

NZGROWER[®]

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HORTICULTURE NEW ZEALAND

VITAL TEAM PLAYERS

PAGE 8



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MID CANTERBURY

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FLIP TO FIND FRUIT

THIS ISSUE OF NZGROWER OFFERS YOU ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE. FLIP THE MAGAZINE TO SEE OUR SISTER PUBLICATION ABOUT FRUIT – *THE ORCHARDIST*.



ON THE COVER:

Working in 'tropical' Warkworth just like home, see page 8.



PEOPLE ARE THE BEATING HEART OF NEW ZEALAND'S HORTICULTURE SECTOR



Nadine Tunley : HortNZ chief executive

He tangata, he tangata, he tangata It is the people, it is the people, it is the people.

On behalf of Horticulture New Zealand, I want to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the 40,000 plus people that play such a crucial role in ensuring our industry's growth, sustainability and success.

Without those people tending to crops in the fields, working in orchards or providing critical supply chain support, New Zealanders would miss out on a reliable and resilient supply of fresh vegetables and fruit that is so important to the health and wellbeing of our nation.

The *Aotearoa Horticulture Action Plan* is our sector's five-point plan to double the farmgate value of horticultural production by 2035 and nurturing people is one of the plan's key pillars.

We're focused on attracting, retaining and growing great people. This means establishing a coordinated capability framework for horticulture, enabling the right person, the right place, building a responsible and attractive industry and supporting diversity and development.

Our young people are the future of our sector and I'm delighted by the skills and ability we see among our young growers.

HortNZ runs the annual Young Grower of the Year national final, which this year will be held in Hawke's Bay on 9-10 October.

We support the six regional Young Grower of the Year competitions which are run independently of the national final. This year, regional competitions are taking place in Pukekohe, Central Otago, Hawke's Bay, Nelson, Gisborne and Bay of Plenty.

“
Our young people are the future
of our sector

Thank you to the organisers and to all competitors taking part in the regional competitions. Your enthusiasm for the events and your willingness to step up to the challenge plays an important part in raising public awareness of careers in our wonderful sector.

NZGROWER

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Previous Young Grower winners and finalists have spoken of how much they enjoyed taking part in all the stages, from the practical and theoretical challenges to the networking and confidence-building opportunities it provides.

“

We're focused on attracting, retaining and growing great people

We are fortunate to have so many passionate and talented young people pursuing careers in horticulture - it's important to support the next generation of industry leaders.

The RSE scheme provides a vital workforce for our industry - it offers employment opportunities for Pacific workers, many of whom return year after year.

Over the past decade, the number of RSE workers coming to New Zealand annually has grown with the current cap being 19,500.

After almost 17 years, the programme is still serving our growers, the RSE workers and our Pacific partners very well in many aspects. But after such a long time of the

RSE scheme policy review being left incomplete - the RSE scheme does need attention to ensure it remains current and continues to meet the challenging needs of government, growers and employees from the nine Pacific countries in the most effective ways.

The government review of the RSE scheme, begun in 2019, identified a set of proposals aimed at streamlining processes, prioritising workers' wellbeing, driving positive employment practices, ensuring more effective planning and securing the scheme's long-term sustainability.

By championing the cause of our young growers, fostering a culture of education and awareness, and refining policies such as the RSE scheme, we sow the seed of resilience and prosperity for generations to come to flourish in our industry. Thus, driving our vision of healthy food for all for ever! ●



You can find HortNZ's president's column on the opposite side of the magazine.

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PROCESSOR TO DOUBLE PRODUCTION VOLUME

Tony Benny



With the export market growing again, Talley's plans to double their production volume over the next five years

After some difficult years during and after Covid-19, Talley's Vegetable Division has regained momentum, with export orders growing again and expansion underway at its processing plant in Mid Canterbury.

Talley's general manager for vegetables Danie Swanepoel believes that the company's factory located just north of Ashburton has the ideal location – right in the middle of the highly productive Canterbury Plains.

"This location is perfect for us, a vegetable processing facility in the middle of a productive growing area. The Canterbury Plains are just fantastic for growing the produce that we market so it makes sense to be here."

The region has the soils, climate and irrigation water to grow the peas, carrots, sweet corn and potatoes that the Ashburton factory processes for local and export markets.

Talley's established its presence in Mid Canterbury in 1996, after venturing into the vegetable industry in 1974 in Motueka, and later moving the operation to Blenheim. Last year Talley's stopped vegetable processing in Blenheim, consolidating all vegetable division operations to the Ashburton plant.

"You just can't compete with the vineyards, so it didn't make sense anymore to have a vegetable factory in Marlborough."

“

We're proud to be supplying food locally and to the world from our factory in Mid Canterbury

Since it was constructed nearly 30 years ago, the factory in Mid Canterbury has grown significantly. Initially equipped with one pea processing line and a single coldstore, it later expanded to include lines for carrots, corn and potatoes. The latest expansion will introduce a new vegetable processing plant, extended potato fry line, a new line for hash browns, and increased potato receiving and storage facilities.

"Kiwis love fries, so it is a good business to be a part of," says Danie, adding that all processed vegetables are now doing well after the labour disruptions caused by Covid-19.

"The majority of our fries are sold locally, while our vegetables are mainly exported, with a significant portion going to Australia and other markets further afield. During Covid we prioritised supporting the New Zealand market



Talley's operate their own harvesters to collect corn grown under contract

due to export challenges. Now the export market is growing again, and over the next five years or so we'll likely double our production volume through the plant."

Although the factory is positioned well to service the local growers, it faces challenges in sourcing labour in a region with one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country.

"We're always up against labour availability and that makes it hard sometimes, especially during Covid and immediately after it. While the situation has improved, we are still reliant on migrant labour. Our workforce comprises individuals from over 25 nationalities, reflecting a rich diversity within our site.

"I believe that diversity is a strength and this is the message to all of our staff - we're all here working towards the same goal," says Danie.

A large part of the 400-strong peak labour force comprises travellers on working holiday visas who can only stay in one job for three months before moving on. They often start work on dairy farms in spring before starting with Talley's as their demand for labour builds in the summer and early autumn.

"Right now, we're in a good position, we are just about fully staffed. While there are a few vacancies, we're certainly not where we were a couple

of years ago when we didn't have staff to run the second fry line. We had to stop the line, ultimately resorting to selling good potatoes as stock feed because we couldn't process it."

The factory operates with four shifts, two 12-hour dayshifts and two 12-hour nightshifts, four days on, four off, a pattern that especially suits the holiday visa staff who use their four-day 'long weekends' to see the country.

Another challenge confronting the business is the volatility of weather patterns and an increase in nighttime temperatures, attributed to climate change, which are affecting harvests.

"The weather is all over the show," comments Danie. "For two years in a row, our pea season has finished earlier than expected, resulting in crop shortfalls.

"We've seen instances where in one paddock we would have peas in fully filled pods and by all accounts, already too hard, while others that are so young, they're not yet harvestable. But they're one crop so you have to take the lot and as a result, the yield in the process suffers."

In a business where planning is everything - the timing of planting, harvesting and employing staff for the factory, the unpredictable climate poses a significant challenge. "You've got to have a good plan but it's only a plan," laughs Danie.

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Volatile weather patterns in recent years have added to the harvest planning complexity



OUR WORKFORCE COMPRISES INDIVIDUALS FROM OVER 25 NATIONALITIES, REFLECTING A RICH DIVERSITY WITHIN OUR SITE

But while climate change does pose major challenges it also offers opportunities, potentially allowing different crops to be grown in Mid Canterbury, including more super sweet varieties of sweet corn which require higher temperatures than the local average.

"Super sweet varieties are highly sought after, but we only have a two-month growing season and we're pushing the limits. We start early and finish late, but the super sweet varieties are not suited to the edges of the season, so we grow what we call normal sweet corn at the start and end of the season. In Marlborough, we never had that issue, it's warmer and the sweet corn is sweeter up there."

"We need to be looking at varieties to try to combat the issue of short growing seasons but with climate change that problem may diminish. There'll be some ups and downs in the meantime."

During harvest, Talley's runs two different models. They operate their own harvesters to collect the peas and corn grown under contract. Whereas with potatoes and carrots, the growers do their own harvesting with Talley's providing transportation to the factory.

During Covid-19, when international shipping effectively ground to a halt, Talley's and other processors scrambled to find storage space for products which had been destined for export. However, Danie says that while shipping has improved it still has its challenges, particularly with ongoing concerns about disruptions in the Suez Canal due to conflict in the Middle East.

“

You've got to have a good plan but it's only a plan

"We're proud to be supplying food locally and to the world from our factory in Mid Canterbury. Despite the challenges we face with labour, we're in the right place to fulfil our mission of bringing the best of New Zealand to the world. Our commitment to serving both our grower base and the wider community remains strong. With the expansion of our factory, we're further solidifying our commitment and our position as the food basket of Mid Canterbury". ●



Stronger by working together

Make your vote count - vote now in the HortNZ commodity levy referendum. **Voting closes midday, Friday 14 June 2024.**

Eligible voters should have received voting papers either by email or post. If you have not received these, please contact HortNZ on **0508 467 869** or email **comms@hortnz.co.nz**.

