

NZGROWER & ORCHARDIST®

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HORTICULTURE NEW ZEALAND

DEVELOPING THE FUTURE

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Craigmore Sunpark orchard in Te Karaka with apple orchard manager Joshua Rowe and assistant manager Chief Nepe. Photo by Kim Parkinson. See page 8.

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Tony is a freelance writer, photographer and videographer based in rural North Canterbury. He has worked for newspapers and magazines, radio and television, including more than 20 years as a reporter/director with Country Calendar. On page 18 he meets the team behind Roper & Son.



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Anna has more than 10 years of experience in the biosecurity and conservation fields, specialising in protecting New Zealand from unwanted pests and diseases. She works across vegetables, tomatoes, onions and summerfruit. Anna is a member of the Xylella Awareness Campaign project group and co-writes an update on page 26.



Paula Lleras

Paula, who joined Potatoes New Zealand in 2019, recently stepped into the role of research & development project manager following the retirement of Iain Kirkwood. In this issue, she outlines the 2026 research focus for Potatoes New Zealand on page 56.



Damien Farrelly

Damien is chief executive of the Fresh Produce Safety Centre, a trans-Tasman industry-led food safety body. He was previously general manager of NZGAP (Good Agricultural Practice). He makes the case for a NZ Fresh Produce Food Safety Network on page 34.



Kim Parkinson

Kim is a newspaper reporter, freelance writer and orchardist who lives on an orchard in Gisborne with her partner Chris. They grow mandarins, lemons, limes, tangelos, Hass avocados and Avogrey® Greenskins. For this issue she tours Craigmores' Sunpark Orchard with orchard manager Joshua Rowe on page 8.



Andrew Gorringe

Andrew grows kiwifruit with his wife Claudia at Waitekohe Organic Orchards in Bay of Plenty. Andrew wrote in to share his opinion about the Gene Technology Bill and its impact on markets. Read his Thought Leaders piece on page 30.



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 provides an overview of the summerfruit season on page 12.



Gina Jewell

From a pastoral farming background, Gina is a former journalist and ran her own consultancy in Wellington for 20 years. Now based in Blenheim, Gina is senior communications manager for the A Lighter Touch programme. On page 37, she reports on vegetable growers who have changed the way they manage pests.



Jack Wilson

Jack is a horticultural consultant with AgFirst, specialising in precision horticulture, applied research and development, and practical orchard management across pipfruit and kiwifruit. He outlines the fundamental economics of orchard canopy systems and how these influence the profitability of fruit production on page 42.



INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP REGULARS

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ELECTION YEAR

A new year always brings a sense of reset, but 2026 promises to be a big year for growers and the wider horticulture sector.

Bernadine Guilleux : HortNZ chair

It is of course a General Election year. That alone sharpens the focus.

For growers, it means the policy settings that shape land use, water, labour, climate and investment will all be under the spotlight.

The decisions the various political parties make over the coming months will influence how confidently growers can plan, invest and keep producing high-quality food for New Zealanders and our global markets.

At HortNZ, we know what growers expect of us in an election year. They want clear and credible advocacy for policies that work on the ground.

That's why in the coming months we will be launching HortNZ's election manifesto.

It will set out practical and achievable policy priorities that reflect the realities of growing fruit and vegetables in New Zealand today.

For us, it is about ensuring decision-makers understand what it takes to grow nutritious fruit and vegetables, manage environmental responsibilities, attract and retain skilled workers, and maintain the resilience of a sector that feeds the country and the world every day.

The manifesto will build on what we hear consistently from growers – the need for certainty and policies that recognise horticulture as both an economic powerhouse and a cornerstone of food security.

We will be engaging constructively with political parties right across the spectrum to make sure growers' voices are heard.



As always, our focus will be on bringing practical, constructive and evidence-based solutions to the table.

It is a role we take seriously, particularly in a year where political attention is high and the stakes are real.

Growers in parts of the country have had to deal with severe weather over the past few weeks. Our thoughts are with growers in the regions that have been affected by the heavy rain and flooding.

I know growers are resilient and rise up to face challenges, but looking out for each other is also really important at times like these.

Finally, I also want to acknowledge the passing in December of Dr Stuart Davis, a giant of our sector.

Stuart was the 2024 winner of the Bledisloe Cup, New Zealand's highest horticulture honour, recognising an outstanding and meritorious contribution to the industry.

Stuart helped shape a smarter, more sustainable future for vegetable growing in New Zealand, so was a worthy winner of this prestigious award.

We really valued his wisdom, his calm leadership and his focus on improvement.

To all growers, best of luck for the year ahead. ●



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EYES ON THE RISKS – AND THE OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

If there's one thing growers know better than anyone, it's how quickly conditions can change.

Kate Scott : HortNZ chief executive

As a sector, we are always scanning the horizon for risks - whether that's biosecurity threats like the yellow-legged hornet or Queensland fruit fly, or the prospect of severe weather events that can turn a good season into a challenging one overnight.

That vigilance is really important. Protecting our crops, our livelihoods and our people depends on it.

But as we head into the year ahead, it's just as important to lift our eyes and recognise that there is also a lot to be excited about.

The Ministry for Primary Industries Situation and Outlook for Primary Industries (SOPI) report released in December last year projects horticulture export revenue will rise five percent to \$9.2 billion in the year to 30 June 2026.

Kiwifruit export revenue is forecast to rise to \$4.3 billion off the back of another strong season, with good yields and continued solid prices.

Apples have reached a \$1 billion export milestone, supported by favourable growing conditions.

“ Profitability is not a nice-to-have - it is critical to the long-term sustainability of our sector

Cherries are also shaping up well, with a large harvest expected to lift export revenue by around five percent, while vegetable exports are forecast to rise, albeit modestly.

These numbers matter. They represent jobs, investment and economic activity in rural and regional New Zealand.

There was also encouraging news on the trade front at the end of last year.

“ ...it's just as important to lift our eyes and recognise that there is also a lot to be excited about

The conclusion of free trade negotiations between New Zealand and India is a significant opportunity for horticulture.

Improved access for products like apples, kiwifruit, cherries, avocados, persimmons and blueberries will help diversify our export portfolio and position the sector for long-term growth in a market forecast to become the world's third-largest economy.

The full commercial benefits will take time, particularly where access is phased in, but the direction of travel is positive.

Alongside the SOPI outlook, the India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement supports our ambition, set out in the Aotearoa Horticulture Action Plan, to double farmgate value by 2035.

Of course, strong export earnings and free trade agreements do not automatically translate to profitability at the farm gate.





Read an update on the summerfruit season on page 12.



Learn how Biosecurity New Zealand is tackling hornets and fruit fly on page 33.



Take a closer look at the India - New Zealand trade deal on page 47.

Input costs remain high, and for many growers margins are tight. If we want horticulture to grow and invest with confidence, the sector must have the right policy settings and growers must be able to capture value.

Profitability is not a nice-to-have - it is critical to the long-term sustainability of our sector.

So yes, we will continue to keep a close eye on the challenges - because we must. But let's also take confidence from the momentum building across horticulture. There are exciting opportunities and New Zealand growers are well placed to make the most of them. ●



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WAS AN EASY DECISION
AS I COULD SEE LONG-TERM
CAREER OPPORTUNITIES
AND A FUTURE WITHIN THE
ORGANISATION**

Craigmore apple orchard manager Joshua Rowe with assistant manager Chief Nepe at Sunpark orchard in Te Karaka. Photo by Kim Parkinson

GROWING IN GISBORNE

Joshua Rowe took a punt on horticulture after high school in Hawke's Bay. Today he manages a large pipfruit operation at Craigmore Sustainables and has made a home for himself and his young family in Gisborne. Now he is encouraging young people to enter horticulture through his roles as deputy chair of Tairāwhiti Growers Association and district lead for the Young Grower of the Year competition.

Kim Parkinson

Craigmore Sustainables currently has just over 700cha (canopy hectares) of apple orchards under management in Hawke's Bay and Gisborne. The Gisborne orchards grow Jugala, a1, Joli™, Envy™ and Rokit™ varieties planted between 2017-2025.

In 2022, they bought a 70ha property in Te Karaka, 20 minutes north of Gisborne named Sunpark, in celebration of its location as the first place in the country to see the sun.

They also manage Glenpark orchard (33cha) in Patutahi, which was hit badly by Cyclone Gabrielle in 2023. With the help of Coxco, and other local contractors, they had to remove more than 130,000 cubic metres of silt from the site, the equivalent of a 20m-high soccer field.

Joshua Rowe manages the two Craigmore orchards. There is an assistant manager at each orchard; Chief Nepe at Sunpark, Te Karaka and Danielle Nepe at Glenpark, Patutahi. Joshua oversees 13 full-time staff and currently employs 80 seasonal workers.

NZGrower & Orchardist visited Joshua at the 70ha Sunpark (45ha planted) property at Te Karaka to find out more about growing apples in Tairāwhiti and the Young Grower of the Year Competition in the region.

Phase 1 at Te Karaka was planted in September 2023. It took until November to finish due to extreme weather events disrupting the planting schedule. Joshua's team worked with Coxco's Labour Solutions to do the planting. In 2024, a further 15ha was planted at Sunpark (Phase 2).

This is his fourth year in the role at Craigmore. The busy orchard manager lives with his fiancée, Holly and their two young children, Kaden (3 years) and Ezra (4 months). This keeps him pretty busy when he is off-orchard. They love the lifestyle in Gisborne and think it's a great place to raise a family.

Born and raised in Hastings, Hawke's Bay, horticulture is in Joshua Rowe's blood. His dad, Mark, managed an apple orchard in Twyford, where Joshua spent school holidays doing orchard work.

"Like many young people finishing high school, I wasn't entirely sure what direction I wanted to take," he says.

Horticulture was familiar and felt like a natural place for him to start.

"I finished school on a Thursday and began full-time work in the orchards the very next day."

Joshua joined Craigmore in 2022. He is deputy chair of Tairāwhiti Growers Association and district lead of the Gisborne Young Grower of the Year competition.

By the time he joined Craigmore, he had already been based in Gisborne for a year, developing and managing orchards for Rockit.

"Moving to Craigmore was an easy decision as I could see long-term career opportunities and a future within the organisation," Joshua says.

He is enjoying the challenge of managing a large operation - Sunpark in Te Karaka has 45cha - 5ha of Joli, 30ha of Rockit, 10ha of a1.

About Sunpark orchard: The trees are spaced in rows 2.8m apart with 1.4m between them. There are 2551 trees/ha, 3 percent are pollinators. They were planted in 2023-2024 using a 2D growing system.

The job requires a diverse skill set across finance, people leadership, chemistry, plant husbandry, machinery, understanding apple markets and more, he says.

"It's one big memory game - the more knowledge and experience you build, the better the outcomes."

Working in the primary industries also creates a strong connection to the land.



Joshua Rowe was one of sixteen graduates of the 2025 HortNZ Leadership Programme. Photo by Kim Parkinson

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INTER-SCHOOL CHALLENGE ALONGSIDE YOUNG GROWER EVENT

The annual Gisborne Young Grower of the Year competition brings together some of the region's most promising young horticulturists, representing a variety of crop types including apples, kiwifruit, citrus and arable crops. It takes place at the Gisborne Eastern Institute of Technology (EIT) Rural Studies campus in Palmerston Road, Riverdale.

Competitors are tested across ten key areas vital for a successful career in horticulture: human resources and compliance, business planning, biosecurity pests and diseases, machinery health and safety, agrichemicals, soils and fertilisers, irrigation and weather, botany, and machinery repairs and maintenance.

Joshua Rowe is district lead of the Young Grower of the Year competition.

The competition brings together industry representatives from across Tairāwhiti and beyond. "It's a great event with food and drinks and entertainment," he says.

"The highlight of the night last year was the two-minute speech challenge where entrants spoke on industry topics selected by the Young Grower Committee."

Last year's Gisborne winner was Craigmores Rhiannon Morrell. She is part of the technical team at Craigmores and went on to compete against six other regional champions at the National Young Grower of the Year final.

Also running alongside the main event is the EIT Inter-School Challenge, which introduces high school students to the world of horticulture, giving them hands-on exposure and insight into the industry.

Speaking as deputy chair of the Tairāwhiti Growers Association, Joshua says the association is proud to support young growers "as part of our commitment to industry engagement where we promote horticulture as a career and invest in the future of our people."

