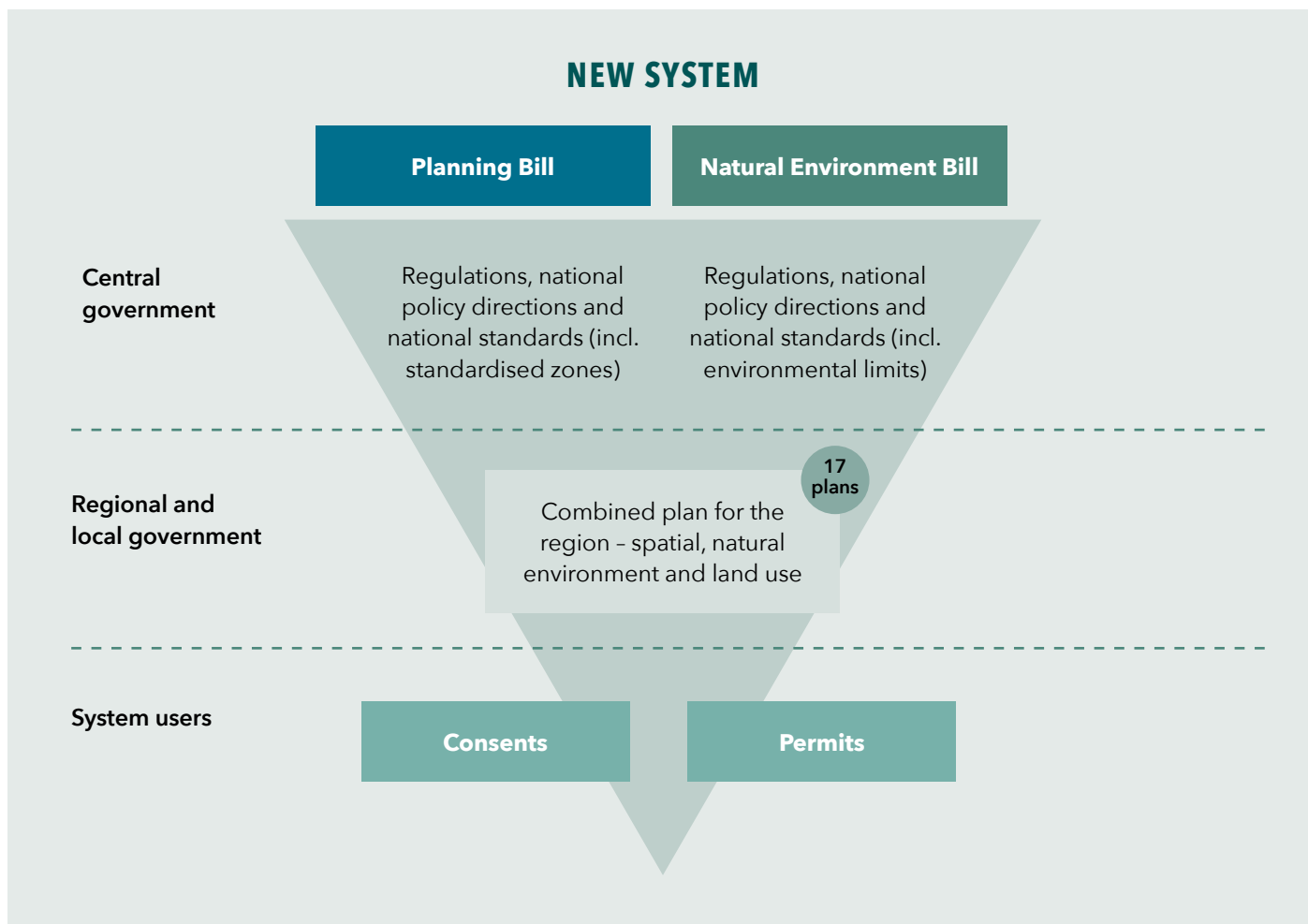


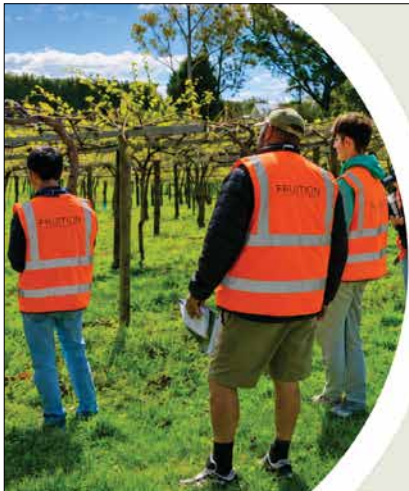
Figure 1: The new planning system

While the enactment of the Bills represents a huge milestone in meaningful resource management reform, we won't know all the details until national policy direction such as Regulations have been put in place.

HortNZ will continue engaging with Ministers, officials and the wider primary sector over the coming weeks to seek

further changes and clarify how the new system will operate for growers.

We will also continue advocating for a National Policy Statement to make commercial vegetable production a permitted activity. We hope to see this addressed in secondary legislation later this year.



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Changes since HortNZ's submissions

Since the Bills were first introduced in December 2025, HortNZ has worked to ensure the Government understands the significant changes needed to make the new system easier and less expensive for growers and farmers, with fewer consents and better conditions for development.

On 20 July 2026, the Environment Select Committee reported to Parliament on the Bills, which included recommended changes. HortNZ has been working through the Committee's report and the revised Bills to understand the response to HortNZ's submissions, and what the recommended changes mean for growers.

HortNZ sees several positive changes that address some of the key concerns raised by growers, including recognition of food and fibre production as a goal of the Natural Environment Bill, reinstatement of controlled activity status for consent applications, and removal of the proposed market-based water allocation system. However, important issues remain unresolved, particularly management of the effects of reverse sensitivity, protected access to rootstock survival water, and requirements for food production and rural environment matters to be considered in spatial planning.

“

The intent of the new Bills is to simplify resource management, reduce consenting costs and delays and improve environmental outcomes

It will be important to get these settings right if we are to achieve the ambitious goal of doubling the farmgate value of horticulture production by 2035, as set out in the Aotearoa Horticulture Action Plan.

How the Bills will affect key issues of importance to growers

Water allocation

With over 90 percent of horticultural crops being produced under irrigation, reliable access to water at the right time of year and in the right volumes is essential for production.

While the inclusion of food and fibre production as a goal of the Natural Environment Bill, the removal of a market-based water allocation system, and the expansion of the definition of 'long-lived infrastructure' to mean that a minimum 35-year duration will apply to permits for water infrastructure are encouraging, there are still improvements to be made.

Of note, HortNZ has sought the ability for growers to access fresh water to prevent the loss of horticultural crops (rootstock survival), including during times of low flow. The Natural Environment Bill does not yet afford the same protection to rootstock survival water as some other critical uses, such as accessing stock drinking water.

The costs and time involved in obtaining consent

The Bills seek to lessen the costs and time involved in obtaining consents and permits by standardising their requirements.

Under the RMA, councils have had a high degree of control over the content of their regional and district policies, plans and consenting requirements. Significant variation in consenting and compliance requirements across the country has resulted in grower confusion and high administration costs, with over 100 regional and district plans, each with different objectives, policies, rules and assessment criteria.

By contrast, the Bills limit this to 17 regionally combined plans, with consents and permits being assessed against four standardised activity types. This is expected to lead to less confusion around planning rules, lower administrative costs, and more consistency in consent and permit allocations.

Requirements on growers to improve land-use practices

The RMA was amended in 2025 to allow activities to be permitted or get consents in overallocated catchments with standards in place to ensure that those activities would reduce their environmental impacts over reasonable timeframes.

HortNZ and others have sought an amendment to the Bills to reflect the 2025 RMA amendment. This would acknowledge that growers need a reasonable transition time to implement environmental improvements under Freshwater Farm Plans.

We have seen the Government respond to this issue in amendment papers released in late August. Amendments to the Bills will enable councils to permit or consent activities in overallocated catchments through the transition period to the new system, as long as there are requirements to reduce effects over time.

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How councils are required to plan for and enable land use

One goal of the Planning Bill is to encourage effective land use in urban and rural areas. This is, in part, achieved through regional spatial plans which provide strategic regional land-use direction for periods of at least 30 years.

However, one issue with the Planning Bill is that it requires spatial plans to be developed before resource limits are set under natural environment plans. HortNZ has highlighted the problematic nature of this timing and how this may impact the use of productive land. Zoning land as highly productive or setting it aside for food production without first also enabling appropriate water allocation and discharge is a lost opportunity.

What happens next?

The Bills are currently before Parliament and are approaching their final stages. HortNZ continues to advocate for changes before the legislation is enacted and will remain involved in the development of national policy direction. Illustrative policy direction is due to be announced for public feedback this month, with formal consultation to follow early in 2027.

What should growers do now?

The Government expects the new system to be fully operational by 2029, with transitional arrangements applying in the meantime. Growers should review upcoming consent expiry dates and seek professional advice where needed.

Most consents expiring before 31 December 2027 will either be automatically extended or deemed granted until 31 December 2027, subject to certain exceptions for long-term water consents. Your council can provide clarification on transitional consent expiry dates.

HortNZ acknowledges the challenges that growers in certain regions are facing with respect to proposed plan changes in the interim, and invites growers from the Hawke's Bay, Horizons and Waikato regions to contact HortNZ senior environmental policy advisor Leanne Roberts for further information: leanne.roberts@hortnz.co.nz ●

For the latest updates, keep an eye on HortNZ's weekly newsletter and the HortNZ LinkedIn page.



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Coastal Farm 103ha - dairy or horticulture

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TAX REVENUE ALERT ISSUED ON HORTICULTURE

In August Inland Revenue issued a 'Revenue Alert' indicating their concern about a number of practices in the horticultural sector. We asked Inland Revenue to explain what employers can expect from an increased focus on horticulture.

Inland Revenue has issued a Revenue Alert outlining an increased focus on behaviours and arrangements that may result in tax obligations not being met. While Inland Revenue recognises that most horticulture businesses work hard to meet their tax obligations, this action is intended to help maintain a level playing field and support voluntary compliance.

HortNZ chief executive Kate Scott says, "We support this action and any approach that promotes compliance and protects workers, growers and the integrity of the tax system."

“

The focus remains on supporting those who are doing the right thing

"We know that most growers work hard to do the right thing and operate responsibly in a complex regulatory environment. Where poor practice occurs, it should not be tolerated. Non-compliance undermines workers, compliant businesses and confidence in our sector."

Increasing scrutiny and activity

Inland Revenue is continuing to increase their level of scrutiny and compliance activity across parts of the horticulture sector. This includes monitoring emerging risks, responding to intelligence, and engaging with businesses where concerns are identified. The focus remains on supporting those who are doing the right thing, while addressing behaviours that may undermine the integrity of the tax system.

The Alert includes workers being paid in cash, complex contracting arrangements being used to obscure what's really going on, and obligations under the schedular payments rules not being met.