Your participation in the levy referendum is crucial, the future of the horticulture industry depends on it.

Find out more in the commodity levy section on the HortNZ website

www.hortnz.co.nz/commodity-levy





WORKING IN 'TROPICAL' WARKWORTH JUST LIKE HOME

Elaine Fisher

In Warkworth, some 4500km south of the equator, one of the town's largest employers offers a work environment best described as tropical and that's just the way the majority of staff like it.

"We employ approximately 120 permanent staff of which approximately 70 are from Kiribati, along with 64 RSE (Recognised Seasonal Employer) workers from Kiribati and four from Tuvalu. The heat and humidity of the glasshouses

is just like home for them," says Sheryl Lewis, HR manager for Southern Paprika Ltd (SPL).

"Our Kiribati and Tuvalu staff are an important part of our team, particularly when it comes to picking our capsicum and snack cucumber crops and pruning and twisting our plants. While the cold weather outside the glasshouse can be a shock when RSE workers first arrive, inside is just like home so they enjoy the work environment."

The tropical conditions, however, are not so popular with Kiwi workers. "We can't find enough Kiwis to do the work. Although employing RSE workers is expensive for SPL it is worth the investment. We wouldn't have expanded our business as we have without the reliable labour RSE provides.

"Thanks to the scheme we know we will have the number of people we need and that they will stay the whole season, take their roles seriously and add a lot of value to the business. In our experience, we generally don't get that reliability from Kiwi workers."

SPL's 86ha site, 60 minutes north of Auckland, has five glasshouse complexes totalling 27ha, including 26ha at the Warkworth site and the original 1ha structure at Point Wells. At any one time the glasshouses have one million plants, producing up to six million kilograms of capsicums a year. Its annual wage bill alone stretches well into the millions.

The company's longstanding relationship with Kiribati and Tuvalu began around 25 years ago when the original glasshouse manager brought with him workers from the islands.

"Over the years that relationship has grown and many of our staff are now permanent residents in Warkworth."

SPL clearly values what its I-Kiribati and Tuvaluan staff bring to the business and it's obvious the feelings are reciprocated by those who have chosen to settle permanently in New Zealand, as well as those who return year after year under the RSE scheme.

"We have three I-Kiribati RSE workers, who are our longest serving, currently doing their fifteenth season."

Part of the appeal may be the work atmosphere. "It's lovely to walk into a glasshouse where music is playing and the workers are singing, laughing and joking. It's such a happy place."



Horticulture New Zealand Notice of the 19th Annual General Meeting

Thursday 29 August 2024 at 1.00pm at Mercury Bay Park, Mt Maunganui.

Business

- 1 Welcome and Apologies
- 2 Voting and Proxies
- 3 Obituaries
- 4 Approve Minutes of the 18th AGM
- 5 President's and Chief Executive's Report on HortNZ's Activities
- 6 Approve Audited Financial Statements for year ended 31 March 2024
- 7 Review of Constitution
- 8 Levy Rate
- 9 Director Remuneration
- 10 Approve 2024/25 Budget
- 11 Approve Auditors for 2024/25
- 12 Notices of Motion
- 13 General Business

Call for Notices of Motion

Any Board Member, Affiliated Organisation or Active Grower Member wishing to have a matter considered at the AGM must give notice in writing to the Chief Executive of Horticulture New Zealand of the notice of motion no later than Thursday, 11 July 2024 at 10.00am. Notices should include the wording of the motion to be voted on and up to one A4 page of explanatory notes. Notices of motions will be listed on HortNZ's website www.hortnz.co.nz on 18 July 2024 and will feature in the HortNZ magazines (August issue).



Shery Lewis HR manager for Southern Paprika Ltd, with long standing RSE staff from Kiribati: Awiata Arintetaake, Tekebo Mweretaka, Temaiana Teakai who are working their fifteenth season with the company

Adding to the feeling of a 'home away from home' is the fact that SPL's permanent staff from Kiribati and Tuvalu refer friends and family for RSE positions and assist with providing pastoral care and language translation in the community. "At work our permanent staff support new team members with training and translation as required."

Because of the distances they travel to work in New Zealand, RSE workers from Tuvalu and Kiribati are able to stay for nine months each year - two-months longer than RSE workers from other countries. This fits well with SPL's peak season and the pullout and replant process.

"That's a long time to be away from home. During the Covid pandemic many were stuck here for two and a half years without seeing their families as even after the New Zealand borders opened, the Kiribati border was still shut. It was really tough for our workers."

Sheryl says it's hard to fully appreciate the sacrifices I-Kiribati are willing to make by joining the RSE scheme.

"As unemployment is very high in Kiribati, the RSE labour mobility scheme is very important to their nation. Often our RSE workers are not only providing for wives and children, they're also supporting extended family including parents, brothers, and sisters.

"Money remittances from RSE workers back home are vital to their economy. We view our scheme as a win, win, win. It's great for SPL because we get the committed workers which we cannot access in New Zealand. It's great for RSE workers as they can better support their families when it is difficult to get meaningful employment in the islands. It's also great for our permanent staff having family members here for nine months."

Each year SPL helps organise shipping containers which are filled with equipment and supplies to send home.

Cropping Land for Lease



23-25ha quality cropping land available for lease in Tuki Tuki catchment, Hawkes Bay.



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Enquiries contact Susan:
027 4596418 or orchardview21@gmail.com



For RSE workers from Kiribati and Tuvalu, the heat and humidity of the Southern Paprika Ltd glasshouses is just like home

"We schedule the arrival of the containers to coincide with the RSE workers' return so they can unload them. It's like Christmas all over again."

In the containers are building materials, sewing machines, outboard motors, power tools, clothing, kitchen tools, televisions and much more.

"Some of the workers set up small businesses for themselves or family members to run while they are away. There are instances where wives have started shops and sewing businesses. One man has established an open-air, mobile cinema, with seating, a large screen and projection equipment while another has a petrol station. Other businesses include boat hire, using outboards sent back from New Zealand."

While the money earned from working at SPL is helping enrich the island nations' communities, the RSE workers are also contributing to the economy and enriching the culture of Warkworth and Rodney district.

"Our permanent staff have become ensconced in the local community, and several have firmly put down their roots, purchasing their own homes here.

"There are Pasifika groups at the local primary school and college and festivals are held regularly. There is a strong connection with the local Presbyterian Church which has grown and now has social workers involved with the Kiribati community."

Sheryl admires what both RSE workers and permanent SPL staff have been able to achieve. "Many use the money from their first season working here to build the first level of a new home, and the second season's earning to build the next level.

"I've been to Kiribati once and would love to return. It's pretty remote and very humbling to see where people live and in particular seeing where our permanent staff started and compare that with what they have achieved. It's not been easy for them to go through the Pacific Access Category ballot process and then work and save hard to own their own homes."

Managing the employment programme for RSE workers requires a significant commitment from SPL, including additional costs associated with being part of the scheme.

"We are required to pay a higher hourly rate to RSE staff and there is a lot of pastoral care which includes coordinating support with literacy, budgeting advice, health clinics, facilitating shipping containers, assistance with staff savings through our relationship with ANZ, training opportunities and much more.

"The RSE scheme is vital to our country and vital to Pacific nations. Without it I don't think horticulture in New Zealand would be able to achieve the growth it has. If the programme is secured into the future, I believe even more investment will come into horticulture." ●

RSE SCHEME AT A CROSSROADS

The Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme has been an unqualified success – that’s among the findings of the 2024 report, ‘The RSE after 16 years: a milestone, a stocktake and a forecast’, researched and written by Emeritus Professor Richard Bedford, University of Waikato and Auckland University of Technology and Charlotte Bedford Development Policy Centre, The Australian National University.

However, after almost 17 years, the RSE scheme is at something of a crossroads.

BETWEEN 17,500 AND 18,000 SEASONAL WORKERS WILL ARRIVE IN NEW ZEALAND FROM SOURCE COUNTRIES IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC UNDER THE RSE SCHEME DURING THE 2023/24 FINANCIAL YEAR

“The combination of circumstances and forces in New Zealand and in the Pacific that led to its implementation in 2007 have changed significantly,” the report says.

The study’s authors say that in the three major source countries for seasonal labour Vanuatu, Samoa and Tonga, critical assessments of the impacts of temporary labour migration on domestic labour markets are raising serious questions about the extent to which they can accommodate increased demand for seasonal labour in New Zealand and Australia.