Events like this help foster strong industry connections, he says, while raising awareness of the opportunities in horticulture and supporting the development of future leaders.

"You become deeply invested, not only in the performance of the orchards but also in the people and communities behind them."

In the short term, he would like to see himself progress into a wider management role.

Another ambition is to grow the Gisborne Young Grower of the Year competition to become Gisborne's biggest horticulture event and help drive meaningful initiatives through the Tairāwhiti Growers Association.

"Attracting people to our business starts with community engagement," Joshua says.

Craigmores actively supports local sports teams and horticultural events through sponsorships.

They host on-site days in partnership with Eastern Institute of Technology Rural Studies and are supported by strong word-of-mouth within the Tairāwhiti region. Craigmores operates under a clear set of values that resonate with Joshua. The values are understand tomorrow, act today; connect and empower; deliver with integrity.

"We proactively monitor market trends to remain competitive with pay and benefits, and we place a strong emphasis on training and development once people are employed," he says.

“

It's one big memory game - the more knowledge and experience you build, the better the outcomes

These initiatives have helped Craigmores build a committed and capable team.

One of the challenges is to improve the attractiveness of the primary sector to school leavers/young people.

"There is still work to do to position horticulture as a truly preferred long-term career choice," he explains. ●



Last year's Gisborne Young Grower of the Year participants from left: Wharekauri Kaimoana; Maddison Barsdell; Rhiannon Morrrell; Larissa Wooding-Ngata; Celest Johnson; Chevaughn Davoren; Matthew Davies; Quade Mitchell. Photo by Strike Photography

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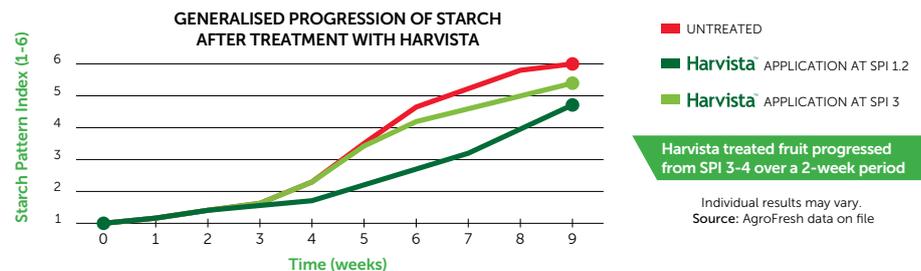


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Suncrest Orchard owner Michael Jones talking to growers, ministers and Summerfruit NZ staff a week before harvest in early December. Photo by Aimee Wilson

UNUSUAL SEASON FOR SUMMERFRUIT

The weather gods have been fickle during this year’s summerfruit season. Growers in Hawke’s Bay, Central Otago and Marlborough report on a challenging year – and find a couple of bright spots.

Aimee Wilson

Rain, wind and hail battered Central Otago orchardists this season, with many isolated weather events occurring in different growing areas across the district.

On Boxing Day, two summerfruit orchards in Dumbarton – halfway between Roxburgh and Ettrick – were severely damaged by a large localised hail event, spanning only about 1km.

The impact was the loss of apricots to both the local and export markets. Several pipfruit growers were also affected – with some apple varieties already showing significant damage.

Teviot Fruit Growers Association president Sam Hobbs says it was gut-wrenching to see growers having to experience such an event.



“Unfortunately several summerfruit and pipfruit growers were substantially affected by the Boxing Day hail event at the south end of the Teviot Valley.

“The damage will reduce export volumes from these orchards but the growers are working through it and salvaging what they can.”

Sam says summerfruit growers in the Teviot Valley have had good pack-outs across most of their varieties, with the overall consensus being that the fruit has been exceptionally clean.

“The Hawke’s Bay season finished early, which led to a strong market and good returns to growers for early apricots, plums, peaches, nectarines and cherries in the Teviot Valley.”



Issy McNeish packing Sundrop apricots at Fairview Orchard north of Roxburgh. Photo by Aimee Wilson

Teviot growers were only a few days later with harvest this season, whereas in other parts of Central Otago, they were up to 2-3 weeks behind.

“Teviot Valley had its fair share of wind, but luckily growers were relieved of the rain this season in the southern corner of the district.”

At the other end of the district, rain wiped out a percentage of cherry crops in Cromwell and Tarras early in the New Year, and then ten days later growers were having to call out the helicopters again to dry off fruit.

Early in the morning on 2 January at least ten helicopters were seen hovering above orchards in the area, after 20mm of rain fell overnight in Cromwell, and a further 30mm in Tarras.

Earnsclough grower Jeremy Hiscock says the rain came at the wrong times when many growers were trying to get export fruit off to market - particularly cherries.

“It’s been a cool summer but we’ve had worse.”

It was also the year that blew and blew.

North of Cromwell, Fortune Fruit - a 35ha export cherry orchard near Lowburn - experienced wind damage as early as October, and by mid-January had called out helicopters at least seven times to dry the fruit, after experiencing rain once a week for the past two months.

Manager Blair Davidson says this season was “unlike any other” and he described the ongoing wind and rain as relentless.

“We’ve had a couple of seasons similar but even then, there are aspects to this season that are uncharted territory.”

He said having three helicopter callouts would be considered a good year, but even with their help there was still damage and splitting “and that’s to be expected, given the amount of rain we’ve had.”

The orchard had to cull 40 percent of a block of cherries from rain damage in early January, but the later season was at least proving beneficial for the Chinese New Year starting 17 February.



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An orchard in Dumbarton battered by hail on Boxing Day. Photo supplied



WE'VE HAD A COUPLE OF SEASONS SIMILAR BUT EVEN THEN, THERE ARE ASPECTS TO THIS SEASON THAT ARE UNCHARTED TERRITORY

In mid-December Webbs Fruit in Cromwell shared photos of wind damaged trees that had completely snapped on social media.

The cooler weather also affected harvest windows, with some pickers frustrated by delays, having to wait for different varieties to ripen.

Blair says in his time as an orchard manager, he'd never experienced such delays with fruit ripening and picking. Traditionally, once the season started, it was continuous right through until the end of harvest.

"It has made it hard for staff."

The Ministry for Primary Industries' Situation and Outlook for Primary Industries report forecast in mid-December that a large cherry harvest was expected to lift export revenue by 5 percent to \$130 million this season.

Last year the peak of the summerfruit season in Central Otago fell around 17 January.

Growers say the cooler season has affected sizing across crops and delayed their maturity, "but if anything it has

spread the season out and there should be less pain that way," Jeremy says.

Summerfruit NZ technical advisor Richard Mills summed up the season as "unusual" in terms of fruit marking, and says it was never going to be a vintage year.

2024 saw a record amount of export cherries coming out of Central Otago.

In Hawke's Bay, cherries, plums and peaches were all finished by early January, and for a short time the country ran out of apricots, while Central Otago's crop was still ripening.

Richard says Hawke's Bay experienced a 'green drought' this season, where there was little moisture on the ground and irrigation was a necessity.

"There was enough moisture to keep the grass green but not enough to make it grow."

However, drought years were also some of the best years for North Island growers because it kept diseases at bay.

He said winter chilling was not as good as last season in Hawke's Bay, but it was more than adequate, and then from September onwards the weather heated up.

Temperatures were well into the thirties from late September until Christmas. The fruit ripened fast and was good quality.

"We are finding now that we have had 80 percent of a full crop load so the implication of that is the size is bigger and comes on earlier."



Severe wind in October around the Cromwell basin damaged trees at Webbs Fruit. Photo supplied

In Marlborough, the handful of cherry growers all had full crops this season but the weather was wetter than ideal, he says.

In his time as a consultant prior to his technical work for Summerfruit NZ, Richard learned a lot about the different growing areas. Central Otago has been rapidly changing over the years, with plantings becoming more extensive and widespread across the district.

Bendigo and Tarras were not traditional growing areas and fruit was being produced at higher altitudes than they had been in the past, which alters harvest times.

Before the Clyde Dam days, stonefruit was grown lower down in the valleys, including in the Cromwell Gorge (e.g. Jackson Orchards), and therefore was more protected. ●

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SPECIALISING IN PEELED RED ONIONS

When he realised traditional onion products and markets were too volatile for his business to be sustainable, Lance Roper searched for a better way. Instead he hit on the idea of specialising in peeled red onions for the local markets. Today he is one of the largest suppliers to supermarkets throughout the South Island.

Tony Benny







Lance Roper (left) with son Lincoln (centre) and Brendan Herries (who is also secretary of the Canterbury Growers Association)

Lance Roper started growing onions in 1991, following 12 years working for the Tucker family on the productive land around Lincoln on the outskirts of Christchurch. He realised that New Zealand growers were small players in the global trade and vulnerable to market fluctuations.

“We were growing red and brown onions for export mainly but then the export price crashed quite badly. I think it was like \$2 a 20-kilo bag in 1994, and we just couldn’t survive on that,” Lance recalls.



A man set on a goal of owning his own piece of land and building a farming enterprise, he had to be innovative and think outside the box. “We had to think of other things and we thought, ‘Well, let’s look at supplying peeled red onions to supermarkets.’ If you want to be successful, you have to do something. There was no future in export.”

While peeled red onions were common overseas, this was a new product for New Zealand. It took time both to figure out how to do it and to develop the market.



Harvesting windrowed red onions before the peeling process

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“We didn’t know what we were doing and no one had done it before, so it was quite a challenge. We had some sleepless nights thinking, ‘Are we doing the right thing?’ You know, New Zealand people are so slow to change.”

Initially it was a seasonal operation but gradually the peeled product became popular among supermarket shoppers. “The supermarkets said, ‘Yeah, good product but we want it 12 months a year.’ So we had to step the game up a little bit.”

“Even though we’ve been doing it for a while, it isn’t easy. You’ve got to manage crates, pallets, compliance, breakdowns, transport, storage, health and safety, staff - and that’s just the stuff that I can influence.”

The business has shifted from solely being a grower to now being responsible for food safety compliance. That means everything from ensuring the paddock is adequate at planting, as well as tracking and tracing inputs, right through to processing which is done in a white room facility.



Compressed air is used to peel the onions. Roper & Son’s workforce peaks at around 20 in summer - most of the staff are permanent

“

If you take all that outer skin off, they look like an apple, every one is virtually the same

Lance says it’s also about managing cost structures. “We monitor labour cost closely and have built our processing system around efficiency because the market is so competitive compared to when I started.”

The peeled red onion trade is mostly confined to the South Island, with North Islanders usually buying the vegetable in skin-on form. The cooler weather in the south means there is a fine art to producing good-looking red onions that are attractive to shoppers. “We don’t have the sun long enough, and they just don’t look nice when they’re harvested,” Lance says.

“That was one of the reasons to go to peel because the red onions weren’t selling. If you take all that outer skin off, they look like an apple, every one is virtually the same.”

As the business grew, Lance bought land. Today the operation covers 325ha, mainly around Lincoln but with a geographical spread so that if a weather event like hailstorms strikes, not all crops will be affected.

About 50ha are devoted to vegetables - red and brown onions, potatoes and pumpkins mainly. The remaining area is planted in up to 16 different arable, seed, fodder or process crops, along with finishing about 1000 store lambs a year.

While only about a third of the land is dedicated to vegetables each year, the whole operation is based around getting the right crop rotations to look after the land and create the right conditions to grow great crops.

In summer Roper & Son’s staff peaks at around 20, dropping back to about 15 in winter. Most of the staff are permanent and others come via Lincoln University.

“Their partners come to study at Lincoln University and they come and work here. They stick around for three or four years while their partner is studying and then to go back to their country for their work, so we don’t really have backpackers or anything like that.

“They tend to be just more of a stable, steady workforce which is probably a hell of an advantage.”

While Lance runs a diverse business, it still comes with plenty of complications - from environment regulations, the rapid urban expansion of nearby Lincoln which is steadily gobbling up fertile land and, increasingly, the effects of climate change.



Lance Roper of Roper & Son says the business has shifted from being solely a grower to processing red onions



MG TRUST GROWER EDUCATION FUND - APPLICATIONS OPEN

Lincoln Roper (Roper & Son) completed a previous year's Rabobank Farm Manager Programme, with a grant from the MG Trust Grower Education Fund. The week-long programme was an opportunity to hone his management and leadership skills. The next programme takes place in Victoria, Australia in June 2026.