"While employer compliance is already an established area of focus for Inland Revenue, an increased focus means employers may notice greater engagement from us," says Helen Mitchell, Inland Revenue external relationship manager. "This could include a mix of education, support and compliance activities, with a broader reach across industries and regions to help ensure employers are meeting their obligations." ●



NEW ENTRANTS REMAIN A FOCUS

To help ensure new entrants get their tax obligations right from the start, Inland Revenue is applying increased scrutiny to new entrants operating within the sector. This includes reviewing GST registrations and undertaking educational visits to recipients of Compliance Assessment Verifications. Early engagement helps ensure businesses understand their obligations from the outset and reduces the risk of issues arising later.



WITHHOLDING TAX OBLIGATIONS

Inland Revenue encourages businesses to regularly review their withholding tax (WT) arrangements and ensure all documentation held on file for contractors is accurate and up to date. Keeping records current helps ensure the correct amount of tax is deducted and reduces the likelihood of issues arising during reviews or audits.



PREScribed WITHHOLDING RATES

Inland Revenue continues collecting debt and helping customers to meet their obligations.

They may set prescribed withholding rates (PWRs) when a contractor has not met their tax obligations. This helps to make sure that contractors do not end up with ongoing tax debt and ensures that existing liabilities are met.

A prescribed rate of schedular tax plus a prescribed percentage is to be deducted from payments to contractors. The combined rate can be up to 50 percent of the payment. The prescribed rate of schedular tax applicable to the horticulture sector notices is 9 percent and the prescribed percentage rate will generally be either 21 percent or 31 percent.

The payer is required to deduct the prescribed rate of schedular tax amount and declare it on their employment information as normal, and also deduct and pay the prescribed percentage to Inland Revenue.



KNOW WHO YOU ARE DEALING WITH

Inland Revenue encourages businesses to undertake appropriate due diligence, including taking reasonable steps to verify the identity and authority of the people they are dealing with. Before entering into arrangements, ensure the person acting on behalf of an entity is authorised to do so.

A common warning sign is where the same individual appears to be acting on behalf of a succession of different entities. This may indicate elevated risk and should prompt additional due diligence. Taking time to understand who is providing services, and who has authority to act, can help protect your business from unintended tax and compliance risks.



NEED HELP?

Businesses are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the Alert and seek advice if they are unsure of their obligations.



To read the full Revenue Alert (RA 26/02), visit www.taxtechnical.ird.govt.nz/revenue-alerts/ or scan the QR code.

If you're unsure about your tax obligations or want to check that your arrangements are compliant, Inland Revenue's website contains a range of guidance and self-service tools.



Get it right. Seeking advice early can help avoid problems later and supports a fair and sustainable horticulture sector for everyone.
ird.govt.nz/get-it-right



Seminars and business advice. If you need assistance, you can also request an advisory visit or attend a seminar.
ird.govt.nz/contact-us/general/seminars-and-business-advice

REVOLUTIONARY NEW KIWIFRUIT KLIMA

In July 2026 a Demo Day was held at a Te Puke kiwifruit orchard to demonstrate the new Kiwifruit KLIMA. The new pruning machine was described as a 'game changer' by some of the attendees, which included representatives from Prospa, Baygold and Southern Cross Horticulture who were able to view the new Kiwifruit KLIMA in action!

ECO TRELLIS® AND KLIMA

Four years ago, pioneers of the ECO TRELLIS® system had an idea to utilise the KLIMA Cane-Pruning machine technology, typically used in vineyards, within a kiwifruit orchard.

Pruning is a large annual cost to kiwifruit growers and the concept of a Kiwifruit KLIMA pruning machine represents a significant potential cost-saving opportunity for the industry.

“

**The new pruning machine
was described as a 'game changer'**

THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The ECO TRELLIS Research & Development (R&D) team needed to set up a trial block to allow for stripping out and mulching canes, after simple pruning cuts had been done to prove their theory.

It all started with the purchase of a vineyard style KLIMA Gen 2 cane stripper and a new tractor unit that could satisfy the constraints of a kiwifruit orchard; the low working height, a safety cab and enough oil flow to power the KLIMA.

At the same time a trellising system was created to allow the down row wires to be released then passed through the KLIMA head unit to strip out and mulch the canes, as for a vineyard.

A trial orchard was identified and converted to a full tubular steel system with a teepee configuration.



Kiwifruit KLIMA at work in the vines



Demo Day at the Te Puke Kiwifruit Orchard

Based on the concept used for vineyards, the greatest challenge for the ECO TRELLIS team was to hold the KLIMA unit in a horizontal plane rather than the vertical use for wine growers. The reconfiguring of the KLIMA was completed by the highly skilled ECO TRELLIS engineers during the R&D project.



The ECO TRELLIS team at Demo Day

The other challenge for the ECO TRELLIS team was the short time window to field test at the Te Puke orchard site, typically only a few days a year due to the pruning window allowed and also requiring ideal weather conditions.

Several options for the trellising and the KLIMA were trialled over the four years, with patent pending releasable wire holders installed in the final trial to allow for under slung wires to be positioned, along with some minor additional modifications to the Kiwifruit KLIMA.

The end result is a revolutionary working option for kiwifruit growers.

NEXT STEPS

ECO TRELLIS will work with the kiwifruit industry to progress the concept to a wider commercial trial for both new plantings as well as retrofitting existing orchards. This will involve adaptability to different kiwifruit growing styles, working with the industry on growing methods that will enhance the use of the KLIMA. ●

For further information contact Gareth Gardiner:

☎ 021 222 4424

✉ gg@nztm.co or sales@ecotrellis.com

ECO TRELLIS
HORTICULTURAL SOLUTIONS

KLIMA

View the Kiwifruit KLIMA in action at www.ecobeam.co.nz



Using drones, growers can potentially react more quickly to weather forecasts and disease risk indicators

MOVING TOWARD MORE RISK-BASED SPRAYING **FOR BLACK SPOT**

Risk-based spraying is part of integrated pest management, but how can growers best balance the risk and rewards for high impact and easily spread disease like black spot? Crop protection experts Dr David Manktelow, Dr Rob Beresford and Dr Jim Walker weigh in on the potential opportunities for growers to improve yield and save money.

James Hefffield : HortPlus

Better informed spray decisions can decrease inoculum pressure, slow the development of fungicide resistance, and reduce the incidence of plant disease. This is leading more growers to consider approaches such as risk-based spraying, with the goals of better protecting their crops with more effective disease control, and potential cost savings running into thousands of dollars a year.

How is technology changing the equation?

Plant pathologist Dr David Manktelow says there is “100 percent” an opportunity for apple growers to optimise their spraying by making better use of data and new technology.

He says digital platforms like the MetWatch crop protection portal by HortPlus can present hour-by-hour risk forecasts for a wide range of plant diseases, including black spot,

based on current environmental conditions and forecast weather. By coupling this with information about ideal spray timing, based on near-real-time wind conditions, apple growers can significantly improve the ways they spray.

He says drones are also having an impact by allowing growers to react more quickly to current weather conditions and disease risk indicators, potentially improving their capacity to spray at precisely the right times to maximise crop protection and avoid wastage.

Responsive spraying in this way in a dry season has the potential to deliver highly effective disease control in a crop like apples with significant reductions in fungicide use compared to current practices.

"Many growers have trapped themselves into intensive 'no gaps' fungicide spray programmes because there is zero export market tolerance for some key diseases.

"It's true that loss of fruit quality and potentially market access is a real financial blow, but loss of chemistry to resistance is a major concern and cost. There are lots of good things that can come out of spraying only when it's actually required."

When adopting an integrated disease management strategy, it was essential to avoid relying solely on fungicides for disease control, David says. Sanitation practices that remove or reduce inoculum pressure could take the pressure off fungicides by reducing the risk of successful infections and slowing pathogen resistance development. Regular and effective orchard inspections to gauge current inoculum load were also vital.

This need for a considered approach to disease management, coupling risk forecasting with inspections and in-season data on inoculum management and spray applications, is echoed by plant disease epidemiologist Dr Rob Beresford.

"Risk-based spraying requires both the computer models that are available for risk forecasting coupled with structured orchard surveillance at key times to update the disease control strategy as the season progresses," Rob says.

How do you balance the risk and reward of risk-based spraying?

Dr Jim Walker – a scientist with many years of experience in crop protection research – agrees there is room for more of a risk-based approach to spraying. However, he cautions that it is important that growers fully understand the risks for their specific crops, and the times during the growing season when risk-based spraying is worth considering.

"It depends on the crop you're talking about and whether you're talking pest management or disease management. We have good monitoring tools, like pheromone traps, for some of our key pests, but pathogens are more difficult as they are usually driven by weather-related infection events. Some crop diseases lend themselves more to risk-based spraying approaches than others."

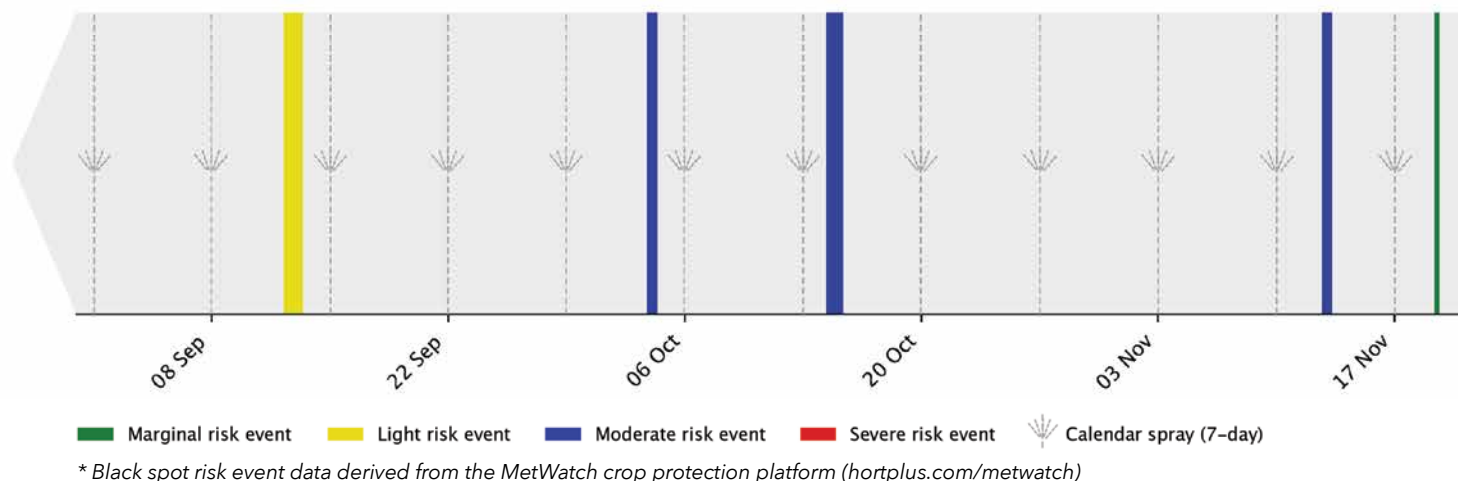
Permanent crops, such as tree fruits – apples, kiwifruit, summerfruit – are all good candidates for more risk-based spraying. However, for some plant diseases, such as black spot in apples, the degree to which a purely risk-data-based spray programme can be adopted depends a lot on the local climate, time of season and rainfall.