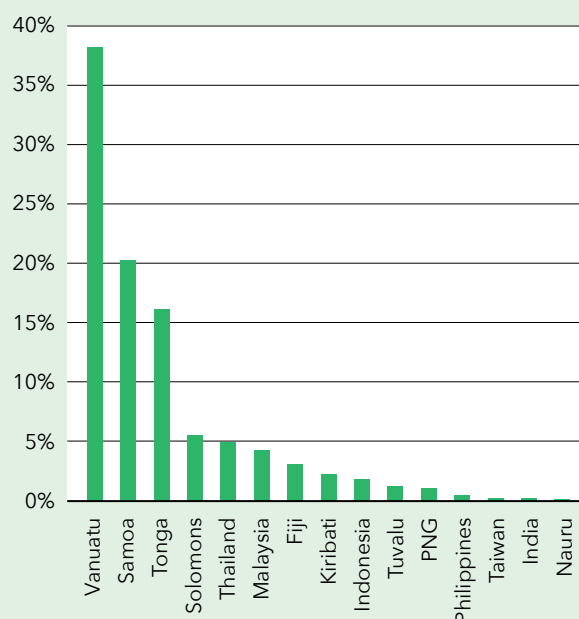
Another factor is that many growers in Hawke’s Bay and the Bay of Plenty have had to adjust their RSE recruitment for 2023/24 downwards because of ongoing effects of Cyclone Gabrielle in February 2023 on their crops.

“Rising compliance costs of recruiting RSE labour are also forcing some employers to manage growth in their numbers of seasonal workers more strictly than might have been the case in the past.

“It seems likely that somewhere between 17,500 and 18,000 seasonal workers will arrive in New Zealand from source countries in Asia and the Pacific under the RSE scheme during the 2023/24 financial year.

“The evidence suggests that it is highly unlikely that recruitment of seasonal workers during the 2023/24 financial year will be close to the approved cap of 19,500,” the report concluded.

Figure 1. RSE workers recruited between 1 July 2007 and 30 June 2023



The country of origin for all individual RSE workers since 2007, based on data from the report, ‘The RSE after 16 years: a milestone, a stocktake and a forecast’. The data include RSE workers from Asia who were grandfathered into the scheme when it began in 2007



Grower event and Annual General Meetings

8 August 2024

TomatoesNZ and Vegetables NZ would like to invite growers to an extension event, which will also include the two organisations’ Annual General Meetings (AGMs).

WHEN | Thursday 8 August, between 12pm and 7pm

WHERE | Navigation Homes Stadium, Franklin Rd, Pukekohe

TomatoesNZ will hold its AGM at 1.30pm, following lunch.

The rest of the afternoon will comprise presentations and panel discussions, chiefly on *A Lighter Touch*, biosecurity, hygiene, crop advisory groups and labour.

Vegetables NZ will hold its AGM at 5pm, starting with a guest speaker. The AGM will be followed by refreshments.

TomatoesNZ and Vegetables NZ will issue official notices of their AGMs and make a call for written remits in due course.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Call either TomatoesNZ business manager, Dinah Cohen, on **021 922 414**; or Vegetables NZ stakeholder engagement and communications manager, Andrew Bristol, on **021 021 62 021**.





GCM farming makes its way to New Zealand



A micro-organism capable of breaking down Chitin and Gelatin has been utilized in organic operations overseas providing a powerful and effective plant health agent. The great news is thanks to the initiative of a New Zealand Grower, Power GCM-N is now also available to our local growers.

What is GCM Farming?

GCM stands for Gelatinase and Chitinase producing Microorganism.

What is *Bacillus velezensis*?

Bacillus velezensis acts to promote plant health by producing Gelatinase and Chitinase which in turn act to break down Gelatin and Chitin.

The micro-organism *Bacillus velezensis* has been shown in trials to promote plant growth. In addition, many strains have the reported ability to suppress the growth of pathogens such as bacteria, fungi and nematodes.

Where is *Bacillus velezensis* found?

Its strains are found in abundance on the foreshore and mudflats of the western coast of South Korea, where it breaks down crab and other crustacean shells.

What are Gelatin and Chitin?

Gelatin is a component of the larvae of many horticultural pests as well as the egg sacs of nematodes. Chitin is a hard shell-like structure found in crustaceans but also in the exoskeletons of insect pests and the cell walls of pathogenic fungi.

What is Power GCM-N?

A powder form of this agent has been made available in several countries to commercial growers as Power GCM-N.

Power GCM-N Mode of Action

Power GCM-N inoculates the soil and stimulates soil microbial activity enhancing plant health and disease resistance. There are thought to be several metabolites and enzymes produced during mass culture which promote crop growth and immunity as well as enhancing soil health.

How to prepare and apply it?

Brewing: is the most effective means of culturing microorganisms on mass.

Preparation for brewing: Water tank, water heater, water pump with aeration, Power GCM-N powder, sugar, fertilizers.

Application: Application of the brewed solution to crops and to soil via dripper or canopy spray every 2-4 weeks is recommended.

Rate: 1kg Power GCM-N can make 1000L of solution sufficient to treat 0.5Ha.

Who should try this product?

Any grower with nematode issues, soil born root diseases, crop pests, aiming to grow crops organically and where crop rotation is impractical.



Power GCM-N, 1Kg



Brewing Kit, 1000L

More information

Email Timothy for full product information, how to use the brewing kit and costs of set up.

Contact us on
gcm.farming@gmail.com
www.gcm-farming.com

For more information contact GCM Farming (NZ) Ltd
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PRODUCT GROUPS



ALL THE LATEST NEWS FROM YOUR PRODUCT GROUPS



VEGETABLE RESEARCH ROADSHOW
'BOYS' IN OHAKUNE: ANTONY HEYWOOD,
DANIEL SUTTON, JOHN MURPHY,
ANDREW BRISTOL AND
IAIN KIRKWOOD





HAVE YOU VOTED ON THE COMMODITY LEVY YET?

Antony Heywood : Vegetables NZ general manager



The labour supply workshop held in Auckland brought together 29 stakeholders to find better ways to fill the labour gaps

If you are reading this, grow fresh vegetables, and have not voted on the fresh vegetable commodity levy, please stop reading this column, go and find your voting paper – either in your inbox or mailbox – and take the time to vote.

Voting is crucial, even though no change is being proposed. Also, it is important to fill out the voting form completely, as an incomplete form will be taken as a 'no' vote.

Vegetables NZ is your grower membership organisation. Let your voice be heard.

What else have we been up to lately?

Last month, we finished the vegetable research roadshows, in conjunction with Vegetables Research and Innovation (VR&I). We saw more than 300 growers and others in the industry, including university students, at these roadshows.

From my standpoint, they were a success. The roadshows outlined the latest grower-funded research and development, stimulated discussion, and provided us feedback. Planning for next year's roadshows has already begun. Planning for next year's in the field extension workshops has also begun. In 2025, the idea is to hold some in-field workshops in regions other than Pukekohe.



Labour supply workshop

Vegetables NZ partnered with independent consultants Scarlatti (Dana Carver) to host a labour supply workshop in Auckland on 15 May. This workshop was in response to growers' calls for Vegetables NZ to do more to ensure skilled labour is available at critical times of the year for vegetable production.

Twenty-nine stakeholders from government, other product groups and HortNZ – plus 15 vegetable growers – debated the merits of current labour schemes and what needs to be improved to ensure current schemes and any future schemes are fit for purpose for a diverse and regular vegetable labour requirement.

The workshop showed that some vegetable growers use the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme very well, but new entrants struggle with the compliance and prescription of the scheme. While no silver bullet was developed on the day, the workshop gave all participants a chance to understand the different perspectives, realise there are gaps but by working together, we have more chance of a successful labour system, than trying to do it alone.

Next steps will be a wider conversation with vegetable growers on the strawman concept that will be developed by Scarlatti from the day's activities. After that, the workshop group will devise actions to take to Wellington for wider consultation and implementation.

Have you heard the Add One More Vegetable ad on the Breeze, yet?

Vegetables.co.nz has partnered with the Breeze and 5+ A Day on a radio, website and social media promotion of Add One More Vegetable, running from 13 May to 9 June. The promotion comprises ads and radio announcer promos, as well as a 'Beat the Basket', fill your basket with vegetables competition, where listeners can win up to \$200 if they manage to stop filling their basket before the basket breaks.

This is the first time that vegetables.co.nz has invested in promotion that is so consumer focused. In this case, the target market is household shoppers with children between zero and 17 years of age. We will be closely monitoring how the promotion goes, which we will leverage through additional social media and media activity.

With a wide range of vegetables in good supply as we go into winter, we feel the timing of this, our first commercial Add One More Vegetable promotion is ideal. The plan is to follow this promotion up with a similar one in spring, if analysis shows this type of radio, website and social media promotion achieves cut through. ●





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COMMODITY LEVY RENEWAL

Dinah Cohen : TomatoesNZ business manager

As you will be aware by now, TomatoesNZ's commodity levy is due for renewal and the TomatoesNZ board proposed no changes to the current levy terms. Since March, we have been seeking feedback on this proposal in the form of webinars, grower workshops and emails. As a result of this process, the board has confirmed the final proposal of 'no change' to the current levy terms.