The MG Charitable Trust 2026 Grower Education Fund offers growers subsidies ranging from \$6,000 to \$14,000 towards four leading development programmes: the Rabobank Farm Managers Programme, Rabobank Executive Development Programme, Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme and Mayfield Group Governance Development Programmes.

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Of the operation's 325ha, 50ha are devoted to vegetables - red and brown onions, potatoes and pumpkins - plus arable, seed, fodder or process crops, and lamb finishing

"You've got a lot more overcast days and a lot more downpours. Instead of two or three millimetres, it's more like 30 or 40mm. A lot more hail seems to be trending at the moment too."

That means the window to cultivate, spray or harvest has shrunk. The operation has to be very flexible. Lance says they can't afford to wait for a contractor when conditions are right but have to have their own machinery ready to go every day.

"We could be planting potatoes, then we've got to jump to something on onions, then we've got to do something on pumpkins and then we've got to do something on radish.

“

My main focus was for them to go and get outside experience and just see what things are like

"There's just so much you've got to do each day because you don't know what tomorrow's going to be like. Vegetables like 28 degrees for four months. They don't like 30 and then down to 17, and then 20, and then cloudy and rain."

Lance is now looking to family succession. Three years ago his oldest son Lincoln, 25, joined the business, following completion of a Bachelor of Agri Business and Food Marketing at Lincoln University and three years with KPMG.

Second son Douglas has just finished high school and is off to Lincoln University this year to do a Diploma of Agriculture, after a summer season working for Wattie's and working in Nelson for another large market gardener in the previous summer holidays.

"My main focus was for them to go and get outside experience and just see what things are like," Lance says.

Lincoln says he's enjoying learning the intricacies of food production from his dad. Lance is committed to the business but says he's unsure what future challenges it will face, as the once small town of Lincoln expands with hundreds of new suburban sections being developed.

"I don't know what our future is here. We've got to see what the subdivisions do and what neighbours we get. There's always someone ringing up and writing about something whether it's working up paddocks, cleaning ditches, irrigation, putting on fertiliser, you name it." ●

PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS

Innovative robotics company MAF NZ see their role not only as selling post-harvest solutions, but in getting alongside New Zealand's horticulture businesses to enable the kind of growth needed to meet the country's aspirations to double exports by 2034.

New Zealand has an enviable horticultural pedigree. Our premium produce and clean green image have seen exports soar to a record \$8.4 billion YE June 2025 and are forecast to grow to \$10 billion by 2029. The Aotearoa Horticulture Action Plan, which aims to double farmgate value by 2035, emphasises collaboration, science and knowledge. Putting rhetoric into real world results, MAF NZ has been working at the coalface to implement the kinds of innovation that make this ambitious growth possible.

“
One of the things we really like about MAF is their willingness to be customer focused

Recently, MAF NZ had the opportunity to work with an export apple business that found itself working longer hours to try to keep pace with this growth, hampered by outdated infrastructure. The new state-of-the-art multi-lane feeding and optical grading system, part of a turn-key solution developed by MAF NZ, allowed the facility to maximise value and pack multiple grades out of a bin. The 2,500 square metre packhouse facility was able to handle up to 60 bins per hour. “It meant we are packing almost half as much again in two-thirds of the time.”

The kiwifruit sector has been a star performer when it comes to horticultural exports, and this is raising capacity challenges both in terms of infrastructure and workforce. Future expansion will only exacerbate these ‘growing pains’. MAF NZ was pivotal in a recent greenfield project which involved designing a post-harvest packhouse from the ground up to be one of the kiwifruit industry's most efficient packing lines, integrating multiple automation systems from suppliers with different capabilities into a cohesive, high-throughput operation. In the words of the management team: “One of the things we really like about MAF is their willingness to be customer focused. Some companies will go to MAF for a turnkey solution. We like to design it, but we like to have MAF in the room and work side-by-side with them. That's where they're really good, designing it together and being focused on customer solutions - it's a point of difference.”



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The loss of millions of Xylella-affected olive trees in Italy's Apulia region has caused annual production losses of €5.5 billion

INVISIBLE INVADER

The Xylella Action Group is working to prepare New Zealand for Xylella fastidiosa, a looming threat edging closer to our shores. Over the last few months, grower campaigns have been building awareness – an often-over-used objective but, certainly in Xylella's case, a genuinely important one.

Alex Bisson : HortNZ risk policy advisor and Anna Broxham : HESL Biosecurity Manager

Growers have a critical role in protecting our industry from Xylella - particularly through late summer and autumn. Do you and your team know the symptoms, and are you safely moving plant material?

Under the Government Industry Agreement for Biosecurity (GIA), the Xylella Action Group (XAG) brings together industry and government to coordinate New Zealand's preparedness for Xylella.

An incursion of Xylella in New Zealand could undermine key crops like grapes (wine), citrus,



Xylella is not in New Zealand but has devastated crops overseas

blueberries and stonefruit with severe economic, environmental and trade consequences.

New Zealand's native flora (e.g. kauri, pōhutukawa, taupata, koromiko, akeake) may also be at high risk.

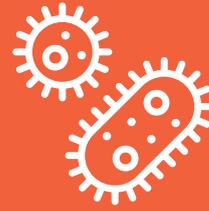
In Europe, Xylella has caused devastating impacts - especially in Italy's Apulia region, with the loss of millions of olive trees - estimated at an annual production loss of €5.5 billion (approx. NZD\$11.2 billion), threatening over 300,000 jobs.



KNOW THE SYMPTOMS

- ⚠️ **Stay vigilant for symptoms** and report them early.
 - Leaf scorch, wilting
 - Cane and twig die-back
 - Stunted growth
 - Reduced fruit size
 - Lateral branches grow horizontally or drop, producing compact-looking trees
- ⚠️ **Symptoms can mimic drought or nutrient deficiencies**, as well as frost and herbicide damage, or infection of other plant diseases already present in New Zealand.

If you find any suspicious symptoms, photograph your plant and call the **Biosecurity New Zealand pest and disease hotline 0800 80 99 66**.



KEY FACTS XYLELLA

- *Xylella fastidiosa* is a bacterial disease threatening New Zealand crops and native flora, with **no cure available once infected**.
- The pathogen is **not in New Zealand**, but our native **Meadow Spittlebug** is believed to be a **suitable vector for transmission**.
- Many host plants **remain asymptomatic, risking undetected spread** through infected nursery stock.
- It's possible that **growers will be the first** to detect an incursion.
- The Xylella Action Group coordinates **government-industry preparedness** under the GIA.

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The Meadow Spittlebug is believed to be a suitable vector for transmission. Photo supplied by Bioeconomy Science Institute

THE PATHOGEN HAS
700+
REPORTED HOST PLANTS
AND MORE CONTINUE TO BE
DISCOVERED REGULARLY

PRACTISE ON-FARM AND ON-ORCHARD BIOSECURITY

Transmission pathways include the movement of infected plant material and whole plants for trade and planting.

-  **Source plant material carefully.** For trusted pest-free suppliers, consider sourcing from Plant Pass certified plant producers. Plant Pass is New Zealand's industry-led certification scheme for plant health and biosecurity. Check the Plant Pass Register on www.plantpass.org.nz.
-  **Comply with regulations** for importing plant material - confirm all import requirements have been met.
-  **Good biosecurity hygiene:** monitor your crops regularly, clean equipment, control weed hosts and manage vector hotspots.

Undetected spread

Many host plant species may have a delayed onset of disease symptom development or remain asymptomatic while still harbouring the bacterium, acting as reservoir hosts - significantly increasing the risk of undetected spread.

Despite strong import controls, an invisible invasion means it is possible that a *Xylella* incursion from infected insect vectors, nursery stock or other imported plant material will be detected first by experienced growers finding unusual signs on host plants.

The infected plant normally will not die immediately but over time as the bacterium cuts off the plant's water supply. After initial infection, infected plants will have no economic value and there is no cure for the disease.

Xylella is primarily spread through xylem-feeding insects - most notably spittlebugs and sharpshooter leafhopper vectors. New Zealand's native spittlebug species - like Meadow Spittlebug (*Philaenus spumarius*) - is abundantly present and widely spread. These add to the risk as they are potentially suitable native vectors.

The pathogen has more than 700 reported host plants and more continue to be discovered regularly.

The distribution of host plants in New Zealand is not well understood. However, New Zealand native plants in international botanic gardens have tested positive for the presence of *Xylella*, indicating that these species can host the bacteria.



The Xylella Action Group is coordinating a Xylella awareness campaign across affected product groups, including Summerfruit NZ and Citrus NZ

Getting ready for Xylella

Xylella is thought to be originally native to the Americas. However, the bacterium has spread dramatically, now affecting most of North, Central and South America, and invading into Europe, primarily in Italy, France, Spain and Portugal.

It has also been detected throughout Asia (Israel, Iran, China, Taiwan), making it only a matter of time before it expands farther, causing a major biosecurity concern for countries still free of the disease.

Xylella has been classified as a top-tier biosecurity threat by the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI). Working together with MPI, XAG industry partners include Citrus NZ, Summerfruit NZ, NZ Winegrowers and NZ Plant Producers Inc.

XAG is actively developing New Zealand's readiness, creating response plans, simulating response scenarios, supporting targeted research and collaborating with partners such as Better Border Biosecurity (B3). A core focus for 2026 is a targeted Xylella awareness campaign for both commercial growers and the public.

XAG supports developing and adopting international guidance for diagnostic protocols and techniques to strengthen response plans. This ensures New Zealand is building the capacity to detect Xylella early and initiate a biosecurity response quickly - ranging from containment to eradication. ●



Ministers Chris Bishop and Andrew Hoggard recently toured the site of the new Plant Health and Environment Laboratory in Auckland

BIOSECURITY FACILITY CONSTRUCTION UNDERWAY

Construction of the new Plant Health and Environment Laboratory (PHEL) at the Mt Albert Research Centre in Auckland is well underway. The new facility will replace the Ministry for Primary Industries' existing PHEL and Post Entry Quarantine (PEQ) infrastructure in Tāmaki.

Touring the site recently, Infrastructure Minister Chris Bishop says, "Once complete, this facility will be one of the most advanced biosecurity centres in Australasia." The facility will include internationally accredited laboratories, PEQ greenhouses and technical expertise to support high-value crop imports.

Biosecurity Minister Andrew Hoggard says, "Strengthening New Zealand's defences against biosecurity threats and the potentially devastating impacts for our primary industries and environment is more important than ever as the risk of new pests and diseases increases with climate change and an increasingly complex trade environment."

Construction is scheduled to finish in 2028, and the facility is expected to be ready for service in January 2029.



www.mpi.govt.nz



Growers Claudia and Andrew Gorringer at Waitekohe Organic Orchards in the Bay of Plenty



NOT SO FAST ON GENE TECH

The Gene Technology Bill is still progressing its way through Parliament. However, organic kiwifruit growers Claudia and Andrew Gorringer are not convinced that those who support liberalising gene technology understand how it will affect horticulture markets. Andrew wrote in to NZGrower & Orchardist to share his opinion.

Andrew Gorringer

I find the gene technology topic fascinating. For example, if gene editing can be used for environmental control of wilding pines - without risk to our export industries and native flora and fauna - then I would be all for it.

My interest in gene technology stems from my 30 years in the arable industry, primarily growing maize for grain. That journey took me to the United States several times and included time spent with the companies developing Bt-Corn and Roundup Ready® corn.

It also led to a long-term friendship with Bob Nielsen, recently retired professor of agronomy at Purdue University in Indiana. It was Bob who put me on to the idea that the farmers growing genetically engineered corn were not benefitting from the technology. They were not gaining

a yield advantage, and there was an increase in cost for chemicals as weeds and insects steadily became even more resistant to glyphosate and insecticide applications.

I recently asked Bob again what his thoughts were after several more years had passed. His sage reply was, "As is always the case, new technology is not the problem. It's how humans use the technology."

Later we built a factory near Auckland and supplied processing grits directly to the food industry in New Zealand. Our key customers were Sanitarium and Goodman Fielder. That was a wake-up call! We had to provide certification that all of our products were free of genetically engineered organisms (GE-free). It wasn't good enough to just say, "but we don't grow GE corn in

New Zealand.” Every batch had to be accompanied with certification that it was indeed GE-free, and that meant sending samples to Australia for testing... and the cost was all on us.