"Risks aren't uniform throughout the season, and there are times of the season when there's less risk, and you can make the decision based on the data, but at other times you may need to be conservative," Jim says.



REGULAR SEVEN-DAY CALENDAR SPRAYING VS ACTUAL BLACK SPOT INFECTION RISK EVENTS (1 SEP - 31 DEC 2025)

Pakowhai Rd Weather Station, Hawke's Bay



"In a cool and wet maritime climate like New Zealand you have the host-pathogen present for more of the year. In Australia it's a different equation, especially in drier parts.

"In Western Australia, for example, there's far less spring rainfall so the risk of inoculum increasing to levels that might cause infection is much lower. This is even more apparent in Washington State in the United States, where relatively dry springs mean that the risk of infection is greatly reduced – indeed many growers take a risk-based approach and take few, if any, measures for control.

"New Zealand has a perfect climate for growing apples but the downside is there are many minor and some major infection periods from bud burst until late November. During this time there are potentially more downsides to risk-based spraying.

“

Growers considering using more of a risk-based approach for black spot spraying should consider which point of the season they are in

"On the backside of that period – in mid-summer – if you are disease free and inoculum free you can afford to reduce spraying and by and large the apple industry does that."

The risk of getting it wrong isn't just market access, he says.

"You can easily get 10 to 20 percent of your crop infected with black spot and at this level, the economics of packing

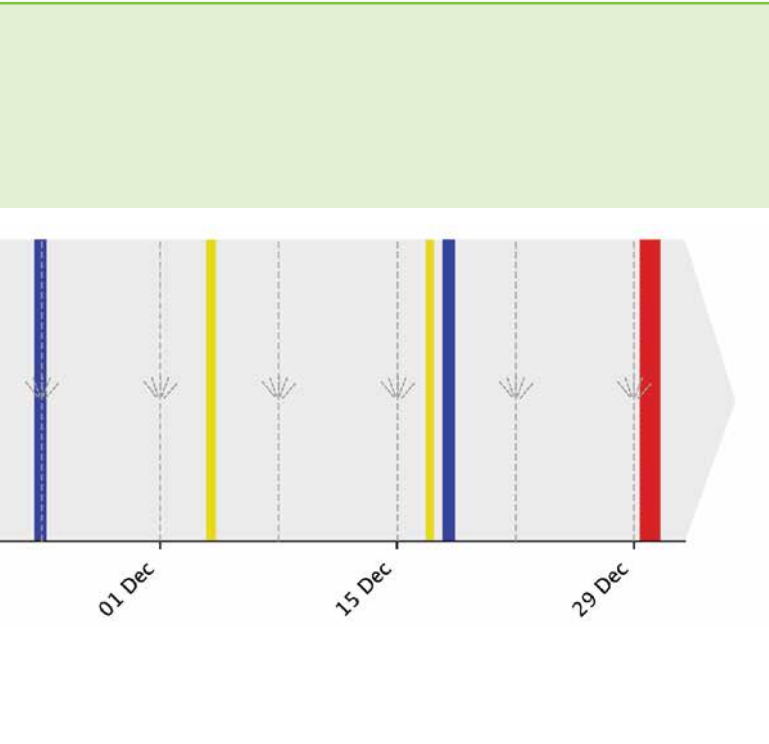
the crop to sort the healthy fruit from infected rapidly becomes impossible."

In New Zealand, most apple growers spray regularly for black spot, often every 7-14 days during the bud-break to mid-November period, regardless of risk forecasts. This is considered important, because there are usually frequent rainfall events during this primary inoculum release period, often coinciding with rapid leaf growth and fruit expansion. Unprotected foliage or fruit during this time greatly increases the infection risk.

However, even while using this approach in the early season, many growers are still monitoring rain forecasts to ensure they are spraying at optimum times to maintain coverage, as well as wind forecasts, to reduce spray drift on spray days. When making spray decisions, growers are also accounting for how much new, unprotected growth they have had since they last sprayed.

Jim says growers considering using more of a risk-based approach for black spot spraying should consider which point of the season they are in, and how much inoculum has already been released. In the early part of the season, those in wetter climates might be wise to be conservative, primarily using risk-based spraying only from December onwards, during the secondary infection period.

Despite all the nuance, and the risk of getting it wrong, Jim says the apple industry has been progressively moving towards more of a risk-based approach over the past few decades – albeit cautiously because few want to risk potential crop loss.



Dollars and cents: How much could you actually save?

Past research in New Zealand suggests apple growers using risk-based spraying for black spot, rather than calendar spraying, might be able to safely reduce their applications by as much as 18 percent, depending on seasonal weather.

In practical terms, that might equate to a reduction of four or five spray applications across the year for a grower who previously sprayed for black spot 22-23 times a year.

Protectant sprays cost around \$30-\$40 a hectare per application. Taking a mid-point of \$35 a hectare per protectant black spot spray application, a grower with a 40ha apple orchard might save more than \$6000 a year, plus hundreds of litres of diesel, by using a risk-based spraying approach.

It's worth noting that higher disease risk due to unfavourable conditions could lead to similar or even greater numbers of applications, potentially increasing spray costs. However, the primary driver for most growers adopting risk-based spraying will be better protected crops. ●

There's a lot to remember when you're running an orchard or a farm.

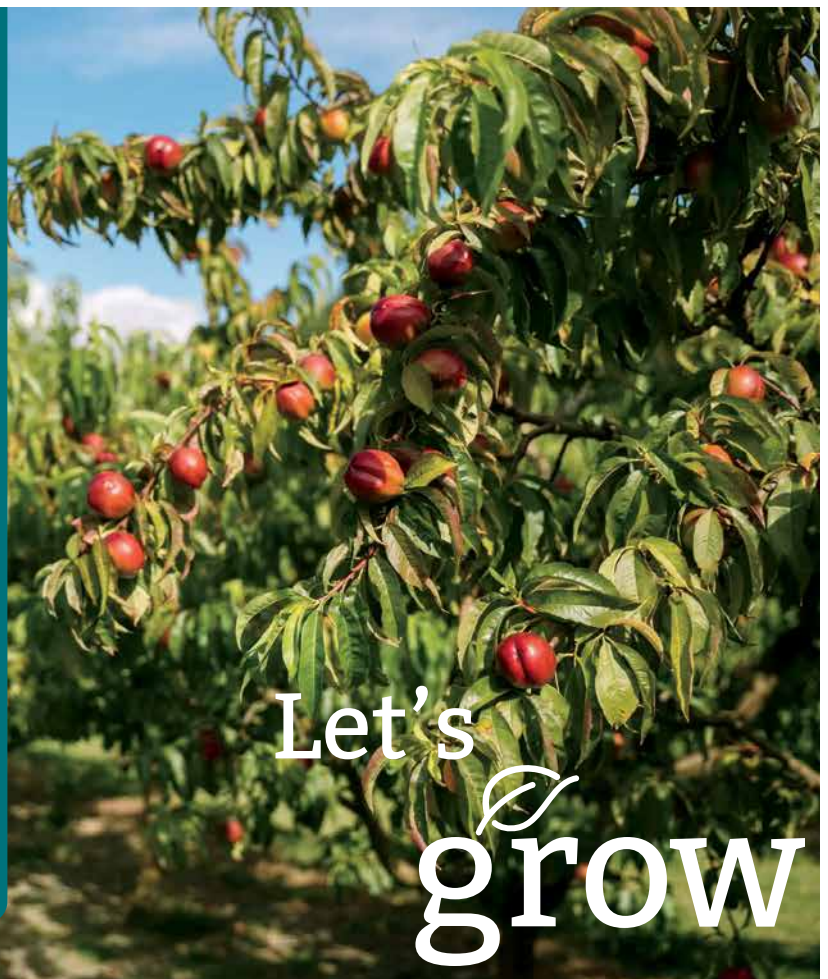
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Let's

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The team at Woodhaven Gardens who supported with the trials, Amanda Gardner in the centre and Adam Jory (general manager) second from the right

COULD PLASMA ACTIVATED WATER AND LIGHT HELP SHAPE THE FUTURE OF FRESH PRODUCE?

New Zealand's horticulture industry has built a reputation for producing premium fresh produce recognised worldwide for its quality, safety and sustainability. Maintaining that reputation, however, is becoming increasingly challenging. International markets are placing greater scrutiny on chemical inputs, retailers are demanding longer shelf life with less food waste, and consumers expect produce that is both safe and sustainably grown.

Amanda Gardner : Bioeconomy Science Institute scientist in the Food System Integrity Team

For growers and processors of leafy greens such as spinach and lettuce, meeting these expectations presents a unique challenge. Unlike many foods, leafy greens are eaten raw, meaning there is no cooking step to eliminate harmful microorganisms before consumption. Their delicate leaves and textured surfaces also provide ideal places for bacteria to attach during growing, harvesting and postharvest handling. As a result, effective washing is one of the most critical steps in fresh produce processing, reducing microbial contamination while preventing bacteria from spreading through wash water.



Today, most commercial packhouses rely on chlorine-based sanitisers or alternative chemistries such as peracetic acid to maintain wash water quality.

While effective, these systems require continual monitoring, hazardous chemical handling and careful water management. Where chemical sanitisers are not used, processors use large volumes of wash water to minimise microbial build-up and cross-contamination – increasing water use, wastewater generation and operating costs.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 A non-chemical washing technology is nearing commercial readiness after testing at Woodhaven Gardens.
- 2 67 percent extension in shelf life compared with conventionally washed spinach, alongside consistent reductions in microbial contamination on both the leaves and in the wash water itself.
- 3 Testing confirmed low nitrate, nitrite and heavy metal residues, meaning the treatment could reduce reliance on chlorine-based sanitisers or peracetic acid.

As the industry looks for ways to improve sustainability without compromising food safety, researchers are investigating technologies that could reduce reliance on traditional chemical sanitisers or large quantities of wash water.

Taking innovation beyond the laboratory

One such technology is being investigated through a KiwiNet Tier 2 project that I am leading at Bioeconomy Science Institute in Palmerston North. The technology is the subject of a pending Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) application, reflecting its potential international relevance and supporting a coordinated pathway towards commercialisation.

The project brings together expertise from Woodhaven Gardens (New Zealand), Eden Park Illumination (United States) and PlasmaLeap Technologies (Australia), combining knowledge in fresh produce production, light technology and plasma science. The work is supported by the Food System Integrity Team, team leader Gale Brightwell, Jeremy Bracegirdle and the Bioeconomy Science Institute Commercialisation Team, whose technical, intellectual property and commercialisation expertise is helping guide the technology towards industry adoption.