In the information pack you can read about the work that TomatoesNZ has done, and will continue to do, if the proposal is supported. If you support the work being done by TomatoesNZ on behalf of all fresh tomato growers, please take the time to vote. The ballot papers were sent by email on 15 May (and by post if we didn't have your email address around the same time). Please have your say and cast your vote!

- If you haven't received your ballot papers please contact me.
- If you have any questions about this process, please contact either me or the TomatoesNZ board chair, Barry O'Neil on **022 108 7007** barryoneil@keronlea.nz
- TomatoesNZ board directors are contacting grower members over the voting period, so you can also talk directly to them if you have any questions.
- Please also see the TomatoesNZ website (tomatoesnz.co.nz) Commodity Levy Final Proposal 2024 for more information.



AGM and mini conference

Please note **8 August** in your calendars as the date that tomato growers are invited to participate in our Annual General Meeting. This will be accompanied by an array of presenters and discussions on the following topics:

- Keeping nasties out of New Zealand: what the seed companies are doing
- Controlling common greenhouse pests (whitefly, psyllid, russet mite, aphids & caterpillars) with biologicals as part of an IPM
- Best practice hygiene for your greenhouse: the Dutch perspective

The message from international speakers Marc Groenewegen and Frank Florus at earlier workshops was that border controls and hygiene practices were the key for New Zealand growers to keeping diseases like Tomato Brown Rugus Fruit Virus (ToBRFV) from having the devastating effect that has been seen in many other areas of the world. This is the theme for our educational conference. Please join us in person:

Date: 8 August

Venue: Navigation Homes Stadium, Pukekohe

Time: 12pm sharp to 5pm (including lunch).

Note that Vegetables NZ will hold their AGM at 5pm in the same venue.

Please RSVP for catering purposes:

<https://forms.office.com/r/GR3nEd2buz>



For those travelling from outside of the Auckland region, please contact me about a travel subsidy.

VOTING FOR THE
LEVY CLOSES
14 JUNE

BOARD MEMBER
NOMINATIONS DUE BY
18 JUNE

THE ANNUAL GENERAL
MEETING IS
8 AUGUST

AGM - board nominations and remits

The nominations for board members opens 30 May. If you have ever thought that TomatoesNZ doesn't represent you and your ideas, consider joining the board.

- Callum Grant is retiring from the TomatoesNZ board after serving 6 years as a board director.
- Albert Shih is due to retire but is making himself available for re-election.

There will be one place on the board. If there is more than one nomination in addition to that of Albert Shih, a board election will be held with more details to follow.

The call for remits opens 30 May - if there is any subject that you would like the TomatoesNZ board and grower members to consider, please put these in writing and email me.

Board nominations and remits need to be received by 18 June.

Resources for growers

I wanted to take the opportunity to remind growers that there are some useful documents on the TomatoesNZ website available for your use. This includes a policy on glass breakage

What's proposed?

TomatoesNZ proposes **no change** to the current **Commodity Levy** of **0.35%**



35c
PER \$100

at first point of
sale for both
domestic and
export sales

The maximum rate is currently set at 0.50% per \$100 with the annual rate set every year as proposed by the board and with agreement by you the members, at the AGM.

management, important for food safety especially if your greenhouse is made of glass and you notice a breakage. <https://www.tomatoesnz.co.nz/about/useful-docs>

There is also information here <https://www.tomatoesnz.co.nz/hot-topics/industrial-allocation-and-how-to-register> on how to apply for industrial allocation. The different articles, available in English and Korean, take you through the different steps. If you have any downtime in the coming months, it's a good idea to start this process as it can take a few days to complete and must be done before the end of the calendar year, for allocation to be awarded the following year. If you have any issues at any stage, please contact me and I will be only too happy to help. ●



You can reach TomatoesNZ business manager
Dinah Cohen on:




021 922 414




dinah.cohen
@tomatoesnz.co.nz




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SOWING THE SEEDS

Kate Truffitt : Potatoes NZ chief executive



Eurogrow recently presented 50 potato varieties to growers in Pukekohe

In the New Zealand potato industry, we are continuously updating and improving potato genetic resources available to improve productivity, quality and opportunities. New varieties are frequently being imported and trialled to determine potato varieties best suited for the New Zealand climate conditions, soil types and market requirements.

SASA and imported potato varieties

New Zealand's Ministry for Primary Industries has an Offshore Accreditation Agreement with SASA (Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture) who hold a nuclear stock potato collection, so that potato varieties in tissue culture can be imported into New Zealand without going

POTATOES COMMODITY LEVY ORDER

Thank you for all the interest, input, feedback, and votes on the Potatoes New Zealand Commodity Levy Order. The referendum closed on 10 May, with 94.74 percent support. We really appreciate everyone who took the time to have their say - we received votes from 54.68 percent of the growers.

through post entry quarantine. This allows the potato seed companies such as Eurogrow and Alex McDonald to import new varieties from their affiliated potato breeding companies, primarily based in Europe.

The importation of new varieties is a long and expensive operation. Seed potato companies invest significant funds in this importation process. They select varieties which they believe will meet market requirements in the future.

New Zealand Seed Potato Certification Scheme

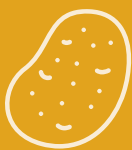
Once imported, new potato varieties are sent to one of the four Potatoes NZ Accredited tissue culture laboratories for multiplication. These laboratories then supply one of four Accredited Mini-Tuber Production Facilities, who produce the starting material that can enter the New Zealand Seed Potato Certification Scheme.

The New Zealand Seed Potato Certification Scheme is run by Potatoes NZ and is managed by a committee made up of two seed growers, two commercial growers, two seed company representatives and two process company representatives. This seed authority sets the seed scheme rules and oversees the entire certification process.

UNECE - Seed Potato Standards

The New Zealand Seed Potato Certification Scheme is benchmarked against the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) - Seed Certification standards, which have become the internationally

IT TAKES OVER **6 YEARS** BEFORE A NEW POTATO VARIETY CAN WORK ITS WAY THROUGH TESTING AND THEN THROUGH THE SEED PRODUCTION PIPELINE BEFORE IT CAN BE SOLD TO THE COMMERCIAL INDUSTRY. ONLY **ONE IN NINE** OF THE IMPORTED POTATO VARIETIES WILL EVER MAKE IT TO MARKET



accepted standard for the trade of seed potatoes. New Zealand has been a member of this organisation since 2014 and has been instrumental in developing these standards. This organisation meets annually to review and update the rules and promote the use of certification schemes around the world.

The UNECE - seed potato committee also plays an important role in highlighting issues facing the member countries including pest and disease outbreaks that might threaten certified seed potato schemes.

They can alert member countries of biosecurity threats allowing members to prepare for an incursion and to develop biosecurity readiness plans.

In addition, the committee addresses some of the challenges that face the seed potato certification schemes globally. An example of such a challenge is the use of True Potato Seed, an emerging technology, which uses true seed (sexually reproduced) for the multiplication of potatoes instead of the vegetative system of potato tubers which is currently used. The committee will need to draft a new set of rules to cover this production process.

Potatoes NZ continues to collaborate with many key stakeholders to ensure Aotearoa has a robust framework in place for potato varieties to support the ongoing success and sustainability of the potato industry. ●

Contact details



0800 399 674



info@potatoesnz.co.nz



www.potatoesnz.co.nz



Lydiard

Excellent white well tucked curd delivering good size and weight. The plant is strong and the jacket and wrap are excellent. Harvest from early December until mid-late April dependent on location. Very adaptable and very reliable.