I don’t want to go there again now that we are growing kiwifruit, but I’m fearful that’s exactly where we are blindly heading. I have been to several industry seminars and events about gene technology, and I have come away with a growing distrust of those leading the charge to open up our industry to the application of gene editing.

Proponents are keen to distinguish between gene editing (precision breeding) and more drastic gene engineering techniques, but I believe the distinction doesn’t mean much to consumers and our customers. And I can’t see how those products could achieve genetic engineering-free certification where our customers demand that.

Co-existence of GE and non-GE crops will be extremely challenging, particularly in areas like Bay of Plenty where we are, with orchards all over the place. Once a gene-edited plant is released into the environment, it will spread its traits to other compatible plants through natural distribution of pollen and seeds - not to mention floods, spills during transport and such interventions as have been well documented overseas.

Look at the Australian experience, with reports of genetically engineered canola growing wild on roadsides and the Marsh v Baxter court case. And there seems to be no relief possible under Australian regulations for losses incurred by contamination of non-GE crops.



“
**...new technology is not the problem.
 It’s how humans use the technology**

And once genetically altered plants are introduced into our open environment there is no going back. It can’t be undone. We are GE forever. We need to think really carefully about this.

Yet, here in New Zealand, it’s remarkable that there has been so little mainstream public discussion about the Government’s gene technology proposals. However, I think it’s a mistake to interpret New Zealand public apathy as evidence of global consumer indifference. Marketplace trust in food production is becoming more important every year.

If we look at the United States example, their population is pushing back against the genetically engineered agriculture industry. The pushback has spilled over into both the marketplace and political sphere, and now their regulations are being tightened, not relaxed.



WHY ARE WE SO READILY WANTING TO GIVE OUR CLEAN, GREEN NATURAL IMAGE AWAY?

GENE TECH LEGISLATION STATUS

The Gene Technology Bill is currently awaiting its remaining parliamentary stages after being reported back from the Health Select Committee in October 2025. The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment will likely be consulting on regulations that will support the new Bill in the first part of 2026. HortNZ will keep growers updated on any further progress of the legislation, or you can check www.mbie.govt.nz.

And New Zealand growers are benefitting from that. Export sales and prices of GE-free conventional and organic kiwifruit (both SunGold™ and Hayward) into North America are stellar (despite the tariffs).

What I took away from the data presented to growers at industry events is that half of our customers around the world don’t want to purchase GE food. So why on Earth would we want to limit ourselves to marketing to the half that do, when currently we have 100 percent of the market available to us?

Of course, it’s possible that global attitudes to GE crops will change, increasing that percentage over time. So, for the sake of argument, let’s imagine that decades from now GE crops will have become the global mainstream. If we look at the current experience, most of those GE crops will be focussed on increasing profitability of the large biotech and agro-industrial enterprises that dominate Northern Hemisphere countries. That is simply the reality of commercial incentives to invest in gene technology.

Thought leaders

Disclaimer: The individual comments and views in this opinion piece do not necessarily represent the view of Horticulture New Zealand, the publisher of *NZGrower & Orchardist*.

NZGrower & Orchardist serves the horticulture community by sharing a broad range of authentic grower voices to generate discussion, change and an environment where all growers can thrive. Contact editor@hortnz.co.nz to share your thoughts.



“
 I'M CONVINCED THAT
 THERE WILL CONTINUE TO
 BE A HIGH-VALUE GLOBAL
 MARKET FOR HIGH-TRUST,
 CLEAN, GREEN, GE-FREE
 PRODUCE EVEN IN A WORLD
 OF MAINSTREAM
 GE CROPS

Claudia and Andrew Gorrige are now into their third year of certified organic kiwifruit production

Take a look at the website of Australia's Office of the Gene Technology Regulator. After 20 years of deregulation, the list of approved commercial GMO dealings comprises mostly offshore applications of canola and cotton modified for herbicide tolerance and insect resistance.

These are not the products that will generate the high value that New Zealand growers need to compete globally. We are uniquely positioned and have an incredible opportunity to continue to supply premium products to the premium markets of this world.

On the other hand, is there a risk that new GE kiwifruit or apple cultivars developed elsewhere could compete with our home-grown cultivars in global markets?

New Zealand breeders say that gene technology may speed up time to market and reduce the costs of creating competitive new cultivars. There's certainly something to that argument, particularly if breeding with gene editing is done in containment, or overseas under our control, and the resultant crops are commercialised without risk to our market reputation.

However, speaking as a New Zealand grower, not a breeder, I'm convinced that there will continue to be a high-value global market for high-trust, clean, green, GE-free produce even in a world of mainstream GE crops.

It gives consumers a compelling reason to buy New Zealand produce. No one in the world is dependent on food supplies from New Zealand. They don't need to buy products from a country that's far away. And we

already have a proven point of differentiation – a point of difference that already has world recognition. Why are we so readily wanting to give our clean, green natural image away?

Instead of embracing GE crops, let's embrace our global reputation; stay a world leader in GE-free breeding and sustainable pest/weed management; and leverage our geography with strong border controls.

Finally, by way of a disclaimer... after a lifetime as a broadacre chemical farmer I, along with my wife, saw an opportunity to step away from commodity markets into high-value organic production. It was a business decision. We are now into our third year of certified organic kiwifruit production with no regrets at all. We are very happy to accept a 20 percent plus price premium paid for by our international customers who in ever greater numbers are choosing to purchase pesticide, herbicide and GE-free foods.

The crux of the problem is, if we, both conventional and organic producers, are to continue to benefit from New Zealand's point of difference as a clean, green producer we need to update our gene technology regulations without risk to our market reputation.

It would seem that little consideration has been given to this subject in the rush to liberalise our laws. Now heading into 2026, it looks like the wheels are a bit wobbly on the Government's efforts to push through the Gene Technology Bill. Hopefully there is still time for a more considered update of the regulations. ●

HORNET AND FRUIT FLY INCURSIONS



Biosecurity New Zealand response teams searching for hornets

Tiny transmitters weighing less than 160mg are helping Biosecurity New Zealand successfully hunt down yellow-legged hornets (*Vespa velutina*) and their nests in Auckland. Attached to the workers, the transmitters track the flight path back to the nests.

At the time of writing, the response team has found 45 queen hornets, and 32 of these with nests. Approximately 600 workers have been found, mostly in nests, and destroyed.

The focus now is on locating and destroying queens to stop them producing a new generation of hornets. At the end of autumn, workers die.

Meanwhile, the biosecurity response following the discovery of a single male Queensland fruit fly in early January continues. Trapping and inspection ramped up swiftly but as of late January, no further Queensland fruit flies have been found within the controlled area.



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ARE WE VULNERABLE ON FOOD SAFETY?

Growers are doing well – our fresh produce industry hasn't experienced a serious food safety incident for more than decade. However, Cyclone Gabrielle and crises across the Tasman have exposed a fragmented food safety system that is increasingly expected to do more with less. Several industry bodies and agencies are proposing a more collaborative and coordinated approach.

Damien Farrelly : chief executive Fresh Produce Safety Centre

New Zealand horticulture has built a strong food safety record over many decades. This has been driven by research, regulation and the steady adoption of good agricultural practices and global standards.

While there have been no major food safety incidents in New Zealand fresh produce since the Yersinia outbreak in 2015, we cannot afford to be complacent given the nature of how fresh produce is grown and consumed.

Regulators have recognised aspects of industry assurance programmes such as NZGAP and GLOBALG.A.P. (Good Agricultural Practice), Brand Reputation through Compliance Global Standards (BRCGS), and SQF (Safe Quality Food), leveraging the high standards driven by export markets and New Zealand retailers.

This recognition could be improved significantly to streamline implementation, thus reducing administration and costs. The current Government is highly supportive of improving recognition of robust industry assurance programmes (e.g. the recent amendment to the Resource Management Act to allow for industry organisations to provide certification and audit services for freshwater farm plans). NZ Food Safety (the regulator within the Ministry for Primary Industries) has a new action plan that seeks to improve operation of the Food Act for businesses including reducing duplicative requirements. This is a positive step in the right direction.

At the same time, there has been a reduction in government funding for research which underpins the New Zealand food safety system and market confidence. Internationally, there has recently been a significant reduction in funding for the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organisation, which has led to the suspension of numerous projects that aim to strengthen global food safety systems. These reductions

come just as consumer, market and regulatory expectations are increasing including the need for improved traceability, transparency, crisis response and reduction in agrichemical use. Fundamentally, this means that the food safety system is being asked to achieve more with fewer resources. Improved approaches are needed to safeguard New Zealand's reputation and market access.



How New Zealand compares globally

New Zealand horticulture stands out internationally, with comparatively low levels of recalls and foodborne illness attributed to fresh produce. Direct comparisons are not straightforward given methodologies, monitoring and reporting frameworks vary widely globally. It's certainly something that should be explored further given European Union data has shown that increased monitoring leads to increased detections, which can be indicative of under monitoring in some European countries.



...we cannot afford to be complacent given the nature of how fresh produce is grown and consumed

Several factors work in New Zealand's favour. The high levels of certification (estimated over 95 percent) to food safety standards, export market focus, strong food safety culture, high water quality and short supply chains all contribute to New Zealand performing well in this area compared to other countries.

New Zealand also has the advantage of having one regulator (NZ Food Safety) compared to Australia where the six state authorities administer separate regulations. This means that it can be difficult to align



approaches (e.g. recalls) across the states. That said, Australia and New Zealand also collaborate closely on food safety via harmonised standards developed by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) (e.g. labelling and composition requirements).

Australia is more readily able to respond to crises such as floods and droughts, primarily because they have more experience due to a higher incidence of these extreme events. While there is room for improvement on both sides, New Zealand can learn a great deal from how Australia prepares for and responds to these events.

 **Lessons from Cyclone Gabrielle**

The fresh produce industry faced unprecedented challenges following Cyclone Gabrielle, highlighting significant gaps in the food safety response system. The potential risks were considerable given the scale of the event, level of contamination in floodwaters and proximity to harvest for many crops. While guidelines existed on food safety risk management for flooding, they were not readily available, shared or adopted to support growers with readiness or response after the event.

“
New Zealand can learn a great deal from how Australia prepares for and responds to these events

A major issue was fragmentation. Product groups, regulators, industry bodies and retailers sometimes worked in parallel rather than together resulting in a lack of effective collaboration and communication for growers.

Thankfully, no food safety outbreak was linked with fresh produce in the aftermath of the cyclone. Though the risk was high, it was generally well managed, representing a positive outcome for consumers and the industry despite the systemic challenges in the response approach.

 **What growers are saying**

Growers are concerned about the increasing compliance burden including more costs and duplication of requirements. There is also frustration that some operators may not be meeting the required food safety standards and regulations. Many growers are calling for a more tailored approach for small growers and low-risk operators.

Retailers and regulators are understandably risk averse; thus some requirements are considered too precautionary (e.g. large buffers from flood waters), which can have a significant negative economic impact for growers. Growers therefore would like improved regulations, standards and guidance which are user-friendly, risk-based and underpinned by science.



NEW FOOD SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR FRESH PRODUCE

Fresh Produce Safety Centre is a trans-Tasman industry-led body. It has recently published Version 5 - 2025 of the *Fundamental Guidelines for Fresh Produce Food Safety*. The document provides an updated, science-based framework to help businesses across the supply chain manage food safety risks. This edition includes new chapters on Managing Critical Incidents & Recalls, Food Safety Culture, plus additional appendices, enhanced guidance on water quality and microbial testing, updated visuals and decision trees - all designed to improve usability.

Also available are the brand-new *Quick Guides for Fresh Produce Food Safety* - one-page summaries that complement each chapter of the Fundamental Guidelines, designed for practical, day-to-day use by growers and their teams.

 These resources are free to download at www.fpsc-anz.com.

 **A more unified approach for safer produce**

To address these challenges, work is underway to establish a NZ Fresh Produce Food Safety Network. The aim is to enhance leadership, strategic alignment and coordination of activities across the New Zealand fresh produce food safety system. The proposed network has been developed in collaboration between HortNZ, NZGAP and United Fresh, and it has been endorsed by the Fresh Produce Safety Centre, NZ Food Safety and the NZ Food Safety Science & Research Centre.