Rather than focusing solely on laboratory experiments, the project is evaluating whether the technology can perform under commercial packhouse conditions while delivering practical benefits for growers and processors.

Why spinach?

Spinach provides one of the toughest test cases for any sanitising technology. Its crinkled leaf surface creates countless microscopic niches where bacteria can attach, while the leaves themselves are easily damaged during processing. Because spinach is commonly sold as a

ready-to-eat product, maintaining food safety without compromising quality is essential.

If a technology can demonstrate meaningful microbial reduction on spinach while preserving leaf quality, it has strong potential for application across a wide range of leafy greens and fresh produce.

Understanding the technology

The patent-pending technology combines plasma activated water (PAW) with dual light treatments to enhance microbial control in fresh produce washing.

Cold plasma is generated by applying electricity to air, producing naturally occurring reactive oxygen and nitrogen species. When these reactive species are transferred into water, they create PAW, a powerful antimicrobial solution produced without conventional chemical sanitisers.

The KiwiNet project goes a step further by combining PAW with carefully selected light wavelengths. The dual light treatment enhances the antimicrobial activity of the PAW, creating a synergistic effect that improves microbial inactivation without raising product temperature or damaging delicate leaves. Unlike conventional UV technologies, the selected wavelengths are effective at microbial reduction while being safer to use and capable of operating across a range of environmental temperatures.

Importantly, the light treatment also enhances the reactive species within the PAW after processing, allowing antimicrobial activity to continue reducing microbial contamination on the produce during storage, and contributing to extended shelf life.

This “multiple hurdle” approach aims to improve microbial control while reducing reliance on conventional chemical sanitisers and excessive water use.

From pilot plant to commercial processing

A key objective of the project was to move beyond laboratory research and evaluate the technology under genuine commercial processing conditions.

Pilot trials were conducted on the commercial spinach processing line at Woodhaven Gardens in Levin. The expertise and support of the Woodhaven Gardens team proved invaluable. Their extensive knowledge of commercial fresh produce processing, willingness to embrace innovation and commitment to trialling new technologies enabled the research team to assess the system under real operating conditions. Their practical insights also helped refine the technology and ensured the trials reflected the realities of commercial packhouse operations.

Currently this technology is not regulatory approved, so the trials were conducted at the end of the production day and all produce was kept for trial purposes only. The production lines were washed down and cleaned prior to commencing normal production the following day.



Plasma activated water system and dual light unit on the conveyor treating spinach during trial



Dual light prototype on the conveyor treating spinach during trial

The trials evaluated the technology's ability to scale from laboratory equipment to commercial processing while measuring microbial reduction on spinach, contamination levels within process wash water, visual quality, shelf life, compatibility with existing processing systems, and nitrate, nitrite and heavy metal residues.

“

Spinach provides one of the toughest test cases for any sanitising technology. Its crinkled leaf surface creates countless microscopic niches where bacteria can attach, while the leaves themselves are easily damaged during processing

Promising early results

The commercial pilot trials delivered encouraging results.

Compared with conventional water washing, the combined PAW and dual light treatment consistently reduced microbial contamination on spinach leaves while also lowering microbial contamination within the process wash water, reducing the potential for cross-contamination during washing.

Quality improvements were equally significant. Treated spinach retained better colour, freshness and overall

appearance throughout storage, resulting in an approximately 67 percent extension in shelf life compared with conventionally washed product. Extending shelf life has the potential to reduce food waste throughout the supply chain while improving product marketability.

Importantly, these benefits were achieved without compromising product safety or introducing undesirable residues. Analysis confirmed low levels of nitrate, nitrite and heavy metals, demonstrating that the treatment leaves minimal chemical residues while delivering improved microbial control.

Together, these findings suggest that PAW combined with dual light technology could provide the fresh produce industry with an effective non-chemical intervention that enhances food safety, extends shelf life and improves processing hygiene.

Why does this matter?

Global markets continue to place increasing emphasis on food safety, sustainability and reduced chemical inputs. At the same time, growers and processors face ongoing pressure to improve water efficiency, reduce waste and maintain premium product quality.

Technologies that can reduce microbial contamination while lowering dependence on conventional sanitisers offer an opportunity to address these challenges simultaneously. For New Zealand growers, innovations that enhance food safety while supporting sustainability could strengthen the industry's competitive advantage in international markets.

Looking ahead

While the pilot trials represent a significant milestone, they are only the beginning of the technology's commercial journey.

The next phase will focus on building on existing pending patent protection for the combined PAW and dual light technology while continuing to engage with growers, fresh produce processors, equipment manufacturers and other end users. Industry feedback will help ensure the technology is practical, economically viable and readily integrated into commercial packhouse operations.

Researchers will also continue scaling the technology to achieve full commercial processing capacity and support wider industry adoption. Although further development and validation remain, the early results demonstrate considerable promise. By combining innovative science with practical commercial application, PAW and dual light technology could become another valuable tool for New Zealand's fresh produce sector – helping deliver safer food, longer shelf life, reduced chemical reliance and a more sustainable future for the horticulture industry. ●



Treated with Plasma activated water and dual light



Water washed control

Comparison of spinach after treatment with Plasma activated water and dual light (top) and water washed control (bottom) after 15 days of storage at 4°C



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VEGETABLE PRICES STUBBORNLY LOW

Indexed data over the last year show retail vegetable prices have remained almost flat, despite retail prices for the rest of the grocery basket generally increasing in line with the rising cost of living.

John Gauldie

The data published by Stats NZ reflect vegetable grower concerns about worryingly thin margins stretched even further, which risks forcing some growers to shut up shop.

While the Food Price Index (FPI) does not measure volume, the index closely maps on to the higher pricing seen in 2023 due to post Cyclone Gabrielle supply constraints, suggesting that good supply over the last couple of years is contributing to low prices.

"Vegetable prices are inversely proportional to supply," says John Murphy, grower and director at the NZ Vegetable Council (NZVeg). "Growing conditions over the past year have been good to very good, so there have been plenty of vegetables, which has kept a lid on prices due to consistent supply."

With most vegetables having no significant export market outlet – onions and potatoes are an exception – most vegetable growers depend on domestic market demand. Exports for onions and fresh potatoes have also been under pressure for several years, creating a difficult situation for every vegetable grower.

The FPI reflects retail price only and does not shed any light on farmgate returns or provide any transparency on margins.

Cost of growing rising fast

Putting the brakes on vegetable production is not an option for most growers, says John, who he says are extremely efficient users of land, water, fertiliser and labour. "Vegetable growers must be efficient because the cost of growing is ever increasing."

In addition, regulatory constraints – notably the Resource Management Act which is long overdue for reform – make it difficult for growers to react flexibly to better manage their costs under changing market conditions.

In the second quarter of 2026, the cost of growing reached a new record, according to the StatsNZ Producer Price Index, which measures operating expenses like fertiliser, seeds, energy, fuel and transport (but not labour or capital goods).

John says fertiliser prices have increased by 25–40 percent since the Middle East crisis began in March 2026. Diesel prices have dropped from a peak in April, but remain high.

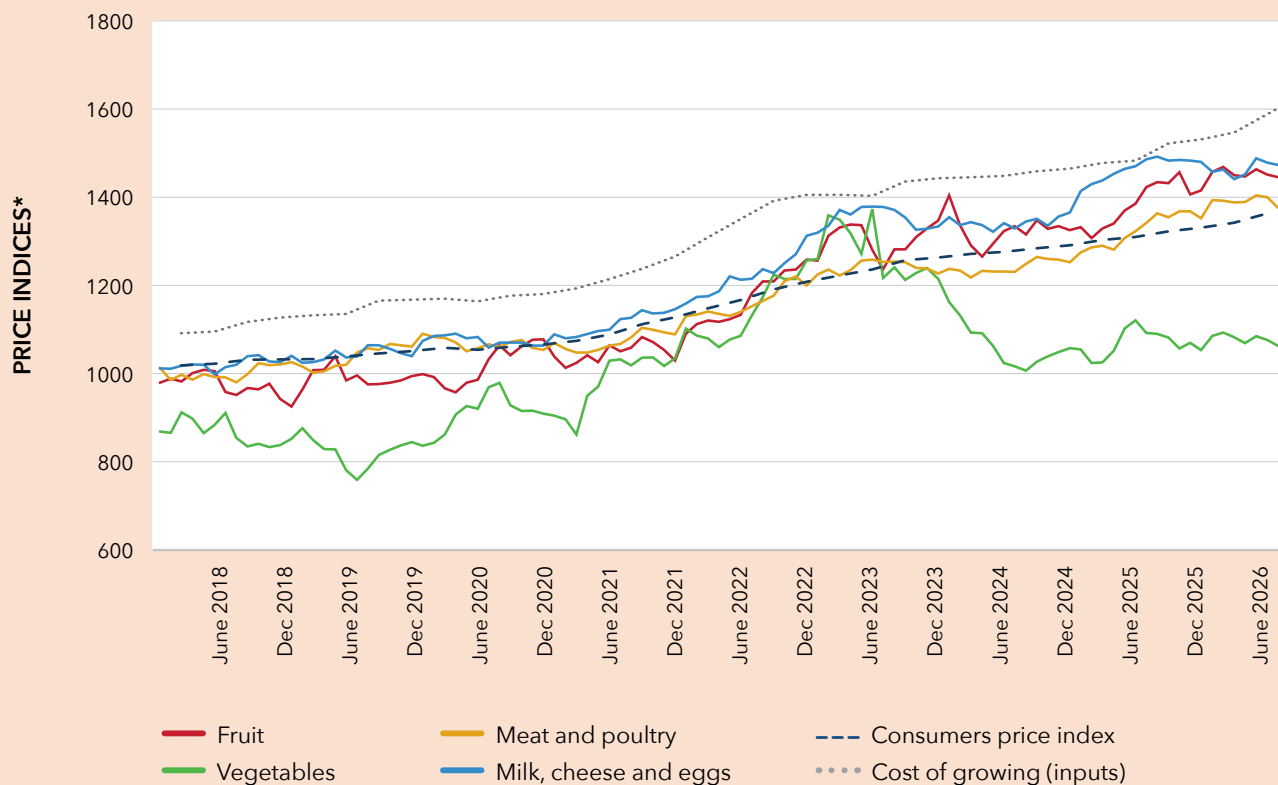
"This year, due to the Middle East crisis and its impact on fuel and fertiliser prices, growers have had to absorb even more cost as consumers expect fresh vegetables to be priced within a certain range, otherwise they will not buy them," John says. "Of course, consumers have also been affected by inflation caused by the Middle East crisis so in many family situations, money for groceries is tight."



The Horticulture Conference panel *Economics of NZ Food: Power, Profit and the Way Forward* featuring from left: Foodstuffs North Island's Brigit Corson, University of Waikato's Frank Scrimgeour, NZVeg chief executive Mike Smith, growers Erin Mai, Hugh Ritchie and Kirit Makan, and moderator Jehan Casinader. Follow the QR code to watch online.