Chavez

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Launch

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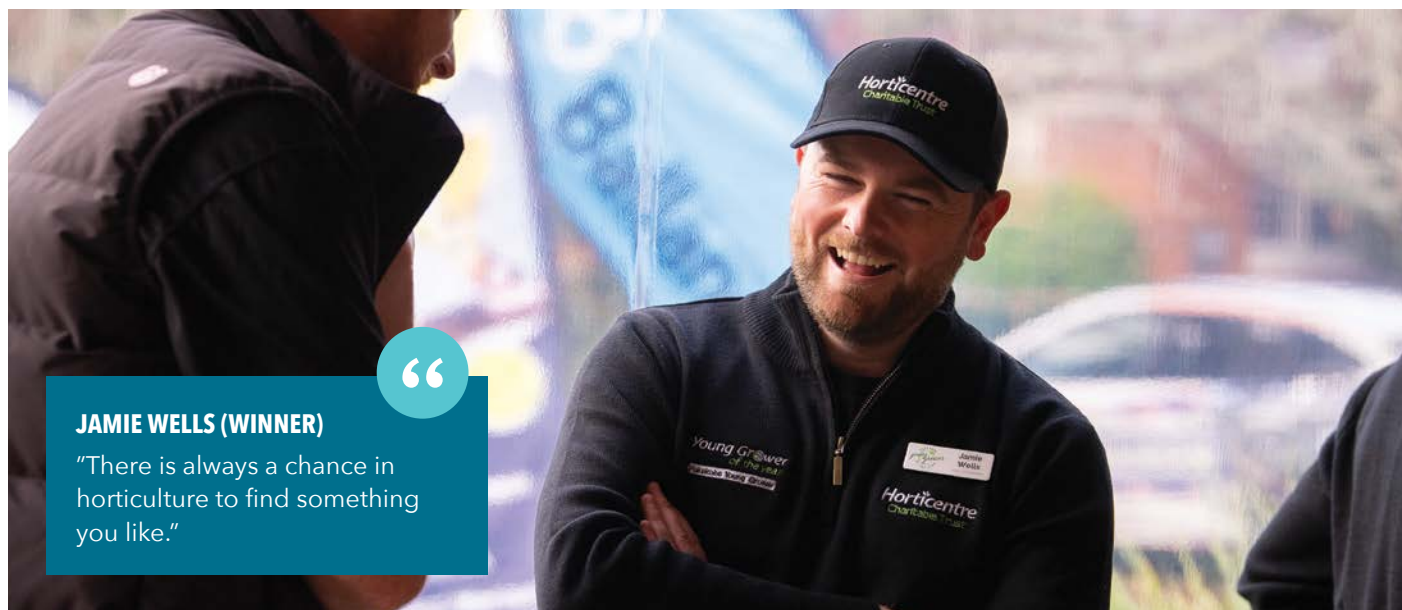
ACROSS THE SECTOR - ACROSS THE COUNTRY



PARTICIPANTS IN THE
PUKEKOHE REGIONAL
YOUNG GROWER
COMPETITION IN MAY



OPPORTUNITY ABOUNDS IN HORTICULTURE



JAMIE WELLS (WINNER)

“There is always a chance in horticulture to find something you like.”

As the 2024 Young Grower of the Year regional competitions get underway, HELENA O’NEILL talks to the seven Pukekohe competitors about the opportunities horticulture offers our young people.

Jamie Wells was named the 2024 Pukekohe Young Grower of the Year at LaValla Estate in Tuakau on 17 May, winning the theory, practical, and business sections.

“I feel like with horticulture, even if you come from a background without any history of growing, you will be able to get far in it. That’s from a personal experience too – I’ve come from a family with no horticultural history, and then to get this far with perseverance and dedication. If you give it your best shot, you can go far.”

The 29-year-old Balle Brothers agronomist says horticulture is an industry that promotes people asking questions in terms of trying to find new ways to solve problems.

“Some of these solutions come from people who haven’t been in horticulture before... the more people we get in the sector it’s only just going to get better. If anyone is on the fence about joining the industry, there is always a chance in horticulture to find something you like.”

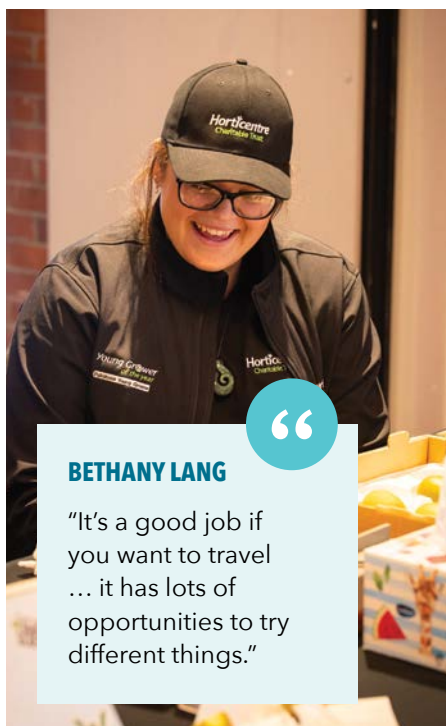
Contestants were challenged in eight different modules: marketing, compliance, pest and disease identification, safe tractor driving, finance, soil and fertilisers, irrigation and quality control. At the gala dinner later that evening they each delivered a speech and competed in a panel discussion.

Runner-up was 21-year-old Jack Haddon, an operator and chemical applicator at Balle Brothers. He also won the best speech.

Balle Brothers general manager of farms, Roger Tomlin, says the company is extremely proud of both young men. He also praised both marketing projects: Jamie’s onion charcoal briquette and Jack’s cauliflower bites – designed to appeal to young children as a healthy snack – saying both are examples of their innovative young minds.

For Jack, joining horticulture was born from the necessity of needing employment over the summer holidays while at high school.

“I believe there are plenty of opportunities in the horticulture industry. There’s more than just being a tractor driver or vegetable picker. You can go a lot further in the industry ... If you have the right mindset you can go into agronomy, marketing, business administration or many other aspects of the industry.”



BETHANY LANG

"It's a good job if you want to travel ... it has lots of opportunities to try different things."



JACK HADDON

"There's more than just being a tractor driver or vegetable picker. You can go a lot further in the industry."



KEEGAN NEATE

"Everyone I've met in the industry is willing to put the extra mile in for the young people that they do get."

Jack would like to see a shift in the public's perception of growing vegetables and show a great understanding and appreciation of horticulture and the wealth of opportunities it offers.

"I think the industry doesn't showcase the diversity of roles enough. We need to become better at selling our industry and celebrate it a lot more."

Keegan Neate, 21, is a packhouse machine operator and trainee orchard manager at Punchbowl Kiwifruit Services.

"With other jobs or school work you hand in assignments and never see them again. But when you're growing something you get to see it the whole way through ... I find that really satisfying taking a plant and turning it into food."

Like Jamie and Jack, Keegan says horticulture has plenty to offer young people, with good career options and support on the job.

"Everyone I've met in the industry is willing to put the extra mile in for the young people that they do get. I've had quite a strong mentorship right the way through. They're willing to answer your questions, and if they don't know then I've always been told a few days later after they've gone away and found out. There's really good support right the way through."

Scott Wilcox, 30, a crop supervisor at A.S. Wilcox & Sons says that having local producers running sustainable businesses, both financially and environmentally, is really important.

"Too often, growing businesses are supplying veggies that they are losing money on. In turn, to be able to invest

in sustainable practices, there needs to be reasonable profitability. How the industry can support producers along the value chain to ensure this, is quite the challenge.

"Horticulture in New Zealand has an important part to play; access to great fresh produce underpins our food system. This importance needs to be understood better by consumers and it's something I'm looking to keep advocating for."

Bethany Lang, 21, is a glasshouse technician for T&G. She started in the industry as a casual crop worker before moving to her full-time packhouse worker and crop technician role working with tomatoes.

"I like the glasshouse work, the hydroponics are interesting and I find it easy to understand. Being able to control the environment is interesting too."

Working in horticulture also means flexibility in what part of the country you want to live in, she says.

"It's a good job if you want to travel ... it has lots of opportunities to try different things."

Peter Schreuder, 28, the head grower at Gourmet Waiuku Ltd says working in horticulture is very rewarding, with satisfaction in seeing hard work grow into a product that you're proud of.

He agrees the industry offers excellent opportunities.

"The future looks promising for the industry. There are some good talented people coming through which was evident from the competition. I am very optimistic about my future as I work in such a great company, NZ Gourmet.



“

KENDRA WRIGHT

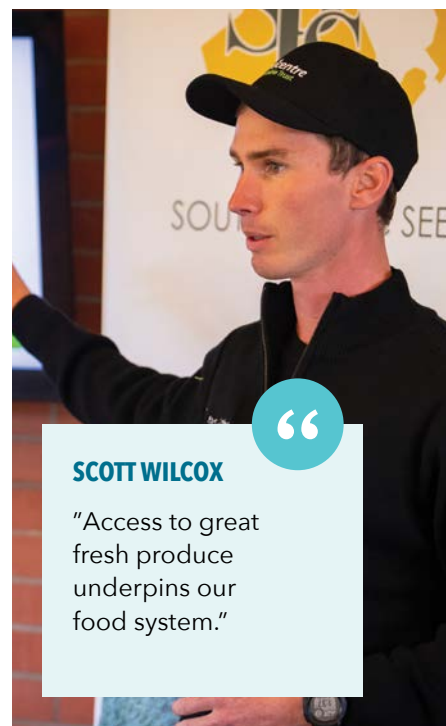
“[The industry] offers the flexibility to move within different parts of horticulture when you want a change.”



“

PETER SCHREUDER

“The biggest challenge is encouraging the next generation to take the industry to the next level.”



“

SCOTT WILCOX

“Access to great fresh produce underpins our food system.”

“They grow a wide variety of crops so if you get bored of one you always can grow other crops.”

“The biggest challenge is encouraging the next generation to take the industry to the next level. A good start will be investing in the latest technology and following trends which are happening overseas.”

Kendra Wright, 29, is an agronomist at Woodhaven Gardens.

“My dad always said to me when looking for a career or job, don't look for a specific job because what you end up doing might not even exist right now. Have your 'must-haves' and things that you don't want and go from there. I knew I wanted it to be somewhat outdoors, to be different every day, some intrinsic value of helping others, not being heavily office based.”