The network is welcomed by growers, industry, regulators and retailers alike as there is a clear need for a more collaborative and coordinated approach to advance food safety and support a thriving fresh produce industry. One of the key objectives will be to review readiness and response systems, which will ensure that we are better prepared for the next adverse event - whether a cyclone, outbreak of foodborne illness, recall or pandemic. In the meantime, New Zealand growers can have confidence that they are on the right track and should continue to implement the updated food safety guidelines and standards. ●

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Workshop attendees during an IPM field session at the Pukekohe Research and Demonstration Farm

GROWERS WALK THE TALK OF **IPM IN ACTION**

When Keith Paterson saw his first lettuce crop at the Pukekohe Research and Demonstration Farm manage a significant aphid outbreak without a single foliar insecticide spray, it challenged everything the older generation had taught him about pest control.

Gina Jewell : A Lighter Touch programme

"I was brought up with the theory that if you see a bug, bomb it - biologicals were just snake oil," Keith says. "But actually seeing these crops grow just on biologicals was definitely an eye-opener."

Keith is one of several vegetable growers who have participated in Integrated Pest Management (IPM) workshops at the farm over the past three seasons. Facilitated by Daniel Sutton, Vegetables NZ research, development and extension manager, and supported by consultant Olivia Prouse, Bioeconomy Science Institute scientists and A Lighter Touch, the workshops follow crops from planting through to harvest, giving growers hands-on experience with IPM strategies in a commercial setting.

The impact on participating growers' practices has been substantial - and measurable. For Allan Marques, agronomist at LeaderBrand, attending the workshops over the past three seasons has demonstrated the value of using nature to fight nature - using beneficial insects and mites to support pest management alongside crop protection products compatible with beneficials.

Allan has tracked spray applications in his own operation since taking part in the IPM workshops, and has seen a dramatic reduction, with about 11 percent less insecticide in 2024-25 compared to the previous season, and a further 35 percent reduction this season.



Grower Keith Paterson at the Vegetables Big Day Out last year, with Evaline Bruce from Ballance

"We used to spray every week during diamondback moth season, not wanting to open a gap," he says. "Now we walk the paddock, we see pests, we see whitefly, see different caterpillar stages, but we're like, okay, stay there. We see beneficials - lacewings, ladybugs, spiders - and we let them work."

“

The more you scout, the more you see what's in your crops, and that helps you decide whether to spray, what to spray

The shift means moving from five applications to perhaps two, spraying only close to harvest if monitoring shows it is truly necessary.

Garry Yee, who has over 40 years in vegetable growing and works with The Fresh Grower, reinforces the fundamental principle: "The key takeaway is you must scout your crops. The more you scout, the more you see what's in your crops, and that helps you decide whether to spray, what to spray."

Understanding which beneficials control which pests has been invaluable, he says. The workshops have provided that deeper knowledge - not just presence or absence of insects but their life stages, their relationships and how to work with natural systems rather than against them.

The power of seeing IPM in action

What makes these workshops effective is their format. Rather than one-off events, growers follow a crop through its entire cycle, making decisions together and observing outcomes over subsequent weeks.

"Without the demonstration farm crop to use as a case study, we would never have been able to show IPM in action," Daniel says. "It's easy to know what the different sprays are, what the pests are, what the beneficials are. But to actually put it all together in a system that works and delivers a commercial crop - that's not easy."

The demonstration farm's unique advantage is its ability to push boundaries without commercial risk. In the first workshop, when a spring lettuce crop reached 10-15 percent aphid incidence, growers in the room were adamant: "Spray, we need to spray." Three years later, the conversation has flipped - it was the growers saying, "Why? You've got low numbers, you've got beneficials, why would you spray?"

Daniel recognises that growers can't push the thresholds in the same way the demonstration farm can - it's their livelihood at stake.

"My mentality was if we can take it to an extreme, like the lettuce crops with no foliar insecticide sprays - great," he says. "I don't expect growers to go to that extreme, but what I'm hoping is they can see that they can meet us halfway, which is still a big improvement."



Attendees in December at the latest IPM workshop series, which followed a lettuce crop but also included sessions relating to onions and barley

A memorable lesson in threshold management

One demonstration provided Allan with an insight that fundamentally changed his approach. Two broccoli crops were planted simultaneously – one at the demonstration farm and one at LeaderBrand’s operation a few kilometres away.

“The demo farm held off spraying until basically the end,” he recalls. As a grower, Allan described the pest damage to the crop at the demonstration farm as “horrible”.

“But in the end, the demo farm crop had the heads to harvest. My crop was wonderful, no damage on the leaves, but when it was close to harvest, diamondback moth went straight to the head, probably because the leaves were full of chemicals.”

The contrast was striking: one crop with damaged leaves but clean heads, the other with pristine leaves but damaged heads – the part that matters for marketability. “That opened my view. I realised I don’t need to be too strong. I can hold the fire a little bit longer until I really need it.”

The demonstration farm is also home to the A Lighter Touch – Vegetables NZ – Onions NZ biodiversity project. By incorporating biodiversity into the farm system through native perennial planting, annual flowering species, cover crops and mobile insectary pods, it aims to enhance beneficial populations, leading to fewer insect pests in crops, and less insecticides required.

The use of biodiversity together with IPM as crop protection strategies is explored in the workshops, and has helped open growers’ minds to this approach.

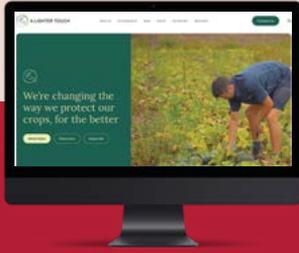
VEGETABLES BIG DAY OUT

On 5 March Vegetables Big Day Out is back in Pukekohe. Visit Te Ahikawariki: vegcentreofexcellence.nz

Keith describes the impact he has seen while managing parallel crops: “We had crops right around the demo farm, so I was using the plantings there. We had nothing bad. Whereas our crop up the road, we were starting to see diamondback moth coming in.” The proximity to biodiverse plantings from the demonstration farm made a visible difference in pest pressure.

Garry describes the benefits he has seen from changing his crop protection approach: “Less spraying means reduced time involved, applications and the cost as well. The less we can use, that reduces costs and benefits our profitability.”

Allan also points to environmental gains: “We’re helping the environment, delivering food with less pesticides. You start to look at the whole environment – can I plant flowers here, do I need to help my soil?”

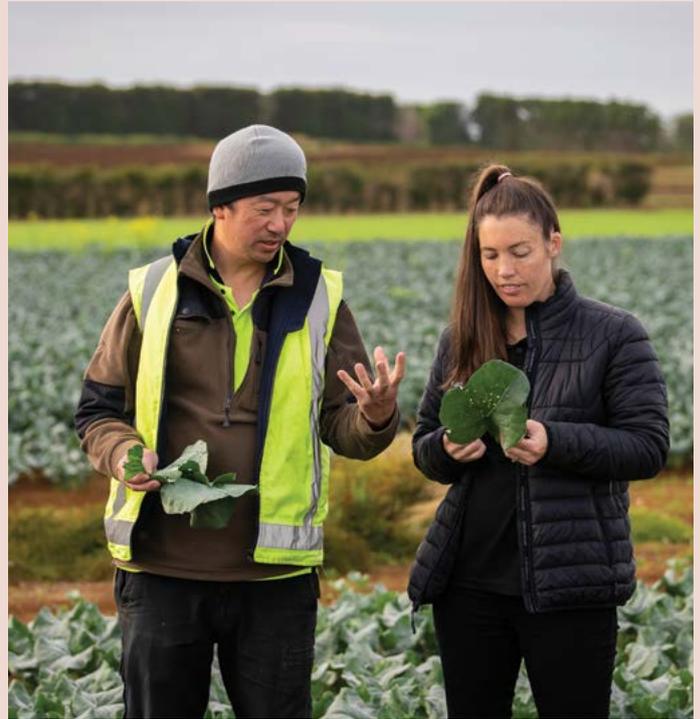


VISIT AN 'OPEN PADDOCK'

This summer growers implementing biodiversity planting to support crop pest management on their own farms are hosting 'open paddock' field walks in vegetable growing areas around New Zealand to help extend knowledge gained from the A Lighter Touch - Vegetables NZ - Onions NZ biodiversity project. Supported by Vegetables NZ and A Lighter Touch, the field walks are to be held in Dargaville in February, in Nelson, Manawatū and Hawke's Bay in March, and in Gisborne in April.



For more information, visit www.a-lighter-touch.co.nz.



Garry Yee from The Fresh Grower discussing scouting results at one of the workshops with Isabelle Crowsen of Fairbank Seeds

Reduced field traffic brings practical benefits. "Instead of going in five times for a spray, we're going twice," Allan says. "There's less compaction, less damage to the crop."

Keith notes another crucial advantage: "By using biologicals first rather than going straight to the harsh stuff, we're avoiding resistance issues."

With resistance developing rapidly, not just in New Zealand but globally, maintaining the efficacy of existing tools is crucial.

Meeting industry challenges

Daniel is clear about why the industry needs IPM: "The more resilient a system is, the more change it can cope with. We're seeing logistical challenges getting products to New Zealand, more resistance to crop protection products, and the pipeline of new products is not what it once was. Consumer demand is changing - people want their food as pesticide free as possible."

These pressures point toward needing more tools in the toolbox. "When something fails, if we're just relying on agchem, the whole system fails," he says. "That doesn't give us surety of being able to keep growing."

Daniel Sutton facilitating one of the IPM workshops at the Pukekohe Research and Demonstration Farm



Looking to the future

All three growers are either implementing biodiversity strategies on their operations or would like to. Allan Marques uses cover crops extensively and has also made use of flower strips, though he notes shared use of land can make flower strips challenging. "The next guy doesn't like you to put flowers in because they become seeds in the paddock."

Keith, whose operation moves from block to block on lease land, can't invest in permanent plantings but sees the value: "The hard thing is we don't have our own farm. The plantings would be great to do, but I'm actually surrounding the demonstration farm at the moment [growing on leased land], so I am using those plantings."

Garry is designating permanent areas for beneficial plantings on The Fresh Grower's operations, working with Olivia Prouse, who leads the biodiversity project work, to select appropriate plant varieties.

Daniel understands the challenge lease land poses for incorporating biodiversity planting. "Not everyone owns the land, so investing in multi-years of perennial planting might not be what they can do. If we can show that the annual strips and the pods are also providing a similar amount of value, then that becomes quite doable in a lease land situation."

Sustaining the momentum

For Daniel, the workshops' greatest success is the mindset shift. "From my perspective, the single best thing we've done through A Lighter Touch has been these workshops. We've done projects that deliver information, but workshops are where behaviour change comes from."

However, extension capacity is limited across the sector. A large commercial vegetable grower initially implemented IPM across all broccoli crops based on workshop learnings, but when the main individual driving this work left, momentum slowed, highlighting the challenge of sustaining change.

"People and roles change, so I don't think it's a matter of ticking the box to say, hey, well, we ran a series of workshops, weren't they successful? It's actually making that resource available constantly," Daniel says.

Because this is not a simple practice change to adopt. IPM is undeniably more complex than calendar-based spraying. It requires knowledge of pest and beneficial life cycles, understanding of product compatibility and regular crop monitoring to inform decision-making.

For the three growers who shared their experiences, the workshops haven't just changed their pest management - they've changed how they think about farming systems.

From fear of crop loss to confidence in biological controls, from calendar spraying to informed decision-making.

As Allan Marques reflects: "Some growers are still applying the same chemicals all year round. I don't think they understand how bad it is - not just for them, but for all of us, because pests can come from their farm to our farm. We're not isolated."

“We've done projects that deliver information, but workshops are where behaviour change comes from

All three emphasise that more of their peers should attend. "More growers should come," Garry says. "Especially the next generation taking over family businesses needs to learn this."

Keith agrees: "There should be more growers attending. I don't know what their futures are going to hold, but they should definitely be popping into some workshops."

The IPM workshops at Pukekohe will continue to run next season, following crops through their life cycles and building grower confidence one season at a time - proving that seeing really is believing when it comes to IPM. ●

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SCAN ME



A Tall Spindle pipfruit structure

THE ECONOMIC DRIVERS OF ORCHARD CANOPY SYSTEMS

In this article, I outline the fundamental economics of orchard canopy systems and how these influence the profitability of fruit production.

Jack Wilson : AgFirst Consultants

Drawing on financial monitoring projects undertaken by AgFirst, consistent trends have emerged: the most profitable growers optimise the three key drivers of Production, Pack-out, and Price (the three 'P's). Producing high volumes of Class 1 fruit from strong varieties remains the single most significant contributor to profitability.