COMPARISON OF SELECTED FOOD PRICE INDICES



Source: Stats NZ infoshare*

Is customer behaviour changing?

Despite high prices for proteins, particularly beef, and low prices for vegetables, it does not appear that customers on a tight budget are shifting more of their shopping budget to the fresh produce aisle.

However, without access to checkout data, it's difficult for the industry to analyse. John says the supply chain needs more transparency, in fairness to both consumers and growers, so margins can be better understood.

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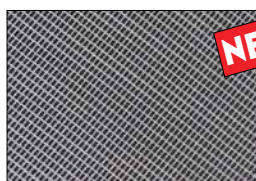
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"Data about consumer behaviour is a valuable commodity and not freely available," he says. "We would like to think that consumers see vegetables as 'health on the shelf' and great value for money, but given all the other factors at play, including a depressed economy, societal change and changes in eating habits, it is hard to tell."

Foodstuffs North Island head of produce and butchery Brigit Corson joined a panel at the Horticulture Conference in July to discuss the *Economics of NZ Food: Power, Profit and the Way Forward*.

“

We've needed to adapt how we're doing things and working with growers through committed volumes and leaning into collaborating together and sharing our volumes to enable better planning

"From a customer perspective, one of the clearest things we see is that people don't shop the vegetable category in isolation - they make trade-offs across their whole basket," she says. "When budgets are under pressure, customers may switch between different products and formats depending on what represents value to them. That could mean choosing a lower-priced fresh option, buying frozen vegetables when fresh produce is out of season, or choosing a prepared product where the convenience justifies the additional cost."

Although the FPI vegetable basket is mostly fresh vegetable items such as lettuce, packaged salad leaf, broccoli, cucumbers, courgettes, mushrooms and kūmara, it also includes frozen veges, canned tomatoes and olive jars.

Brigit urges caution when drawing conclusions from the FPI's limited group of 20 vegetable items, a fraction of the increasingly complex fresh produce section. For example, potato prices have risen recently.

For growers, she says the broader signal is that price remains important, but it isn't the only factor influencing what customers choose.

"So rather than reading lower vegetable pricing simply as a signal that consumers are buying less produce, I think there is an opportunity to look at which products, formats and attributes customers are continuing to choose when they are making those trade-offs. That is where the grocery data can potentially provide useful signals for growers about where demand is heading."



Brigit Corson at the Horticulture Conference panel

Brigit introduced Foodstuffs' Grower Commitment Programme at the conference, which she says has been quite a change in how the retailer interacts with growers.

"We've needed to adapt how we're doing things and working with growers through committed volumes and leaning into collaborating together and sharing our volumes to enable better planning."

Increasing demand

While it would be great to see retailers also stimulate higher vegetable consumption to help increase prices, the underlying trend of New Zealanders eating less than the recommended 5+ A Day portions of vegetables precedes the current pricing situation - and is not unique to New Zealand.

"One of the priorities in the New Zealand Vegetable Council manifesto is increasing vegetable consumption to improve New Zealanders' health and reduce the burden on the health and hospital system,"

John says. "So much money goes into cure in New Zealand and extremely little into prevention, through things like diet and eating more healthy vegetables. We will be talking with the next Government about a programme to increase New Zealanders' vegetable consumption, similar to the programme currently underway in Australia."

Any progress in increasing consumption is likely to be some way off, and barring any unforeseen adverse events (in which growers are among the hardest hit), John is not optimistic on the outlook for more realistic prices for vegetables.

“

Data about consumer behaviour is a valuable commodity and not freely available

"Unfortunately, until there is substantial progress on regulatory reform, a reduction in the cost of doing business in New Zealand, and a behaviour change programme to increase vegetable consumption and improve New Zealanders' health, we believe the graph will look much the same as it does now in August 2027." ●

* Data derived from Stats NZ:

- Consumers Price Index All Groups for New Zealand, Seasonally adjusted (Qrtly-Mar/Jun/Sep/Dec)
- Food Price Index Level 3 Classes for New Zealand, Seasonally adjusted (Monthly)
- Producers Price Index inputs level 4 quarterly (Horticulture and Fruit Growing)

SOUTH PACIFIC SEEDS EXPANDS COVERED CROP RANGE

The medium to low-tech plastic and glasshouse growers of New Zealand have a new option when it comes to accessing quality genetics for their production.

South Pacific Seeds has launched a new programme specifically focused on covered crop production, with the support and backing of strong global breeding portfolios. Better disease packages, yield potential and overall fruit quality are key drivers to this decision to launch into the product group. South Pacific Seeds has diversified their range of chilli seeds and has a focus on bringing in quality genetics at affordable seed prices.

Already holding some robust cucumber genetics that are performing well throughout Europe, South Pacific Seeds recently launched the JOVI Continental cucumber after a trial season throughout the spring, summer and autumn of 2025-2026. Alongside this is a new Lebanese cucumber for the warm season harvest period called FLORENCE. These cucumber genetics boast very strong disease packages and competitive yield advantages. Large-scale trials are underway, focusing on snacking cucumbers, slicer types and rootstocks to complete the range.

“

A major player in Italian and Spanish production, SERAFINA is expected to perform well throughout New Zealand

Indeterminate medium to low-tech tomato genetics are also a new addition to the South Pacific Seeds covered cropping range. With a focus on introducing a comprehensive disease package for all varieties, including tomatoes with brown rugose fruit virus resistance, South Pacific Seeds is offering a range of coloured cherries, mini plums, cocktail and larger loose red types. Trials to date of SUNSTONE, YELLOW DIAMOND and TYTON have been promising, with growers seeing the full benefits of strong genetic breeding. Additional trial lines, including large beefsteaks, cherry truss and even black tomatoes are available to any growers wishing to view these types under their individual growing operations.



ZUMA zucchini has an excellent disease package and strong performance



Eggplant SERAFINA a promising new introduction

While a smaller market in New Zealand, South Pacific Seeds is offering a new medium to low-tech eggplant by the name of SERAFINA to trial. A major player in Italian and Spanish production, SERAFINA is expected to perform well throughout New Zealand.

Rounding out this new category for South Pacific Seeds is a selection of zucchini. ZUMA is a new introduction with a very comprehensive disease package and the ability to produce well into the season with continued success. ZUMA complements the strong variety CORTEZ already offered to the market, which impressed growers nationwide last summer. ●

Enquiries please contact South Pacific Seeds on
0800 77 22 43.



SOUTH PACIFIC SEEDS



Carrots were a hit at the Auckland Food Show, thanks to Matthew Malcolm's So Sweet stand

NO ONE GOES TO A FOOD SHOW TO BUY A BAG OF POTATOES, UNTIL THEY DO

Carrots in handbags, a 'cartoon' come to life and temporary tattoos in the shape of avocados – among the 278 exhibitors keeping 30,000-plus food-keen attendees satiated at this year's Auckland Food Show were three somewhat unconventional stalls. LACHLAN WOODS-DAVIDSON details the realities of taking fresh produce to a consumer event – and whether it should be on your radar for 2027.

Exhibitors offered up their newest and most delicious across four days at Auckland Showgrounds this past July. Among the sauces, snacks and small-batch temptations, just three names from New Zealand's fresh produce scene set up shop: Southland stalwarts So Sweet Vegetables, South Auckland darlings The Fresh Grower, and industry body NZ Avocado.

"People that go to the Food Show love food," states Matthew Malcolm, owner of So Sweet, "so we introduced them to our carrots. We just gave away free samples and it was very well received."



It's easy to imagine: Between the micro-sized samples, complex flavour profiles and experimental concepts, a handful of clean root vegetables – neatly bunched, gleaming orange under the show lights – was perhaps the perfect tonic. "For people to get to know your products, you've got to be there," Matthew adds. "If people don't know about them, they can't buy them. So we thought, all right, let's give it a go."

So Sweet were never there to sell. Their range was laid out, carrots front and centre, the team with a simple brief: Point attendees to which upper



Crowds at the NZ Avocado stand - every lift in fresh avocado consumption lands with the local grower

North Island shelves were lined with more. For a label hailing from the opposite pole of the country, a tangible presence in a new market is hard-won. The reception on the day left the team of three doing all they could to keep up – and this in spite of an omen to kick off day one.

“One of the first people that walked past saw the veggie display and went, ‘Oh, that’ll be a hard sell.’ They just said it to themselves, but I overheard them,” recalls Matthew. “If you went there trying to just sell produce, yes, it would be a hard sell, because no one goes to a food show to buy a bag of potatoes. But that wasn’t the point.” And once word got out: “There were carrots sticking out of people’s bags, people eating carrots, and people coming to the stand going, ‘Oh, is this where the carrots are? I’ve seen everyone in the show walking around eating carrots!’”

This wasn’t So Sweet’s first time exhibiting at the show, but the scale of the response was nonetheless surprising. “No one actually gives away a quantity of something you can actually eat. We gave a whole bunch of carrots away – I think that’s what really won the day.”

For Matthew and his team, the investment in travel, time and product was all for the long-term brand build. From two-year-olds to 92-year-olds, attendees took a branded bunch home – those who resisted finishing it mid-show – and the So Sweet tag likely ended up in their fridge. A physical presence in the consumer’s home, and a reminder of what to look for on the next grocery run.

Still, So Sweet will likely sit next year out. With most attendees returning year on year, Matthew would rather not preach to the converted. For an outfit launching something new, however, he sees such events as almost essential.

“Say you’re trying to launch a new apple variety – people have got to taste it.” Launching a cauliflower, he concedes, “might be a bit of hard work.”

“

If people don’t know about them, they can’t buy them. So we thought, all right, let’s give it a go

Which is why it was excellent to speak to the only other vegetable grower at the event, The Fresh Grower. They were there introducing consumers to lesser-known lines and didn’t let snacking suitability stand in their way, nor have they for the better part of the last 15 years. “I think we’ve missed one or two years when things got tough,” admits owner Allan Fong, “but it’s roughly that.”

You may have seen some of The Fresh Grower’s marketing efforts appear on your screen lately; they’ve become something of a darling of the Pukekohe bread-basket, partly thanks to an ultra-sharp social media approach. In an algorithmic landscape that increasingly rewards authenticity and grassroots storytelling, the Fongs are flirting with minor celebrity in their niche. A 30-second video posted on



The guacamole is a crowd favourite



Food show visitors make the most of temporary avocado tattoos

Mother's Day, showing Allan's mother tending the family garden at the age of 97, has around a million views and counting.

The Food Show is the face-to-face version of the same brand-awareness play, to "get out there," in Allan's words. "A lot of people – you won't believe this – they say, 'Oh my god, you're real. We thought you were a cartoon,'" laughs Allan, whose grinning face appears on the company's packaging. "It just goes to show – it's very difficult getting branding out there. It takes a long time."

The thousands who found their way to The Fresh Grower stand this year had reason beyond meeting the man from the packaging. They could also try a 'Green Goddess' fried rice collaboration with fellow exhibitor Good Chow: Crunchetta cos leaves loaded with a medley of Fresh Grower greens and fennel, stir-fried through basmati.