Horticulture ticked all the boxes.

“From there it clicked into place... it also offers the flexibility to move within different parts of horticulture when you want a change. At the moment I'm an agronomist but at some point, I could be based in the packhouse, or a sales rep, or working in plant breeding. It's somewhere where you will always have a job.”

The 2024 Central Otago Young Grower of the Year competition was held on Friday 24 May in Cromwell. Regional competitions will be held in Hawke's Bay on 6-7 June, Nelson on 27 June, Gisborne 27 June, and Bay of Plenty 17 July.

The national Young Grower of the Year final will be held in Hawke's Bay on 9-10 October. ●

APPLY
NOW



2024 HORTNZ LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

COURSE STARTS 13 AUGUST 2024

Our programme took a break in 2023 to be reviewed against the current industry landscape, recent research, and the food and fibre sector leadership framework. The evaluation has since been completed and we've partnered with Rural Leaders, a charitable trust known for their provision of the Kellogg rural leadership programme, to pilot the renewed programme in 2024.

The programme is aimed at all age groups and designed for potential or current leaders in the fruit and vegetable industry to prepare them for leadership roles in our sector. Participants will primarily, but not exclusively, be growers or their employees, or those from organisations closely associated with growing.

Find out more on HortNZ's website www.hortnz.co.nz



THE 25-YEAR JOURNEY OF NZGAP

Melanie Dingle : NZGAP technical advisor

In the 1990s consumers were becoming increasingly concerned about the origin and safety of their food. Growers saw that they would be required to demonstrate that they looked after the health and safety of their workers in addition to producing food that was safe to eat.

A group supported by the NZ Vegetable Federation (Vegfed) travelled overseas to see how this could be done. They observed the problems created when growers needed to comply with numerous assurance systems. They realised that if growers did not take the lead on food safety themselves, others such as retailers and regulators developed systems for them.

After a Standards New Zealand workshop in Wellington introducing the relatively new concept of ISO 9000 (quality management standards by the International Organization for Standardization), the group decided to develop an assurance programme around these internationally recognised principles. The new assurance programme needed to be credible, fair and affordable.

The first version was known as the Vegfed Quality Assurance Approved Supplier Programme, with the first certification outside of the pilots granted in 1999. That year, the NZ Fruitgrowers Federation agreed to “co-ordinate a move within the fruit industry towards a single New Zealand horticultural quality assurance system”. By late 2000, possibly prompted by the then Ministry of Health – which stated that they would accept the Vegfed programme as a food safety programme but it needed to cover both fruit and vegetables – the fruit industry had committed to a joint industry approach. This resulted in a name change to the New Zealand Fresh Produce

Quality Assurance (NZFPQA) programme. Brokering this collaboration between the fruit and vegetable sectors and the subsequent support from the many founding groups was one the first major milestones of the programme.

“

The new assurance programme needed to be credible, fair and affordable



During 2001, many aspects of the programme were being formalised. The annual operating budget was \$295,000, residue testing across the programme began and discussions turned towards developing a constitution and the ownership and governance model.

By the early 2000s, international assurance programmes such as EUREPGAP (predecessor of GLOBALG.A.P.) had found their way to New Zealand. NZFPQA quickly gained formal recognition as equivalent to EUREPGAP. Consideration was given to future ownership of the programme and a strategic alliance was signed between AgriQuality (predecessor of AsureQuality) and Vegfed. These discussions led to the newly formed Horticulture New Zealand being made responsible for NZFPQA and the subsequent name change to New Zealand GAP in 2006.

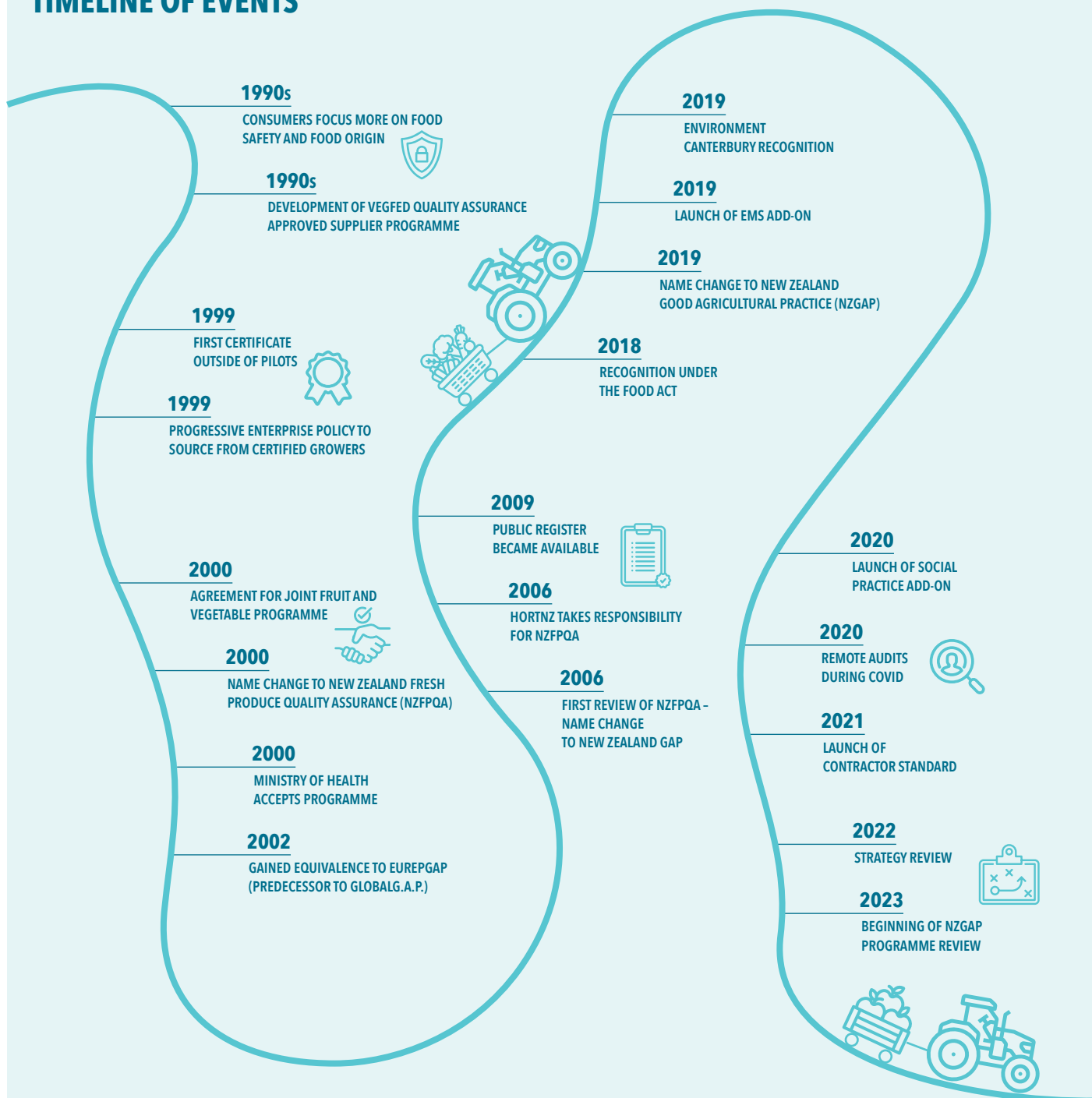
During a strategic review of New Zealand GAP in 2007, the increasing value of NZGAP as a tool for grower advocates to respond to regulatory requirements became clear in areas other than food safety – such as sustainability, health and the environment.

Over the next few years NZGAP developed a new database, reviewed funding models and considered how to continue to add value and be relevant to growers.



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TIMELINE OF EVENTS



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NEW ZEALAND'S GROWERS
ARE COMMITTED TO ADOPTING
SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE
PRACTICES



NZGAP **SUPPORTS GROWERS**
TO NAVIGATE WHAT AT TIMES
SEEMS LIKE A MINEFIELD OF CUSTOMER,
CONSUMER AND COMMUNITY
EXPECTATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

Discussions included how NZGAP could be used as an example of managing Resource Management Act requirements at an industry level, developing grower groups and add-ons. Probably most importantly, it was recognised that NZGAP was able to interpret requirements of regulators and councils and adapt the programme to enable growers to meet their obligations. Outcomes for growers included the recognition of NZGAP by the Woolworths Quality Assurance Programme, recognition under the Food Act in 2018 and a 10 percent discount on ACC levies for NZGAP-certified operators who attended FarmSafe workshops.

2019 saw the launch of the NZGAP Add-Ons and a Contractor Certification Programme in response to broadening regulatory and market assurance expectations in sustainability and worker welfare. Add-Ons developed include the Environmental Management System (EMS) and Social Practice. Environment Canterbury and Gisborne District Council formally recognised the EMS Add-On to meet Farm Environment Plan requirements. The Social Practice Add-On and Contractor Programme were recognised by Woolworths, Foodstuffs and wholesalers as meeting their responsible sourcing requirements. These new programmes and Add-Ons were positioned to meet the wider needs of the industry. Advocacy work for broader recognition is ongoing.