Cost management also plays a critical role; however, high-performing growers tend to be cost-aware rather than cost-driven. Strategic investment, such as additional pruning to lift pack-out, often generates far greater returns than short-term cost-cutting.



Because orchard businesses vary in structure, experience, labour capability and risk appetite, no canopy system suits everyone.

This article highlights the economic influences associated with three major pipfruit canopy systems: Tall Spindle, Horizontal 2D, and FOPS (Future Orchard Planting Systems).

When talking about canopy systems, we need to keep the 'why' in our minds. We are growing fruit to make money, and to do that we need to optimise the three 'P's and be cost-aware. Now it is up to us to decide what canopy system should be used to achieve that, matching our unique management techniques, labour structure and expertise.

Production

Production remains the foundation of profitability, but in today's high-value variety environment, achieving the optimal balance between yield and fruit quality is essential. Long-term performance is typically strongest in blocks that consistently execute three core production drivers:

- Early yield accumulation – getting a good tree from the nursery and growing it well in the first two years – arguably the most important years to ensure long-term success. Achieving a good yield accumulation needs to be done through precision of many management factors. It means not getting greedy and overcropping the tree that you have grown so well in the first year. It also means not undercropping and growing the tree out of a balanced structure.
- Filling the space – developing a canopy that can fill 100 percent of the allotted space. We are now commonly using plant growth regulator products to control vigour as the trees get older, but ensuring this does not get in the way of canopy fill is critical. A big part of this is getting out amongst different orchards, benchmarking yourself and understanding what 100 percent canopy fill actually looks like.
- Reducing variability – some of the highest yields I have seen have been on the Tall Spindle. The reason high yields are achieved is because it is a large canopy, with every tree filling 100 percent of its space. In recent years this has become increasingly challenging with European Canker slowly crippling blocks. Variability will continue to be the number one killer of yield and as always, now is the easiest time to manage it.

Pack-out

Improving pack-out directly increases the proportion of fruit sold at premium prices. Pack-out reductions are frequently linked to canopy management issues, including insufficient spray penetration or poor light distribution.

Lately, there has been a shift to more planar canopies such as FOPS, 2D or other multi-leader systems that allow good light from top to bottom of the tree. The idea is that by reducing the complexity of the tree's structure, you are allowing more light to penetrate all parts of the tree, avoiding shaded areas and thus increasing the fruit quality, colour and pack-out.

FOPS and 2D canopy systems, when managed well, achieve fantastic light distribution. However, when managed at best practice, a Tall Spindle system can achieve the same depending on the crop load and branch distribution.

Pack-out is often the 'P' that declines when you don't get the vigour control equation right. In most cases this happens when the 'canopy system x variety x tree spacing' relationship is wrong. Many times, trees are planted too close, which causes an over-vigorous tree, reducing light distribution and therefore fruit colour.

Price

Price is determined largely by the variety you grow but also by your ability to grow to the colour and size specification the consumer wants. The canopy system is the tool that helps you get there. Different varieties are more suited to different canopy systems due to their growth nature, and some systems have better capability to grow for quality over others.

What we want out of a canopy system regarding price is the ability to drive high yields at year 8+ while still maintaining size and colour. This is achievable by:

1. Maintaining or recycling young fruitful wood
2. Branch renewal capability to maintain density
3. Vigour control whereby the tree is just growing enough to achieve 1 and 2 above but not too much whereby shading and poor carbohydrate portioning are occurring.

Multi-leader systems do this well through their vertical growth nature. Replacing an upright stem in FOPS remains easy at age provided you have ample light around the cordon. 2D systems generally prioritise quality over quantity and therefore the longevity of horizontal branches is greater; however, being able to replace branches in the bottom of the canopy becomes difficult with age due to the orientation of branches and the age of the trunk.



NZ Feijoa Growers Association
**Renewed
Commodity Levy**

The NZ Feijoa Growers Association advises that it intends to apply to renew the Commodity Levies (Feijoa) Order 2020 in 2026. It is the Association's intention to apply for an order with the same rate, coverage, and form as the existing order; that is 3% of the price of feijoas sold in New Zealand at the first point of sale, or 3% of the fob value for export feijoas, or 3% of the unprocessed value of feijoas if a grower processes the feijoas on their own account. All prices are exclusive of GST.

This intention was debated and confirmed at the November 2025 Annual General Meeting of the Association, was reported in the December 2025 members newsletter, and placed on the website. A discussion paper will be circulated to members in February 2026 with referendum ballot papers circulated shortly after that. If the application is approved by both members and the Minister it will take effect in 2027.

Roger Matthews
President, NZ Feijoa Growers Association Inc

www.feijoa.org.nz



The planar horizontal 2D canopy orchard system



A FOPS (Future Orchard Planting Systems) pipfruit canopy

Table 1: Demands of pipfruit canopy systems over time

Orchard husbandry task	Tall Spindle	2D	FOPS (multi-leader)
Tree training	Minimal – some training in the first one to two years to establish calm lower branches	Consistent – tree training occurs for much of the tree’s life, setting the formal horizontal structure	Intensive up-front – FOPS requires significant tree manipulation in the first one to two years to set the tree’s structure. From there the tree training requirement reduces year by year
Pruning	Requires a trained eye. No two cuts are the same. Without good supervision there is a high margin for error	Repetitive, with many similar cuts from top to bottom of the tree	Repetitive, many small, physiologically sound cuts maintaining the open light wells and structure of the tree
Thinning	Complex tree structure creates difficulty and higher risk of misses	Accessible and visible, allowing clear crop loading instructions	Accessible and visible, allowing clear crop loading instructions
Harvest	More frequent movements accommodating the tree’s 3D structure, requiring skilled labour	Planar nature creates a visible picking environment. With high light it tends to bring larger first and second picks	Planar nature creates a visible picking environment. With high light it tends to bring larger first and second picks

Branch replacement in Tall Spindle needs constant effort and good light, but can be achieved if done well. Maintaining young wood is a must in these canopies to keep their light distribution up. However, each system can get far too ‘bushy’ easily when mismanaged.

Cost

Beyond the three ‘P’s, cost control is a major determinant of profitability. Although fruit growing is inherently expensive, the greatest losses often arise from under-investment at critical moments, resulting in reduced production or pack-out. Understanding the long-term training and management demands of each canopy system allows growers to capture system-specific advantages more effectively.

When going into a horticultural development we need to understand the demand of different canopy systems over time. We need to acknowledge that more precise systems such as 2D and FOPS require more up-front tree training costs, but in the same breath realise that the work (done right) will be worth it with the gains in yield and quality received at the back end. We need to understand the demands of each system over time to allow them to achieve their advantages.

Table 2: Influence of early yield accumulation on a 15-year Internal Rate of Return

First crop timing in Tall Spindle	15-year Internal Rate of Return
Cropping year 2	12.2 percent
Cropping year 3	8.5 percent

LONG-TERM PERFORMANCE IS TYPICALLY STRONGEST IN BLOCKS THAT CONSISTENTLY EXECUTE THREE CORE PRODUCTION DRIVERS:



EARLY YIELD ACCUMULATION



FILLING THE SPACE



REDUCING VARIABILITY

WHAT IS THE SYSTEM FOR YOU?

Choosing the optimal canopy system is a strategic decision shaped by business structure, labour capability and management style. Growers often gravitate toward systems that align naturally with their preferred operational approach. Examples include:



The Specialist

A grower with long-standing success in Tall Spindle. Their experience, confidence in training staff and proven results mean changing systems offers little advantage when the current approach consistently performs.



The Early Adopter

A grower who embraced FOPS at scale and found it naturally aligned with their team's skills and workflow, resulting in significantly higher yields compared with their previous Tall Spindle plantings.



The Innovator

A highly consistent 2D grower who has established a uniform orchard structure across varieties, creating predictable management rules and operational efficiency.

Internal Rate of Return

Internal Rate of Return (IRR) provides a robust measure of the long-term financial performance of orchard systems. It calculates the discount rate at which the Net Present Value of all cash flows – both costs and returns – equals zero. As orchard investments span many years, IRR is an effective tool for assessing lifetime profitability rather than performance in any single season.

The success of a block of trees needs to be judged over its lifetime, not just in any one particular production year. Any block of apple trees can look and be phenomenal at year 5, but the real question is, what is the cumulative yield you have achieved, or what will that system at that spacing look like and how will it perform at year 12?

Yield accumulation has one of the greatest influences on IRR. Getting a good tree out of the nursery is the first big win, but by creating early yield, watch the IRR number climb. Table 2 shows a good example of the impact on the IRR when you delay cropping for one year due to factors such as poor nursery trees or cutting canopy back unnecessarily – a drop from an IRR of 12.2 percent to 8.5 percent over 15 years.

Conclusion

Apple trees are remarkable in that you can grow them in multiple ways provided you have the physiological knowledge to get the most out of them. A common theme across each of the canopy systems mentioned is that they are narrow. It is important for growers to continue to strive for a narrow canopy not only for light distribution but for the possibility of automation advancements.

“

Realising what works for you and your business structure requires thought and experiment

When aligning yourself to a canopy system you quite often do just that. Growers with multiple canopy systems tend to find their pros and cons and favour one system over the other. Realising what works for you and your business structure requires thought and experiment. At the end of the day, you want the system that optimises the three 'P's with cost control for you and your business. Luckily here in New Zealand we are an innovative industry with the best people growing to the best of their ability on multiple systems, so go take a good look around. ●



India's rapidly developing middle class and supermarket infrastructure suggests potential for New Zealand premium apples.
Photo courtesy of NZ Apples and Pears

TRADING OUR HIGH-VALUE KNOWHOW

If the India–New Zealand trade deal makes it through Parliament and enters into force later this year, it will mark historic breakthroughs in apple and kiwifruit market access. It will also herald in a “new generation trade agreement” leveraging New Zealand’s technical knowhow to support our partners’ rural development.

John Gauldie

New Zealand’s world-leading horticulture knowhow has been recognised in the India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which locks in economic cooperation and technical assistance in areas of Indian interest.

Concluded in December, the deal demonstrates that New Zealand, despite its small domestic market, can effectively leverage its investments in orchard systems, technology and education to gain preferential market access.

India’s Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal called it a new generation trade agreement built on tariffs, agricultural productivity, investment and talent with complementarity at its core.

The deal hasn’t been universally celebrated by New Zealand’s primary industries. However, if it

becomes legislation, it will see New Zealand become the first country in the world to gain preferential apple access in any Indian trade agreement.

India has been extremely protective of its apple sector historically. Every other country faces 50 percent tariffs – even Australia after its 2022 Australia-India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA), which specifically excludes apples.

Big win for premium apples

The milestone India-New Zealand FTA opens the door for greater access to India’s premium apple market, catering to a rapidly expanding middle class (currently estimated at 435 million, projected to grow to 715 million by 2031 and more than 1 billion by 2047).

OTHER INDIA-NEW ZEALAND FTA PROVISIONS

Streamlined SPS

The agreement should streamline Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) standards. It promotes faster clearance, paperless trade and self-declaration.

Organics recognition

An interim organics mutual recognition arrangement has been agreed as a transitional measure until such time that a full assessment of each other's organic technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures can be made.

Investment assistance

The agreement could encourage New Zealand investment in Indian horticulture. India will establish a bespoke 'New Zealand Investment Desk' to assist New Zealand investors with issues that may arise across the investment lifecycle.

Duty-free imports from India

New Zealand will eliminate all tariffs on all Indian imports from day one. However, tariffs are already very low. New Zealand imports more than \$37 million annually in horticulture products from India (and rapidly growing - up 300 percent in the last decade). Imports include frozen vegetables, dried onions, lentils, guavas, mangos, jams and peanut butter, gherkins and pickled onions.

Working Holiday in New Zealand

The agreement includes a New Zealand Working Holiday Scheme, with up to 1000 places for young Indians (18 to 30 years old).



KEY FACTS INDIA-NEW ZEALAND FTA

- New Zealand becomes first country to **gain preferential apple access to India**
- Apple tariffs halve to **25% on quotas up to 45,000 tonnes**
- Kiwifruit gains **duty-free access on 15,000 tonnes**
- **Sharing New Zealand technical knowhow** built into trade deal

Tariffs reduced on kiwifruit

In another first for India, New Zealand kiwifruit growers will see the tariff on exports into India removed entirely on up to 15,000 tonnes per year, with all volume on top of that subject to a reduced tariff of 16.5 percent, down from the current 33 percent.