"I recommend [the show] to everybody, but it does take a bit financially," levels Allan. "You never make money out of it – I had eight people on the roster, not counting the packhouse, packing and delivering daily.

We were selling as well, at pretty much wholesale prices, just trying to recover costs, but you only ever recover part of it. It's part of a broader advertising campaign." Part of that campaign includes showing face, and product, at other in-person events – trade shows, such as the recent Bidfood Show, are an important part of the coordinated approach.

Allan and his team will be back next year. With challenges often looming in a changing growing and commerce environment, putting a face to the name, or cartoon – establishing and maintaining a unique identity as a brand – may matter more than ever. "We don't have deep pockets to do big marketing campaigns, but we do what we can to get out there.

Though if this year's reception and their success online are anything to go by, that identity is growing deeper roots rather than being eroded by the tide.

Similarly, NZ Avocado has capitalised on various customer-facing opportunities. Of the country's 19 product groups, they were the only one that made the trip to Greenlane, enjoying their inaugural year at the show. "In-store tastings have been a staple of our strategy for many years," explains stakeholder engagement manager Rose Fallow. "An event like the Food Show is essentially an in-store tasting on steroids."

The model was proven at January's Latin Festival in Aotea Square – free guacamole, recipe books and avocado temporary tattoos alongside a Seven Sharp-led guac competition – and repeated across the four days in July, with a scan-your-ticket draw to win a tray of avocados and join the AvoLovers newsletter.

The guacamole was a crowd favourite, with Rose's numbers from the weekend supporting their team's enthusiastic

approach. Some 440 avocados were mashing into more than 9000 servings, and 1000-plus recipe cards and 500 recipe books were gone by early Sunday. The draw added 1660 unique emails to the AvoLovers list; nearly half opened the post-show mailout – more than double the industry average – and a pre-show Meta post reached close to 20,000 accounts. Like The Fresh Grower, NZ Avocado saw the show as an opportunity to fuel their digital marketing channels.

For a product group, the case is sharper still. “Absolutely, other groups should consider having a presence,” says Rose. “Since we don’t directly sell a product, it sometimes feels like there is a distance between us and the consumer – we don’t get direct sales feedback.” The show bridged that gap, letting the team receive feedback in real time and an opportunity to provide value – tips on ripening, storage and meal ideas.

“For us, it’s less about our brand name being recognised – rather about educating consumers and inspiring increased usage,” says Rose. With every fresh avocado sold in New Zealand grown here, any lift in consumption lands with a local grower. “It was much more, ‘Here’s some guac, what did you think of that? Here’s the recipe so you can make it at home.’” Avocados, freshly in season, landed top of mind with an already food-focused crowd.

The Food Show sits within a coordinated approach from NZ Avocado – one fixture in a season-long consumer programme spanning retail media with the supermarket groups, influencer campaigns, in-store sampling and displays, a nationwide retail engagement programme, targeted digital, and events and activations such as the Latin Festival and this year’s show. Pending budget approval, they will be back at the latter for 2027, and with refinements in hand – more enduring collateral (one attendee still has an in-store-tasting recipe magnet on their fridge) and a sharper “free guacamole – come find us” pre-show post. Fittingly, National Avocado Day falls on next year’s show Saturday.



FRESH PRODUCE AT FIELDDAYS!

This year at Fieldays, the HortNZ stand (supported by NZGAP, Potatoes New Zealand and Summerfruit NZ) encouraged public appreciation and fruit and vegetable consumption by showcasing grower stories, 5+ A Day recipes, and providing 2.2t of produce and 1600 servings of fresh juice!

Notably, the growers’ primary drive was business first – brand awareness, a name remembered at the shelf. Yet it was the produce itself – fresh, clean and looking its best among the bottled and baked – that made their stalls so popular. The healthy, seasonal choices stood out among the crowd.

“

For us, it’s less about our brand name being recognised – rather about educating consumers and inspiring increased usage



A tag in the fridge, a recognisable face, 1660 new avo readers: the returns from fronting consumers arrive slowly, but compound. Yes, no one goes to a food show to buy a bag of potatoes... until they do. ●

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GETTING THE START RIGHT: WHY SEED MATTERS MORE THAN EVER



With potato production, everything starts with seed. It is a simple statement, but one that underpins every decision a grower makes, from paddock selection through to harvest outcomes.

Kate Truffitt : Potatoes New Zealand chief executive

While weather, inputs and management all play their part, the quality of the seed going into the ground remains one of the single biggest determinants of crop performance.

For growers across New Zealand, getting the start right is not just good practice, it is essential.

The foundation of crop performance

Potatoes are unique in that they are propagated from tubers rather than true seed. That means whatever is in the seed, good or bad, is carried through into the following crop.

High-quality seed provides:

- ✓ Strong, even crop establishment
- ✓ Better yield potential
- ✓ Greater percentage of tuber uniformity at harvest
- ✓ Reduced risk of disease issues.

That is why certified seed is considered the cornerstone of potato production, supplying the entire industry with reliable, highest quality planting material.

In practical terms, planting uncertified seed will affect the following crop with quality and disease issues and a marked reduction in revenue.

**THE QUALITY OF THE SEED
GOING INTO THE GROUND
REMAINS ONE OF THE
SINGLE BIGGEST
DETERMINANTS OF
CROP PERFORMANCE**



Why quality matters in the paddock

Uniform, healthy seed typically results in:

- ✓ Even emergence across the paddock
- ✓ Consistent plant development
- ✓ More predictable tuber size and yield.

In contrast, planting uncertified seed can lead to uneven crops, making management more difficult and reducing marketable yield.

Seed quality also plays a major role in disease management. Viruses, bacteria and other pathogens can be carried in the seed and spread throughout the crop if not controlled at the source.

That is why certification standards are not just about compliance; they directly affect the bottom line.

Traceability: Knowing what you are planting

As production systems continuously evolve, traceability has become an increasingly important part of the seed potato supply.

The New Zealand Seed Potato Certification Scheme provides growers with:

- ✓ Assurance of seed origin
- ✓ Confidence in varietal purity
- ✓ Verified inspection and testing processes.

Certification involves both field and tuber inspections to ensure seed meets strict standards before it reaches growers.

For growers, this traceability means fewer unknowns. It allows decisions to be made with confidence, particularly when managing risk around pests, diseases and crop performance.

Trust across the value chain

Certified seed sits at a critical junction in the value chain, linking seed growers, commercial growers, processors and markets.

Trust in the system is built through:

- ✓ Consistent quality standards
- ✓ Reliable certification processes
- ✓ Strong relationships between seed and ware growers.

When that trust is strong, it supports the entire industry, ensuring crops perform as expected and supply chains remain stable.

When it is compromised, the impacts are felt widely, from reduced yields to market issues.

More than just a seed tuber

Behind every seed potato is a lengthy development process. New varieties often begin as imported plant material, which is carefully tested and multiplied through laboratory and minituber production before progressing through several generations of field multiplication. It can take years before sufficient volumes are available for commercial planting, making seed production a long-term investment built on science, planning and trust.

International experience demonstrates the value of maintaining high-quality seed systems. Discussions through the World Potato Congress have highlighted how reliance on recycled seed in parts of Africa has contributed to lower yields, increased disease pressure and reduced crop performance. By contrast, New Zealand's strong productivity is supported by a commitment to certified seed potatoes and ongoing seed renewal.

Developing and producing seed also requires access to suitable land, with long rotations and strict quality standards placing increasing pressure on available growing areas.

As new varieties enter the market, strong relationships between growers and seed merchants are more important than ever. Importing, multiplying and commercialising new genetics requires significant investment and time. By working closely together and clearly communicating future requirements, growers and seed merchants can make confident decisions that support innovation and ensure the right varieties are available for the future.

Challenges facing the seed sector

Like the wider potato industry, seed growers are operating in an increasingly challenging environment.

Climate variability

Weather patterns are becoming less predictable, with both excess moisture and heat stress affecting seed production, quality and storage.

Biosecurity pressure

Maintaining disease free seed requires continuous monitoring and strict hygiene practices, particularly as pest and disease risks evolve.

Production intensity

Seed crops require a higher level of management, crop rotation, inspection and compliance compared to many other crops, increasing time and cost pressures.

Sector awareness

While growers understand the value of certified seed, there remains an opportunity to better communicate its importance across the wider supply chain.

These challenges highlight just how critical the seed sector is, and how much precision is required to deliver consistent positive outcomes.

What growers need to focus on

For growers selecting seed, the priorities remain clear:

- ✓ Choose certified seed to reduce risk and improve reliability
- ✓ Understand the source and history of seed lines
- ✓ Match varieties to conditions and market requirements
- ✓ Work closely with suppliers to ensure alignment on expectations.

These decisions set the direction for the entire season.

Getting it right from the start

Across the industry, there is a growing recognition that success in potato production increasingly depends on getting the fundamentals right.

Certified seed is at the centre of that.

In a season where variables like weather, input costs and market pressures can change quickly, starting with high-quality, traceable seed provides one of the few areas where growers can control risk early.

And in an environment where margins are tight and expectations are high, that early advantage can make all the difference.

Looking ahead

As the sector continues to evolve, the importance of seed will only increase.

Stronger focus on quality, improved traceability systems, and continued trust across the value chain will be critical to maintaining performance and confidence in the industry.

For growers, the message is clear:

If you want a strong finish, you need a strong start, and that starts with New Zealand certified seed potatoes. ●

HOLISTIC VIEW OF KIWIFRUIT PERFORMANCE

The second edition of NZKGI's Kiwifruit Industry Performance Report has recently been delivered to kiwifruit growers around New Zealand, providing an independent assessment of how the country's largest horticultural export is performing across production, quality, supply chain, market and financial measures.

Mike Murphy : NZKGI head of communications and strategic projects

While performance reports exist throughout the horticulture industry, the report by New Zealand Kiwifruit Growers Inc (NZKGI) is thought to be somewhat unique. Designed specifically from a grower perspective, it brings together a wide range of industry data and analysis into a single publication, giving growers a holistic view of performance across the value chain and helping them understand not just what happened during the season, but why.

For NZKGI head of performance and insights Craig Sims, the report is an important part of ensuring growers have access to transparent, independent information about the industry they collectively own.

"The report is really about helping growers understand how the industry is performing as a whole," Craig says. "This is now our second edition, which means we're starting to build a valuable body of information that allows growers to look at performance over time, not just in a single season."

The report is produced as part of NZKGI's constitutional responsibility to monitor and analyse industry performance on behalf of growers. While some horticultural sectors publish operational and financial results, comprehensive independent performance reporting remains relatively uncommon across the wider industry.

"Growers make significant investments and long-term decisions into their businesses, so it's important they have access to information that helps them evaluate how different parts of the industry are performing," Craig says.