“

NZGAP was able to interpret requirements of regulators and councils and adapt the programme to enable growers to meet their obligations

Currently, NZGAP is reviewing the base NZGAP programme. Part of this process is submitting to GLOBALG.A.P and MPI to retain recognition and submitting to the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) to gain recognition. This allows NZGAP to continue providing integrated assurance – saving growers time and money whilst enabling them to meet regulatory and market requirements.

New Zealand's growers are committed to adopting safe and sustainable practices and the industry is committed to supporting them. NZGAP supports growers to navigate what at times seems like a minefield of customer, consumer and community expectations and requirements. ●

Registrations now open

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and Horticulture Conferences 2024**
28-30 August, Mercury Baypark, Mount Maunganui

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BIODYNAMICS CELEBRATED IN HAWKE'S BAY

Bonnie Flaws



The first priority is to feed the workers and residents of Hōhepa's housing developments

In early May, the centre of gravity for anthroposophy in New Zealand – Hōhepa – joined with global celebrations for the centenary of biodynamic agriculture. Chief executive Santiago De Marco spoke to NZGrower about the movement.

The biodynamics movement was birthed by Dr Rudolf Steiner in the 1920s after he delivered a series of famous lectures to farmers addressing their concerns of the day. These lectures focused on the health of what lies beneath our feet, rather more than what comes out of it. Those farmers adopted Steiner's philosophy and put it into practice and so biodynamics was born.

One hundred years later biodynamics has had an indelible impact on farmers across the world – you can find biodynamic farms from Austria to India, from New Zealand to Mexico and everywhere in between. Those who practise biodynamics look at the farm as a complete ecosystem, an organism based on a symbiotic relationship between the people, the animals, the plants and the land itself.

Hōhepa was founded in 1956, so it's been around for 68 years. One of the inspirations for its founding was a group of 15 local Hawke's Bay farmers who had been working with Steiner's principles and trialling his methods.



The organisation works to steward healthy soils and bring people together from all walks of life

Since then Hōhepa has become part of the fabric of everyday life in Hawke's Bay, well known for its farm shop, delicious cheeses and crafts. Everyone knows them, and most people have a personal connection to them. Either they know someone who works for them, they buy their products or they support their community work in some way.

"Hōhepa is not an institution locked away on a farm somewhere. We see it as being engaged in the whole of Hawke's Bay – we are really spread out," says chief executive Santiago De Marco.

Hōhepa is the third largest employer in Hawke's Bay, with 640 employees. It offers services for the disabled community, as well as the wider community through housing, education and social enterprise, in which they produce sustainable products like beeswax candles, wooden furniture and textiles.

"We haven't done a proper study on this but we believe that we are a major contributor to the local economy, with the numbers we employ. And then all the activities that are generated at Hōhepa that interact with local businesses and you know, renting houses and offering rentals to staff. We all feel very integrated and connected with the Hawke's Bay community."




VOLUMES PRODUCED LAST YEAR


30,000
KG OF
VEGGIES




18,000
KG OF CHEESE


225,000
LITRES OF MILK

On the horticultural front, Hōhepa grows in its hot houses and veggie gardens all the high value crops like eggplants, tomatoes, cucumbers, beetroot, broccoli, bok choy, carrots, capsicums, cauliflower, kūmara, leeks, silverbeet, spinach, onions, potatoes, pumpkin and kale.

"A high number of people turn up to work in our veggie gardens, from all walks of life. The land is such a generous environment where people of different abilities can interact. Some like watering, others like heavy work tools and machines. It's such a diverse working farm, and there are heaps of engagement opportunities for those who want to make a contribution," Santiago says.

The volumes produced last year were 30,000 kgs of veggies, 18,000 kgs of cheese and 225,000 litres of milk, he tells me.

Over the last three years, every Friday Hōhepa has been gathering native seeds in the local forests to grow seedlings in its nursery. These are then planted in wetlands and riparian areas. To date they have planted more than 100,000 trees.

"The social and ecological responsibility is a practical reality for us every day," he says.

However, it's not an 'everyday' type of operation and it has a different set of priorities than purely commercial businesses. First, the produce is used to feed the workers and residents of Hōhepa's housing developments, next they are sold in their own shops, and then the third layer is to supply local wholesalers like Chantals and Cornucopia, which align with their values.

When it come to Hōhepa's award winning cheeses and other products like candles and crafts, these are sold to wholesalers nationwide.

When asked about the 100-year celebrations, Santiago says Hōhepa decided to join in with the worldwide

celebrations to both mark a moment in time, celebrate history and renew its commitments for the future.

In the horticultural and agricultural space this means working with a strong sense of ecological responsibility to steward healthy soils and ecosystems, and in the social space, bringing people together from all walks of life, including intellectually disabled people (who produce most of their crafts and work on the farms). Their vision is Every Life Fully Lived, and you can see that in action in everything Hōhepa does.

“

Hōhepa is the third largest employer in Hawke's Bay, with 640 employees

Celebrations began at sunrise at the Ātea a Rangi star compass in Waitangi Regional Park. Throughout the day, attendees participated in guided tours and activities and heard from a range of speakers. Ueli Hurter, co-leader of the Agriculture Faculty at the Goetheanum in Switzerland, who travelled to the celebrations, shared insights into the origins of the biodynamic movement and recent research showcasing its success, while Pereri King, a teacher and storyteller, narrated the Māori perspective on caring for the land and its people.

Other speakers included Helmi Abouleish, president of Demeter International Biodynamic Federation who sent a special welcoming video and James Palmer, secretary for the environment and chief executive at Ministry for the Environment, who highlighted the urgency of environmental stewardship and the critical role of sustainable farming practices in the face of climate change.

Attendees were also given a showcase of the achievements of Hōhepa's biodynamic farms and the contributions of individuals towards sustainable agriculture from Carl Storey, Hōhepa's land and farm enterprises manager.

The day finished with a screening of the documentary '6 Inches of Soil' and a meal made from Hōhepa produce and biodynamic wine.

Santiago said there was a need for the biodynamic community to become more modernised so that it can attract farmers who are already going organic and might want to move in this space. But they have to understand that biodynamics has this whole other aspect of social responsibility and a philosophical commitment to the earth. He thinks this may be more in reach now than previously, as more and more farmers move into the regenerative space.

"One hundred years ago people weren't so concerned with soil, but now with this doco explaining that six inches of soil feeds 8 billion people, focussing on the soil is becoming really significant". ●

INDIA CONNECTIONS: THREE GENERATIONS IN PUKEKOHE

Glenys Christian



Bharat Bhana on the porch of the former family home in Pukekohe, now the office of Hira Bhana & Co

A passion for growing is what has kept Pukekohe company Hira Bhana operating for over 60 years, says director Bharat Bhana.

"We had it instilled in us from a young age that growing wasn't about making a lot of money, it was all to do with providing food for people," he says. "That's where the passion comes in."

Founder Hira Bhana (Bharat's father) first arrived in New Zealand in 1935 as a 12-year-old. He returned to India due to his father's ill health but came back in 1949, working in fruit and vegetable shops in the Auckland suburbs of Ōtāhuhu, Panmure and Mission Bay as well as in Rotorua.

In 1957 he moved to Pukekohe, growing potatoes and onions in partnership with Daya Ranchhod. The following year his wife, Bhani, and three sons, Jeram, Dinesh and Amrat arrived in the country, buying 4ha of land in Tuakau Road from where the company still operates.

Bharat and Balvant were born after they arrived, along with two sisters. The boys shared one bedroom in the three-bedroomed house which now houses the company's office. They joined the business from high school, tackling all the different roles involved with operations like planting and harvesting done by hand.

"We didn't start off with a lot, but we had very good advisers along the way," he says. "Due to dad's ill health, our mother Bhani was the backbone doing much of the manual work."

One adviser was Uka Chhiba (see sidebar), a large grower who came from our village, Machhad, in Gujarat State, India.

"He found us our first block of leased land and taught us what we should be doing," he says. "His advice was like gold."

He gave us several bins of Rua potato seeds which started us growing winter potatoes. Then he urged us to grow more potatoes on any spare land in the 1970s which we did and ended up selling for good values.

"We probably had luck on our side in the 1970s and 80s," Bharat says.

RURAL | LIFESTYLE | RESIDENTIAL

TENDER

TE AWAMUTU 1972 Te Rahu Road

Flays Berry Farm - Berryfresh

Founded in 1984 by Murray & Anne Flay this 29.5ha of premium flat horticultural land produces raspberries, blackberries and boysenberries for local and international markets. The business is well known and supported both locally and nationally with established distribution lines and a reputation for quality. A retail shop provides fresh and frozen berries, ice creams and a pick your own berries' experience. This lifestyle/family business is ripe for opportunities and accelerated growth.