Zespri's sales into India have been heavily constrained by the tariff which cost \$9 million on \$27 million of sales last season. Zespri sold around 7200 tonnes into India last year.

Many other crops benefit from the deal. Pear access into India received a 50 percent tariff reduction to 16.5 percent phased in over 10 years, with no quota and no export window (Australian pear imports are capped at 3700 tonnes annually).

Cherries and avocados will move to duty-free access over a 10-year period, with persimmons and blueberries potentially following suit after securing phytosanitary access.

Compared to Australian growers, New Zealand growers will be able to export a narrower range of products with reduced or eliminated tariffs - particularly limiting our vegetable exporters. Australia's ECTA provides for the phased elimination of tariffs (from 30 to zero percent) over 6 years (starting in 2022) for avocados, cherries, raspberries, blueberries, blackberries, currants, onions, shallots, leeks, cabbage, lettuce, asparagus, spinach and certain peas and beans.

Nevertheless, wins on apples and kiwifruit are important as they represent our largest markets in India and 95 percent of our current exports to India by value.

India is currently New Zealand's fifth largest market for apples, taking 34,000 tonnes in 2024, costing New Zealand exporters \$30 million in tariffs on \$61 million of sales (FOB).

By comparison, an existing premium apple market, Viet Nam, imported 41,000 tonnes of New Zealand apples in 2025 but with a value of more than \$140 million (FOB), according to Stats NZ data.

The deal includes a quota for New Zealand apples to receive a 50 percent reduction on tariffs (from 50 percent to 25 percent) during the window from 1 April to 31 August on up to 32,500 tonnes in year one, growing in phases to 45,000 tonnes in year six and onwards. The quota also includes a minimum price of USD\$1.25 per kg (CIF). Outside the quota, the current 50 percent tariff will apply.

New Zealand's end of the bargain

The Government has not released the exact mechanisms that will drive the "Agricultural Productivity Partnership" between New Zealand and India's horticulture sectors. However, unlike other rural development initiatives such as New Zealand Onions Allium Cooperation Project with Indonesia and the VietFruit Project with Viet Nam, it appears that the New Zealand-India FTA builds collaboration directly into the trading agreement.

The Kiwifruit Action Plan will be launched as a flagship deliverable under the FTA, with Bioeconomy Science Institute (BSI) and the New Zealand kiwifruit industry working alongside Indian kiwifruit growers in rural communities over five years.

BSI will partner with Indian growers to improve production, quality and supply chain performance. Centres of Excellence or model orchards will be established in key growing regions, demonstrating best practice and providing training tailored to Indian conditions. The programme will also include technical exchanges, with regular visits by New Zealand experts and opportunities for Indian growers and officials to visit New Zealand.

Danielle Adsett, NZ Apples and Pears acting general manager, points to further collaboration between the New Zealand and Indian apple industries, which will see technical experts continue New Zealand's longstanding history of supporting Indian growers with productivity and profitability improvements.

Collaboration between Indian and New Zealand apple growers has been ongoing since the 1990s and the first World Bank Apple Industry Development Project.

"While the speed and efficiency of this FTA has been remarkable, in many ways it has also been a long time for our industry," Danielle notes. "India is widely acknowledged as a long-term partner by our industry - from importer to exporter, researcher to researcher, and grower to grower. Our two countries share many common values and complement each other across the value chain."

Similarly, Zespri and BSI (then Plant & Food Research) have been working closely for several years with the governments of New Zealand and India to improve kiwifruit market access in return for supporting local growers. The work included extensive two-way engagement, visits and

the preparation of a comprehensive scoping study to support delivery of the cooperation.

At the time of writing, no details have been shared on what additional industry investment and commitment would be required in the Agricultural Productivity Partnership agreements with India.

Logistics will remain a constraint on trade.
Photo courtesy of Simon Hegarty



Trade remains challenging

New Zealand Horticulture Export Authority chief executive Simon Hegarty extends the industry's appreciation to Trade Minister Todd McClay and the full New Zealand negotiating team. He says the deal is the result of extremely complex negotiation under testing conditions and notes that the initial bilateral negotiations with India began in 2010 before lapsing in 2019.

Compared to the current trading environment, exports under the new FTA will benefit from smoother trade and lower non-tariff barriers - more on a level playing field with other southern hemisphere supplying countries.

However, Simon also notes that for many sectors the freight and logistics challenges are significant and will continue to be a constraint on trade. ●



NZ Feijoa Growers Association Commodity Levy Rate

The NZ Feijoa Growers Association advises that the rate for the Feijoa commodity levy will remain at 3% of the price of feijoas sold in New Zealand at the first point of sale, or 3% of the fob value for export feijoas, or 3% of the unprocessed value of feijoas if a grower processes the feijoas on their own account. All prices are exclusive of GST.

Under the Commodity Levies (Feijoa) Order 2020 the levy rate for the 2026 year was held unchanged at 3% at the 2025 Annual General Meeting of the Association.

Roger Matthews
President, NZ Feijoa Growers Association Inc

www.feijoa.org.nz



Summerfruit NZ teamed up with Hawke's Bay-based creative agency FizzyPop for a new consumer campaign tapping into the excitement of Kiwi summers

FRESH APPROACH NEEDED FOR **PRODUCE** MARKETING

*New Zealand horticulture exports are on the rise, but the domestic market for fresh produce is tough despite the great value for money on offer.
Is better marketing part of the answer?*

Niko Kloeten

Awards aren't always the best measure of marketing success, but the YouTube NZ Marketing Awards 2025 still told an interesting story for New Zealand's fresh produce sector.

Eighteen food and beverage brands were among the finalists, but fruit and vegetable growers were nowhere to be seen.

Growers aren't ringing the alarm bells over their failure to get nominated for the YouTube NZ Marketing Awards, but industry figures say a new approach is needed to lift fresh produce consumption in New Zealand and grow the domestic market.

Convenience is key

Retail consultant Tristan Kitchener, an international grocery sector expert, says price isn't the only lever for boosting consumption.

"As affordability pressures increase, consumers have become more value-conscious, with value defined as a trade-off between price and quality," he says.

"Within that equation, convenience plays a critical role since it allows brands to justify a higher price by delivering greater overall value. For modern shoppers, convenience is no longer a nice-to-have, but a key driver of choice."



Tristan, who spoke at the Horticulture Conference 2025, says Kiwi consumers are price sensitive: on average they make around 60 percent of their purchases on promotion, compared to 40 percent in Australia.

“**We’re creating nostalgia rather than tying into historic nostalgia**”

However, he says Kiwi growers also need to look at what’s going on in the United Kingdom, which he describes as “a canary in the coalmine” for Australian and New Zealand supermarket trends. The major retailers, such as Tesco and Sainsbury’s, have reinvigorated heavily commoditised categories, including vegetables.

“When you look at core veges – such as onions, beetroot and potatoes – the retailers have done an amazing job at increasing consumption by increasing usage occasions, through introducing convenient, easy-to-use formats across both frozen and fresh formats,” he says.

“They’ve value added and tapped into emerging trends, such as air fryers – now being provided for free by the UK government to pensioners to combat rising energy prices.

“At any particular stage of the year, I could find you a seasonal supply that would generate exceptionally good value” - United Fresh president Jerry Prendergast

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New Zealand is well suited to 'hard discounters' but young consumers are driving demand for semi-prepared or minimally processed vegetables, says Tristan Kitchener

LeaderBrand's general manager sales and marketing Bevan Roach says "The more you know about the food you eat, the more you learn to understand the price of vegetables"

Major brands have also seen the opportunity; McCain have their own air fryer range of all different types of products from sweet potatoes to beetroot to root veges."

The success of Costco - which saw a record 100,000 Kiwis sign up in its first week - shows many New Zealand shoppers still like to buy in bulk to capture savings.

The New Zealand market is well suited to 'hard discounters' retailers, like ALDI and Costco, which use retail formats focused on delivering the lowest possible prices by running a very lean, no-frills business model (fewer products, private label rather than brands, minimal service and lower prices).

But Tristan says there is also a trend - especially among younger consumers - for smaller, more frequent shopping trips and for meals to be made with "components" rather than ingredients, as many are time-poor and increasingly lack basic cooking skills. This is where semi-prepared or minimally processed vegetables can provide a convenient and affordable solution.

"Around 50 percent of consumers don't know what they're having for dinner until 5pm that evening. And a lot of them wouldn't have food in the fridge, which is why there's this trend towards 'little and often'," he says.

"Ironically, we are starting to shop like the wet markets in the east, where consumers shop daily since many don't own fridges. Little and often."

Tristan says another, possibly counterintuitive, trend is that many shoppers are looking to save money by buying smaller portion sizes, rather than trying to save on a per kg basis.

"What we've seen during the cost-of-living crisis that's happening around the world is increased participation and presence of pre-pack products at a smaller pack size, at a higher price point," he says.

A grower himself, Tristan has seen this trend firsthand with his cherries, which he sells to Australian supermarket giant Coles.

"Historically, Coles has always wanted loose, random weight grab bags sold per kg, at \$15-\$18 per kg. This year we also supplied 300g punnets that work out to \$25 per kg, and consumer support has been strong. Why? Consumers don't want the risk of bill shock when they go to the till and realise they've inadvertently over-spent, they'd rather purchase a smaller pre-pack with price certainty."

Aussies seek vege boost

New Zealand growers are also looking across the Tasman, where the industry has launched the 'Plus One Serve by 2030' initiative to try to boost vegetable consumption by an extra 75g serve of vegetables each day by 2030.

The cost-of-living crisis has affected Kiwi food consumption habits, with staples like meat, dairy and eggs becoming more expensive, but outside of seasonal variation and weather events (not to mention Cyclone Gabrielle), fresh produce prices have not kept pace with inflation.

United Fresh president Jerry Prendergast says fresh New Zealand-grown fruit and vegetables are still affordable, if they are purchased at the right time of year.

“People’s knowledge about what is in season negates the cost. I can reassure the public of New Zealand that at any particular stage of the year, I could find you a seasonal supply that would generate exceptionally good value.”

Jerry says the 5+ A Day campaign has been hugely successful in educating Kiwis on the health benefits of fruits and vegetables, including its work in schools.

“As far as promotions are concerned, I think our supermarket chains do an exceptionally good job of promoting a range of fresh fruit and produce. However, there’s another step that’s required as an industry,” he says.

“Kiwis know they need to eat more fruit and produce for good health. What they need is inspiration. They need to be inspired to purchase and they need to know it’s going to taste good.

“That is why the 5+ A Day Charitable Trust were early adopters of social media, where we can cost effectively provide fresh inspiration through new recipes and serving suggestions to Kiwi families. What is needed is greater funding and more collaboration of all industry stakeholders to ensure cut through.”

The industry’s marketing budgets are dwarfed by the budgets that are available for products that are high in salts, fats and sugars, Jerry says.

“**Around 50 percent of consumers don’t know what they’re having for dinner until 5pm that evening**

“We drive down the motorway and I see a billboard for Kentucky Fried Chicken and it’s the latest Double Down or lunchbox pack and you’ll open social media and the same promotions there. But they have a budget that is significant and, as a result, are influencing the consumers. The produce industry doesn’t have that budget.”

In terms of marketing individual products, Jerry says taste and appearance are huge factors for consumers, while the right packaging can also help.

“If you’ve got a display of mandarins, some people will buy a bag, but they wouldn’t have bought a kilo’s worth of mandarins if the bag wasn’t there. And then once you’ve got the mandarins, you tend to consume more.”



Cabbage

Fresh market/process for winter/spring harvest.

Robusta: Dense, short core, nice deep green colour, good weight. Good dis-ease tolerance and field holding. 4.5-5kg.

Midori Plus: Deep drumhead, consistent shape, excellent internal quality and field holding. Versatile. 4kg.

Nisu: smaller 2-3kg. Early maturity. Medium drumhead. Good eating. Holds well.

Early Onion Range

Red Mars (new) 7 days earlier maturing than market standard **Red Planet** and **Red Saturn** 7 days later. Sow from mid April to mid/late May.

Red Orbit: sow late May to mid June. All have excellent shape and colour.

Dev: excellent early brown. Deeper in shape and early maturing. Possibly the best mid-late April sown brown in the market.

Spinach

Grow yield with the best spinach:

Sioux: versatile, summer/shoulder, semi savoy, Pe:1-15,17,19,20.