Producing the report requires data from a wide range of sources. NZKGI draws information from industry organisations, government agencies, publicly available datasets and performance reporting published throughout the year. The information is then analysed

and presented in a way that allows growers to understand trends and compare performance across different parts of the supply chain.

"We're not simply republishing information that's already out there," Craig explains. "The value comes from bringing that information together, analysing it and presenting it in a format that helps growers see the bigger picture."



Robert Humphries, NZKGI vice chair, pictured on the cover of the Kiwifruit Industry Performance Report 2026 during a trip to Europe to inspect fruit in market



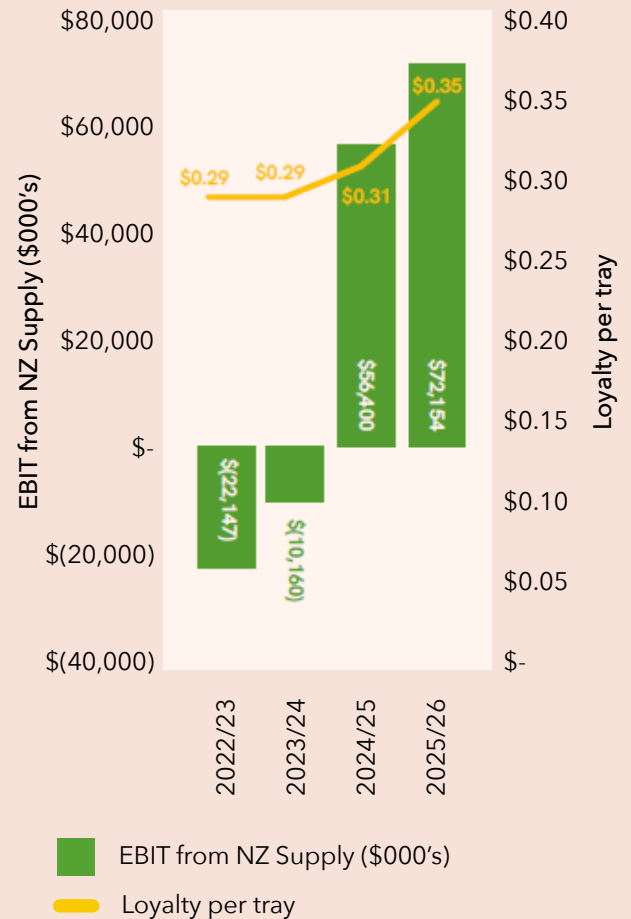
Craig Sims, NZKGI head of performance and insights

The report has been intentionally designed to serve both as a high-level industry scorecard and as a deeper analytical resource. Readers can quickly understand how key areas of the industry are performing or delve into more detailed sections covering specific operational and commercial measures.

One of the report's more distinctive features is the annual Deep Dive, which examines a topic of particular relevance to growers and the wider industry. In last year's inaugural report, the Deep Dive summarised NZKGI's Maturity Clearance Review, providing an end-to-end assessment of performance through the maturity clearance process and the implications for growers. This year's Deep Dive focuses on loyalty payments, explaining how they operate, the value they deliver to the industry and how growers benefit directly from strong New Zealand Supply EBIT performance.

"It allows us to go beyond the standard performance measures and take a closer look at a key topic that growers need to understand and engage with," Craig says.

EBIT FROM NZ SUPPLY AND LOYALTY PER TRAY³



Loyalty enables Zespri to secure long-term logistics arrangements and provides a mechanism for profit-sharing with growers when NZ Supply EBIT exceeds target levels, as reflected in the increased loyalty payments paid in 2024/25



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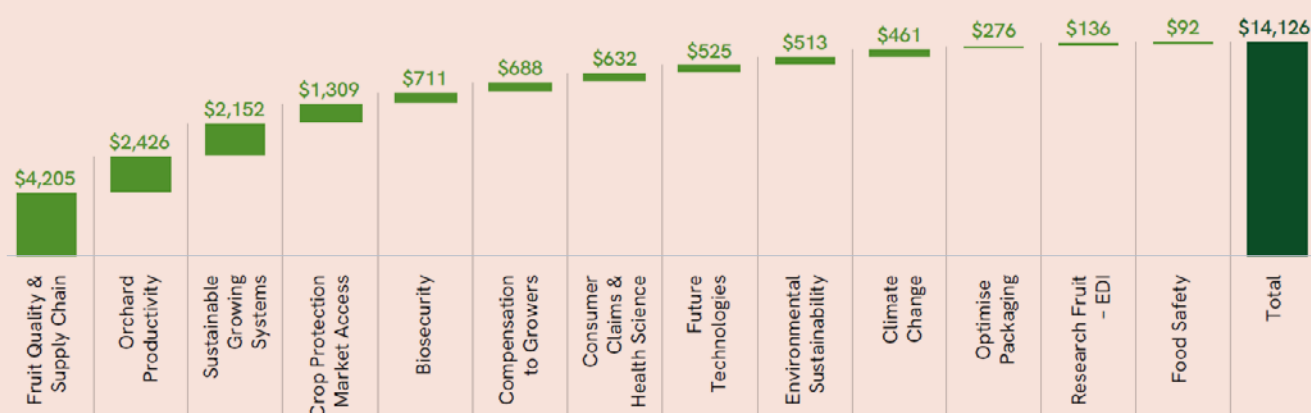
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NZ SUPPLY INNOVATION FUNDING (000'S)



Total innovation spend (including for new cultivars, NZ Supply and Non-NZ Supply) increased 14 percent to \$14.1 million in 2025, driven by increased investment in new cultivar development and Stage 3 trials across Red, Green and Gold varieties, more than offsetting a \$1 million reduction in NZ Supply innovation funding (pictured) following the Zespri Innovation realignment

The timing of the report's release is also deliberate. The publication is distributed alongside Zespri's Annual Report, allowing growers to read the two documents together and gain both operational insight and independent performance analysis.

"Our report provides additional context and analysis that can help growers assess the results contained within annual reports," Craig says. "Together they provide a more complete picture of industry performance."

“

Growers make significant investments and long-term decisions into their businesses, so it's important they have access to information that helps them evaluate how different parts of the industry are performing

This year's report covers many of the same themes as the inaugural edition, including grower returns, fruit performance, quality outcomes, forecasting accuracy, shipping performance, market performance and financial results. Importantly, having a second edition now allows trends to emerge and performance to be tracked over time.

"One of the most useful aspects of the second edition is that we can start looking at change over time," Craig says. "We've refined some measures, added further insights and continued to build the report based on what we learned from the first version."

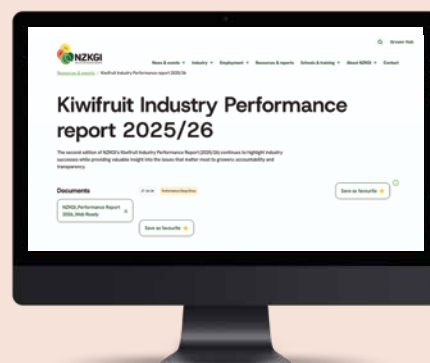
Despite the report's growth, NZKGI sees it as an evolving resource and is actively seeking grower feedback.

"Every year we'll continue looking for ways to make it more useful and more relevant to growers. Feedback is a critical part of that process," Craig says.

As the kiwifruit industry continues to mature, the report is becoming an increasingly valuable tool for growers wanting a comprehensive view of how their industry is performing. It provides a level of transparency and independent analysis that remains relatively rare within horticulture and reflects the industry's ongoing commitment to accountability and continuous improvement. ●



The NZKGI Kiwifruit Industry Performance Report 2026 has been mailed to kiwifruit growers and is also available to download from the NZKGI website: www.nzkgi.org.nz.



SHORT FLEXIBLE TRAINING NOW AVAILABLE FOR HORTICULTURE INDUSTRY

Primary ITO is introducing short modular training for the horticulture industry, to support new staff to gain introductory knowledge and existing staff to grow their skills.

The new training is available for the horticulture production and horticulture services sectors.

The new Limited Credit Programmes (LCPs) are completely flexible, allowing training to be fully customised to suit a particular employee, role or workplace. Taking four months to complete, learners can choose from the entire range of unit standards available in the full New Zealand Certificate Level 3 training programmes, with no compulsory components.

The new training is available for the production sectors covering fruit, indoor and outdoor, nursery and post-harvest. It is also available for the service sectors covering landscape construction, amenity and arboriculture.

Primary ITO sector manager Hamish Gordon says this new training option has been introduced in response to industry feedback.

“

The new training is available for the production sectors covering fruit, indoor and outdoor, nursery and post-harvest

“Employers told us they want more flexibility and clear training pathways that align with their operational needs. This new modular ‘bite-sized’ training is an ideal option for new and existing staff, with the ability for learners to move on to the full New Zealand Certificate and Apprenticeship qualification later if they wish.”

Hamish says the LCP programmes enable inexperienced staff starting out in horticulture to gain an introduction to the industry, while existing staff can specialise and upskill in particular areas to add to their skillset and continue their career journey.



Horticulture Training Advisers can help find the right training for businesses and individuals



LCPs can be a good taster before committing to a longer certificate or apprenticeship in horticulture

“Our Training Advisers will work alongside employees and workplace to really tailor the learning to the individual and company. Each learner may want to do something different – even in the same workplace – and whatever they achieve can be cross-credited to the full programme if they decide to complete that later.”

Primary ITO will provide all learning and assessment resources and pastoral support for the learner throughout the training programme. ●

Learn more by visiting www.primaryito.ac.nz or call 0800 20 80 20 or email info@primaryito.ac.nz



GREENHOUSE GROWERS ENCOURAGED TO **STAY AHEAD OF THE CURVE**



Growers attending the day-long Covered Cropping NZ mini conference in Tuakau in early August were encouraged to use new tools and techniques before being required to by regulators.

Andrew Bristol : NZVeg communications manager

AgriLink director Andrew Barber held a session on the horticulture industry's new Codes of Practice. He took delegates through implementation of a drain solution management plan for a small greenhouse, noting how valuable discharge solution is in terms of water and nitrogen.

But he said, "Don't wait for new resource management regulation to require you to improve practice. It is much more powerful for us an industry to talk about what we're already doing, rather than to say what we're going to do."

Throughout the day, the 130-plus delegates enjoyed several stimulating sessions, on topics including ground-sourced heat for greenhouses, resistance management and integrated pest management (IPM) and humidity control. This was the first greenhouse event for Covered Cropping NZ.

Streamside Organics owner Logan Kerr, who is Christchurch-based, said he flew up for the event as he is keen on diversifying and growing more crops under cover. "I'm confident I will get something out of the day, even if it's not directly applicable to what I currently do," he said.

Logan was part of the panel discussion on using IPM for whitefly.

Logan maintains a green bridge as part of his IPM, which although it might not "look the tidiest," provides a perfect habitat for beneficial insects/biological control agents

(BCAs). This gives the BCAs a food source when pest numbers might be low and can even attract BCAs that the grower has not introduced themselves.