TENDER
(Unless Sold Prior)
Plus GST (if any)
Closes 11am Friday, 12 July 2024

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Helping grow the country



Founder Hira Bhana first arrived in New Zealand in 1935 as a 12-year-old. Photo courtesy of the New Zealand Machhad Gam Society

"The cost of everything was down and prices at auction were reasonable. If you produced a consistently good quality product, people would bid for it and you'd get the extra dollars. You could grow and sell, but these days you need to have good marketing support to know where your crop will provide the best return."

“

It will never grow another vegetable. Once it's brick and mortar there's no coming back

Hira Bhana now has over 600ha of land around Tuakau, Harrisville, Buckland and Onewhero, producing seven different crops; potatoes, onions, carrots, pumpkins, cabbage, cauliflower and lettuce.

"We used to grow outdoor tomatoes for sauce but pulled out in the 1980s when production moved to Hastings," he says.

Around 60 staff are employed to run the business - this number increases during the spring and summer months.

"We have seen massive production costs in the last few years which have not been helped by wars in other countries and new compliance costs that are now forced on businesses - some of which are meaningless as far as cropping is concerned."



AROUND **60 STAFF** ARE EMPLOYED
TO RUN THE BUSINESS



HIRA BHANA NOW HAS OVER
600HA OF LAND



HIRA BHANA HAS BEEN OPERATING
FOR **OVER 60 YEARS**

"It all takes a toll on the business, and it doesn't produce more vegetables," he says. "Everyone else is telling you what to do and how to do it."

Another worry is the 150 to 200ha of growing land he estimates has gone into housing around Pukekohe in the last 10 years.

"It will never grow another vegetable. Once it's brick and mortar there's no coming back."

He understands sellers' motivation in wanting to sell to the highest bidder but that means when blocks come up for sale growers are priced out of the market. And despite adoption of sustainable growing practices, new neighbours can bring complaints about dust, spray drift and tractor noise.

"And if we use up all the good fertile soil, what are we leaving for the next generation?"

In Hira Bhana's case there are third generation members now working in the company in a variety of roles, despite other growers encouraging their children to find work off the land.

"It's a hard business and you wouldn't be in it unless you were passionate about it." ●

THE INDIAN VILLAGE LINKED TO MANY PUKEKOHE GROWERS

Commercial grower and historian Uka Chhiba tracked down photos of 68 of 70 immigrants from one Indian village – including Hira Bhana who arrived as a 12-year-old with his father. Uka's book *Machhad to New Zealand*, published a decade ago, follows their journey from Machhad, a small village in Gujarat State, to Auckland, and then for many of them on to the Pukekohe area and into vegetable growing in the years from 1902 to 1935.

He detailed how the families helped each other out, often finding work as general labourers as government regulations during the Depression years meant they couldn't buy land. But that changed in the 1940s with them able to grow crops to supply the American forces in the Pacific.

Uka's father bought four hectares of land in Pukekohe in 1941 where he grew potatoes and onions, and then he went on to become one of the largest growers in the area. He was the first Indian president of the Pukekohe Vegetable Growers' Association (PVGA) in 1984 and the following year the first Indian member of the New Zealand Vegetable & Potato Growers' Federation (Vegfed) process and market division.

He also wrote a second book, *Indians in Pukekohe, 1918-2006* and planned to write a third, about Indian growing families in Pukekohe, but sadly passed away in 2007.

FAMILY HISTORY

Some Pukekohe growers can trace their families' history back to immigrants a century ago from India's Gujarat State to New Zealand – a migration chronicled in Uka Chhiba's book. Courtesy of the New Zealand Machhad Gam Society.



NOMINATION and ELECTION of VEGETABLES NZ BOARD DIRECTORS

Vegetables NZ Board Directors are elected by registered members of Vegetables NZ. Any member of Vegetables NZ is eligible to nominate, second a nomination, or be nominated for the position of Director.

All nominations must be seconded. Nominations must also be signed by the nominee to confirm that they are willing to stand.

Vegetables NZ's Constitution & Rules, Clause 6.1(a), provide for the Board to comprise between six and eight individuals, holding office from time to time as the Directors. There is an annual retirement by rotation (every three years) for Directors. Directors who are retiring by rotation and are available for re-election, **do not** need to be nominated.

- John Murphy: retires by rotation and is available for re-election
- Warwick Simpson: retires by rotation and is available for re-election

Kirin Hari has resigned, which creates a vacancy on the Board.

When do nominations open and close?

Nominations are open. They close at 5pm on Thursday 11 July.

Where do I send nominations?

Completed nomination forms should be returned to Vegetables NZ, either by emailing: andrew.bristol@freshvegetables.co.nz or by post: Andrew Bristol, Vegetables NZ, PO Box 10232, Wellington 6140.

Will there be a vote?

If there are more nominations than positions available, registered members of Vegetables NZ will be asked to vote.

Timeframe

Thursday 11 July	Director nominations close
Thursday 18 July	Voting papers for Directors sent to members (if required)
Thursday 1 August	Voting closes (if required)
Thursday 8 August	Results announced at the Vegetables NZ AGM: 5pm Thursday 8 August, at the Navigation Homes Stadium, Franklin Rd, Pukekohe



HORTICULTURE NEEDS YOUR TIME

Glenys Christian



Ranjit Singh grows tomatoes in his Pukekohe greenhouse

"I was born in India but New Zealand has given me everything," says Pukekohe hothouse grower, Ranjit Singh.

His father, Makhan, who had retired from the Indian army, came to this country in 2010.

"He could see he could have a good future here," Ranjit says, who joined him as an 18-year-old in 2014.

They worked on kiwifruit orchards in the Bay of Plenty, picking and pruning, then came to Auckland later that year to work in glasshouses around the Pukekohe area.

Two years later Makhan and his wife, Baljit, set up BMAK Evergreen Ltd and bought their first hothouse of 1500 square metres at Bombay, heated by a gas boiler. The next year they set up a second operation just over the motorway on the road to Pukekohe, heated by diesel. A further purchase at Tuakau where waste oil is used as the heating source gave them 2.4ha under cover growing loose tomatoes and telegraph cucumbers. An expansion now underway at Tuakau will see their growing area reach a total of 3ha.

Ranjit manages the properties after gaining valuable experience in growing cucumbers from Raj Sharma, who he worked for in his Bombay growing operation. His wife, Chetna, whose family have been in New Zealand for four

generations, works with him. The company started growing cucumbers only, but with harvesting over in four weeks, they wanted to diversify into other crops.

"We wanted to be harvesting year-round so started growing tomatoes," he says.

Around 25 staff are employed year-round tending the crops then picking and packing. Produce was initially sold through Fresh Direct but now all goes through T&G, with Ranjit crediting one of its Tuakau growers, Nilesh Patel, with helping him out a lot in learning more about growing.

"We're trying to make quality count in everything we do," Ranjit says.

That involves using fewer chemicals where possible and improving lighting, which it's hoped will increase production substantially.

Asked about the challenges they face he says they were lucky not to suffer damage from the Auckland Anniversary weekend deluge last year other than a pest and disease problem with their bore water which was able to be rectified through treatment with ultraviolet light.

"Mostly we are struggling with pricing at the moment," he says.

"Input prices are high such as gas and labour and prices aren't good - for the last 10 years they've been the same."



**AROUND 25 STAFF ARE
EMPLOYED YEAR-ROUND
TENDING THE CROPS THEN
PICKING AND PACKING**

While young people are needed in horticulture, he says the younger generation is often more attracted to careers as lawyers or teachers. They need to have a wide variety of knowledge about how to manage plants, chemical applications, and staff to succeed in horticulture and the best way of gaining that is by building up on the ground knowledge as they go, he says.

“

**We're trying to make quality count
in everything we do**

“I trained on the job, day by day. The industry needs your time. There are no holidays and no parties. It's not hard and if you take your time things will become easier.”

Two years ago he went to Holland to look at new technology such as robots and automation. “There were some ideas which I'm already trying here,” he says.

BMAK Evergreen has been closely involved with innovative Pukekohe company, FTEK, using a range of its technology from auto-spraying through to lifters and harvesting trolleys.

Always looking to the future the company is trialling growing large and sweet Palermo capsicums at its Tuakau growing operation. “We hope that will make another line for us.”

Further into the future he'd like to explore what opportunities there may be in India for glasshouse grown crops where there is a very limited market at present.

“There are some polyhouses there growing tomatoes and snack cucumbers,” he says. But while technology is available there's a knowledge problem in applying that to managing crops under systems seen in this country when it comes to inputs such as chemicals and fertiliser.

But for the immediate future he says his priority is very much on his family and their business.

“I'm focusing on what we have,” he says.

“My father pushed me a lot but he never asked what my plan was. He had one dream and that was for his son to be a businessman.”

And while his father is now semi-retired from the business – “he is always working”. ●

dewulf
enjoy growing



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