The green bridge idea is contrary to usual practices whereby greenhouse growers are encouraged to clear weeds that might harbour diseases (diseases that could enter the greenhouse area). However, if growers seek advice from their horticulture supplier, they can find out what seed mix will best suit the BCAs that they are encouraging, while also ensuring they don't have plants which will harbour pest species.

Logan's experience was mirrored by JS Ewers grower manager Lian Price, who outlined that company's positive experience experimenting with biostrips to support BCA control of thrips in strawberries.

"We put in a 0.2ha biostrip, using 30kg of a variety of seed, for \$350. The flowers came in at different stages, and the unforeseen benefit was an

abundance of honeybees.

"The strawberry blocks closest to the biostrip had the highest production, due to increased bee activity. Plus, thrips were not an issue."

JS Ewers plans to refine their IPM approach in the coming season.



The Covered Cropping NZ mini conference in Tuakau welcomed more than 130 delegates in early August



AgriLink director Andrew Barber says, "Don't wait for new resource management regulation"

AI tips and tricks

No conference is complete without a session on AI. Grower2Grower managing director Stefan Vogrincic – a big fan of AI – shared his personal experience.

Stefan said, "If you're going to use AI, you have to ask it properly." He provided several examples of what he meant.

"AI doesn't replace the grower, but it helps with analysis and research, and can challenge thinking," Stefan said.

"However, AI can sound the most confident when it's wrong so the less experienced you are [as a grower], the more carefully you need to check AI's answer."

During question time, incoming Covered Cropping NZ chair Simon Watson echoed this sentiment. He said that with AI, "You've still got to be a grower, and live and breathe your crops."

Having a number of growers talk through their experiences of implementing IPM was appreciated by the audience. Some tips that were related include:

- 💡 IPM is unlikely to work the first time, but perseverance will pay off
- 💡 Regular crop monitoring can be the difference between successful control and not
- 💡 Learning from what you did last season and building on this will help future years.

For other tips and resources, see the TomatoesNZ website <https://www.tomatoesnz.co.nz/ipm>

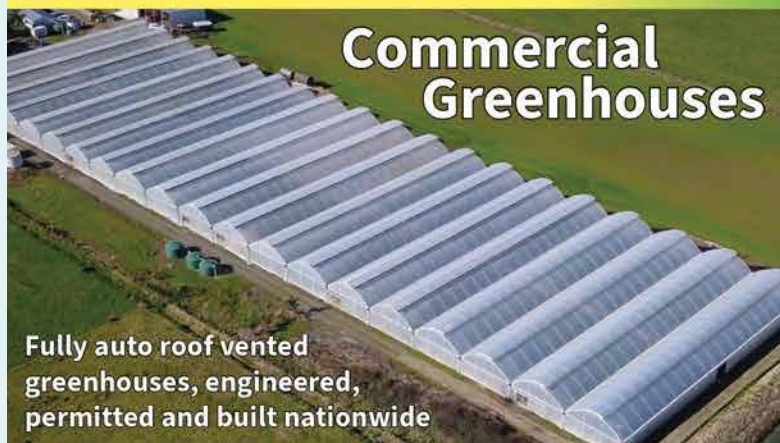
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Life Membership Award recipient Brian Gargiulo with Barry O'Neil, Lifetime Achievement Award recipient and outgoing TomatoesNZ chair



Dinah Cohen, Covered Cropping NZ manager, presented Barry with a caricature of the TomatoesNZ Board

Growers got a lot out of the data rich, technical session on the impact of humidity on plant growth and yield. Arlet Dechering, from the Delphy Academy in the Netherlands, was the presenter. She was sponsored by the Horticulture Charitable Trust.

Two of Arlet's conclusions were that growers "need common sense and green fingers to get the most out of data" and "more data is not always better."

Arlet also stressed the importance of profit, echoing a sentiment from the session exploring barriers to geoheat. In his presentation, Yale Carden of GeoExchange NZ said "it all comes down to the bottom line" when growers are making decisions about energy.

Awards time

Two significant awards were made at the conclusion of the TomatoesNZ Annual General Meeting, which was held after the mini conference. The first was a Life Membership Award to Brian Gargiulo and the second, a Lifetime Achievement Award to outgoing TomatoesNZ Chair, Barry O'Neil.

In his acceptance speech, Brian joked that tomatoes "catch everything, from first thing in the morning until late at night, after you've gone to bed."

Brian said he has thoroughly enjoyed the industry. "I've had a lot of fun and been educated by a lot of very good growers, who've taught me how to behave, how to react, and how to grow. But whether I have learned successfully is another thing!"

In presenting Barry with his award, chair Simon Watson said Barry "has faced numerous biosecurity threats, including fruit fly outbreaks and pepino mosaic virus, as well as COVID-19 lockdowns, since becoming independent chair in 2018."

Simon went on to say that "Barry's empathetic leadership, effective decision-making, and exceptional time-keeping skills have been crucial to navigating complex ministerial issues and board opinions. His contributions also extended to the formation of Covered Cropping NZ."

The conference was a chance for the covered cropping sector to celebrate the HortNZ President's Trophy, being awarded to T&G general manager, Ben Smith during the Horticulture Conference.

Accepting the trophy, Ben said, "It's guys like Brian and Barry and everyone else in this room that have made the successes that we've achieved in the covered crop sector in the past few years. I really thank everyone in the room for being part of what we've achieved." ●



Feedback on the conference can be shared with Covered Cropping NZ at the below QR code while all resources are available on the TomatoesNZ website: <https://www.tomatoesnz.co.nz/hot-topics/resources-from-the-greenhouse-mini-conference/>

LEAF MOULD SURVEY

Take part in a survey on Leaf Mould to help inform the research work into resistance that Francis Ferrada-Hartley started at Massey University.



Scan for more information

PRACTICAL SPRAY WORKSHOP

On 24 September ALT, TomatoesNZ and Vegetables NZ are hosting a final greenhouse practical spray workshop in Kaiapoi, Canterbury.

For details, visit:



a-lighter-touch.co.nz/upskill-with-the-alt-spray-workshops-2026/

CHINA GROWER TRIP

We are still working on a grower trip to China and will let everyone know when we have a confirmed itinerary but this is likely to be next year and definitely not in October or November 2026.

If you have any questions, please email or phone Dinah Cohen, Covered Cropping NZ manager

021 922 414 | dinah.cohen@tomatoesnz.co.nz

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NARROW, AGILE, AND **BACKED TO KEEP GROWERS MOVING**

From spraying and mowing to harvest and transport, tractors working in New Zealand's orchards and vineyards are expected to handle tough jobs in tight spaces at the busiest times of the season. John Deere's new 5E Narrow Tractors have been designed specifically for those challenges, with the backing of parts and service networks to keep growers up and running when it matters most.

The specialty John Deere 5EN range is purpose-built for horticulture to pull heavy carts and handle fully loaded sprayers while being able to navigate tight turns in the most densely planted vineyard.

With a width of 1.48 metres and a turning radius from 3.56 metres, there are few places the 5EN can't fit, and the tractor has more power than before, with a 105-horsepower option.

Equipped with the reliable John Deere PowerTech™ 4045 PWS engine, the 5EN achieves excellent torque, fuel efficiency and durability, and a factory-fitted creeper option is available to achieve speeds as low as 0.15km/hr.

Heavy duty cylinder blocks allow the tractor to perform in ditches, over rough terrain, and other less than ideal conditions, and mechanical front-wheel drive provides traction at the press of a button.

A variety of front, mid and rear-mounted implements can be quickly and easily hooked up to the front and rear attachment locations through the gear shift controls and rear hitch controls.

The 5EN also introduces advanced precision bringing systems like AutoTrac™ guidance to the orchard, minimising operator fatigue and reducing overlap to save on input costs. Advanced filtration in the cab is available direct from factory, with a switch to transition between Cat II or Cat IV filtration as needed.

Other cab enhancements include a new digital dash display, optimised right-hand console and throttle placement, USB-C ports for connectivity, an Electro-Hydraulic (EH) Hitch and an integrated armrest for ergonomic support. Lighting upgrades include LED work lights, headlights, and rear hitch lights as standard.



John Deere's new 5EN specialty narrow tractors have more horsepower and a cab built for comfort



The 5EN cab includes a new digital dash display, an enhanced right-hand console, USB-C ports for modern connectivity, an Electro-Hydraulic (EH) Hitch and an integrated armrest for ergonomic support

"The 5EN cab is ergonomically designed for growers and operators who may spend eight to 12 hours in the machine at peak times, to enable them to work in comfort," Erin Wagstaff, John Deere Australia and New Zealand Marketing Manager for Small Ag and Turf, explains.

"Horticulture is an incredibly important sector for John Deere and we're continuing to invest in exciting, practical and innovative solutions like the 5EN range of tractors, to help growers to operate more efficiently and profitably."

Keeping a horticulture operation productive requires more than the machine itself. Erin says access to the right parts is critical.

"John Deere dealers provide growers with genuine John Deere parts as well as Reman and alternative parts options, backed by advisors who can help identify the solution quickly," she says.

"We're committed to providing New Zealand growers with the dealer network, parts and support to help keep their machines working when they need them most."

Until 31 December 2026, growers can receive 10 percent off parts purchased over the counter at any John Deere dealer when they spend \$1,000 or more (ex GST). Speak to your local dealer for full offer details. ●





UPDATE ON WAIKATO AND HORIZONS COUNCIL PLAN CHANGES



The Government has announced proposed changes affecting Waikato Regional Council Plan Change 1 and Horizons Regional Council Plan Change 2. We know many growers in these regions have been looking for clarity on what these changes mean in practice, particularly while the wider resource management reforms are underway. At a high level, the announcements appear to provide a more practical transition for affected growers, so these are generally positive developments. However, HortNZ is still waiting to see the exact legislative wording and implementation details, so some aspects may need to be confirmed or clarified as the changes progress. You can find more information on the changes at hortnz.co.nz.

NZGAP ANNUAL MEETING



NZGAP (New Zealand Good Agricultural Practice) certifies the safe and sustainable production of fruit and vegetables in New Zealand. NZGAP will be hosting its Annual Meeting in September where committee election results will be announced, any motions received from members will be considered and an update on finances will be provided. The meeting will be held online via Teams and recorded for anyone who is unavailable to attend on the day.

When: Tuesday, 22 September | **Time:** 12-1pm | To register, please visit nzgap.co.nz

PROPOSED CHANGES TO ORGANIC REGULATIONS



The Ministry for Primary Industries is proposing changes to the national system used to regulate organic products, which was introduced in 2025. The changes should make it clearer, more practical and proportionate before businesses are required to comply with the regulations by 31 March 2028.

Consultation is now open on an exemption threshold for small growers, compliance measures, a new 'national organic' mark, and some minor and technical amendments to the Organic Products and Production Regulations and the Organic Standards Regulations.

HortNZ are preparing a submission on behalf of commercial fruit and vegetable growers, which will be circulated in September. For more information, contact matt.watson@hortnz.co.nz.



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