Onyx: spring & autumn, semi savoy, Pe:1-20.

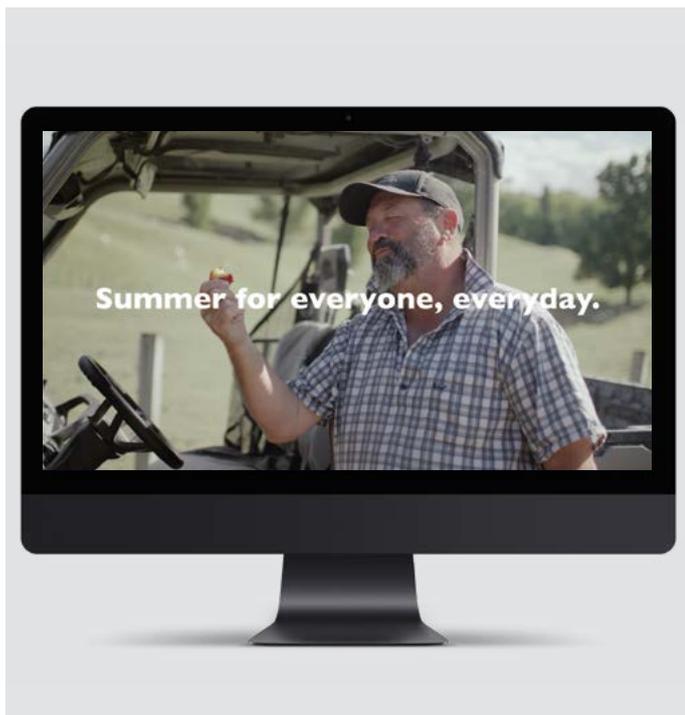
Skarne: autumn/winter, semi savoy, Pe:1-19.

PV 1582: winter, Oriental, Pe:1-15,17,19.

Tectonite: autumn/winter, Oriental, erect habit, holds well. Very fast. Stunning. Pe:1-18,20.



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Summerfruit NZ's campaign taps into the excitement of Kiwi summers

In the bag

One company embracing the trend towards convenience is LeaderBrand. It's one of the largest growers in the country with farms in Gisborne, Pukekohe and Chertsey (near Ashburton).

LeaderBrand recently added a new Mexican salad and rocket slaw to its range of bagged salads. The company's general manager sales and marketing Bevan Roach says this type of convenience packaging helps drive vegetable consumption.

"Salad bags changed the game by making mealtime healthy choices so much easier - it's as simple as opening a bag.

"Let's face it, we're all busy - quick, easy meals that don't sacrifice nutrition are lifesavers. Bagged salads are a cost-effective and convenient way to elevate your meals without all the prep."

Bevan says LeaderBrand's social media and communications not only cover the basics of vegetables and their health benefits, they also share behind-the-scenes stories.

"Provenance teaches people about the journey of food from the farm to the plate, the effort that goes into producing food and the impact of weather," he says.

"The more you know about the food you eat, the more you learn to understand the price of vegetables, the challenges. And why eating seasonally means you are getting the best nutrition benefits and the best price."

Bevan says people eat with their eyes, so "inspiration is everything" in LeaderBrand's marketing.

"We collaborate with talented chefs to craft delicious meals using our products and share them with both our social media audience and their own. We also try to highlight the benefits of eating vegetables."

Making summer(fruit) fun

Health benefits are a key part of vegetable promotion, but for stonefruit it's all about emotion.

Summerfruit NZ has teamed up with Hawke's Bay-based creative agency FizzyPop for a new consumer awareness campaign that taps into the excitement of Kiwi summers.

The 2025 campaign built on their previous work, but this time around it's a bit more "real and gritty," says FizzyPop director Tom Young.

"We're creating nostalgia rather than tying into historic nostalgia. It's amplifying the grower messages at the same time as that feel-good message: it's summerfruit every day.

"So whether you're at classic Kiwi summer events or just out on the beach, it's about enjoying summerfruit there - as well as just the fact that summerfruit is phenomenal.

"It's a real classic FMCG [Fast-Moving Consumer Goods] push: it tastes bloody delicious, go and buy some. There's an obvious emotional tie-in."

Summerfruit NZ chief executive Dean Smith says they enjoy working with a regional agency that's close to growers.

"That's really important to us in terms of proximity, content and authenticity as well. A challenge for this awareness and education campaign is taking Charlotte [the star of Summerfruit NZ's socials] on the road," he says.

“
Kiwis know they need to eat more fruit and produce for good health. What they need is inspiration

"We obviously need to be very cognisant of the fact that our members are spread geographically in the North Island and the south, so that content that we are developing has a really nice regional spread to it as well."

Beyond the campaign, Dean says the summerfruit industry's biggest opportunity is also its biggest challenge.

"It's the fact that we are a seasonal product that has inherent variability because of the way that we we're at the mercy of what nature gives us, climatically from a season-to-season perspective."

However, Smith says there's been huge strides made in developing consistency into the product offering.

"I was talking with one of the category managers recently at one of the big supermarket chains, and he was commenting on the improvement that's been made within the industry in recent times. So that's encouraging, but certainly the job's not done." ●

A SIMPLE IDEA WITH **NATION-SHAPING** **POTENTIAL**



While New Zealand grows some of the best vegetables in the world, New Zealanders do not eat enough of them. This contradiction sits at the heart of worsening health and wellbeing statistics, rising health costs and a food production and distribution system that is not as robust as it could be – let alone needs to be.

Antony Heywood : Vegetables NZ chief executive

University of Otago research shows that lifting average daily vegetable intake by just one serve (75g) could save New Zealand around \$835 million in lifetime health costs for the cohort of the adult population that was modelled. The biggest gains occur among people aged 25 to 64, which is precisely the cohort carrying the greatest burden of preventable, diet-related disease.

Yet current consumption tells a worrying story. Fewer than one in ten New Zealanders eat the recommended five or more serves of vegetables a day. Among children, the figure is even lower. While many people believe they eat well, international evidence shows that vegetable intake is usually overstated, once food waste is accounted for. In other words, the baseline is likely to be worse than we think.

Globally, the pressure on food systems is intensifying. The EAT-Lancet Commission has highlighted the environmental cost of current diets, with food production responsible for around a third of global greenhouse gas emissions and a third of all food wasted.

Add One More Vegetable

Vegetables, however, sit on the right side of the equation. They are nutrient-dense, low-emission and capable of delivering more health per hectare than most food groups.

However, people will only eat more vegetables – and be healthier – if they understand their value, and know how to store and prepare them. What's needed in New Zealand is a national food strategy that improves the viability and resilience of the country's food production and distribution system, while increasing food literacy so people understand the value of healthy food and know how to store and cook it.



Vegetables NZ's initiative aims to increase vegetable consumption

Vegetables NZ's Add One More Vegetable initiative could be the starting point for a national food strategy that aligns government and the health and education sectors with industries that produce and distribute healthy food.

Add One More Vegetable is not a silver bullet but is a credible place to start. If New Zealand is serious about improving health outcomes and strengthening food security, vegetables must move from the margins of policy to the centre. Government and industry working together to achieve one more serve of vegetables a day could be the catalyst that get us to a healthier New Zealand.

FROM IDEAS TO ACTION: RESEARCH FOCUS FOR 2026

Research and development (R&D) plays a vital role in supporting potato growers to farm productively, sustainably and with confidence. By focusing on real on-farm challenges, R&D helps growers improve yields and quality, manage pests and diseases, reduce risk and adapt to changing environmental and market conditions.

Paula Lleras : Potatoes New Zealand research & development project manager

This year, we marked the retirement of Iain Kirkwood, who has made an outstanding contribution to Potatoes New Zealand and the wider horticulture industry. Over the course of his career, Iain's work has had a meaningful and lasting influence on the sector. His departure opened the door for me to step into the role of R&D project manager, transitioning from my previous position as R&D assistant. I value the experience and knowledge gained from working alongside Iain and am keen to carry this forward as I take on new responsibilities and look ahead to the challenges and opportunities of this role.

In 2025, Potatoes New Zealand completed a consumer research project across fresh, processed and crisp categories. The research was followed by stakeholder and grower workshops to identify activities that could help increase consumption and grow the category. This project provided valuable insights into how we can move forward as an industry, particularly in relation to more forward-looking, horizon-type projects.

We are now working on a draft Potatoes New Zealand Research and Development strategy, which is still in its early stages. The intention is to widen the focus beyond pests and diseases to include areas such as on-farm profitability, waste-stream management and other potential projects. The aim is to identify the critical issues facing the industry now, as well as those that will be important in the future. Potatoes New Zealand will be engaging with our growers to identify and prioritise the main challenges and opportunities.

The goal is to listen, enable and promote better outcomes for the New Zealand potato industry by driving research that transforms science into practical solutions for growers.

As we move into 2026, collaboration across the whole industry is becoming increasingly important. The Ministry for Primary Industries is driving this message, aiming to engage and enable change for vegetables. Work on a wider Vegetables Group R&D strategy is underway as we collaborate across projects.

Potatoes New Zealand has been working across the vegetable sector, collaborating in joint R&D projects, mostly around the Pukekohe Research and Demonstration Farm. The Paul Horne Tour in February 2025 and the Zebra Chip Seminar in June 2025 are examples of these joint activities, delivering insights into Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategies and opportunities for improved pest management, as well as the latest research updates on Tomato Potato Psyllid (TPP) and *Candidatus Liberibacter solanacearum* (CLso), offering growers practical management guidance.



The goal is to listen, enable and promote better outcomes

Current projects at Te Ahikawariki (the Vegetable Industry Centre of Excellence) include:

- The Sustainable Vegetable Systems (SVS) in potatoes, which demonstrates the modelling of the SVS Tool and how it can be used to support grower decision-making
- The mound integrity trial for control of Potato Tuber Moth (PTM), which investigates different management practices to reduce soil cracking and prevent PTM infestation
- Ground-truthing of BioScout spore units to assess how this AI-driven spore monitor can be used in vegetable crops to combat pests and diseases.

Smart insect trapping work delivered in sweetcorn at Te Ahikawariki last season provided acceptable accuracy levels (87 percent), allowing for a significant decrease in data delivery times and faster decision-making. These AI-driven insect traps are now being evaluated against conventional pheromone traps used to monitor PTM. The objective is to assess the performance and effectiveness of smart traps compared to traditional monitoring tools.



Paula Lleras pictured at a Sustainable Vegetable Systems Tool demo site in Pukekohe with Iain Kirkwood before his retirement last year



Visiting Australian IPM expert Paul Horne at a presentation for growers in Pukekohe

We are about to start an Early Blight research project to evaluate alternative crop protection products and assess the effectiveness of crop protection programmes that utilise these options.

Powdery Scab remains a persistent challenge in the potato industry, so we are continuing field trials of a compound (copper gluconate) that stimulates premature germination of resting spores in the absence of a host, reducing the pathogen's presence in soil over time and disrupting zoospore migration, preventing them from locating their potato host roots.

TPP and Liberibacter (CLso) management is another priority. Through the Canterbury Potato Liberibacter Initiative, many projects have been delivered and our knowledge has grown. However, we still have not found a cost-effective solution to TPP and CLso in potato crops. An Integrated Pest Management trial is currently underway to establish a ten-hectare commercial production site in Canterbury, based on a strict IPM approach. A field day to share insights

and see IPM in action is scheduled for mid-January. We also continue to talk to TomatoesNZ and other affected crops about TPP management techniques and tools.

As we look ahead, our commitment remains clear: to deliver research that empowers growers with practical, science-based solutions. The challenges facing our industry are complex, but through collaboration, innovation and a shared vision, we can build a resilient and sustainable future for New Zealand potatoes. We invite all stakeholders to engage with Potatoes New Zealand, share ideas and be part of shaping the next chapter of the industry's success. ●

If you have any questions, please contact Potatoes New Zealand.

☎ Phone: 0800 399 674

✉ Email: info@potatoesnz.co.nz

🌐 Website: www.potatoesnz.co.nz

PEPMV DEREGULATED



Just before Christmas, the exotic pathogen Pepino Mosaic Virus (PepMV) was deregulated under the legislative process. That means that PepMV is no longer listed as an unwanted and notifiable organism in New Zealand. This is good news for growers who have been growing with this disease.

Dinah Cohen : TomatoesNZ general manager

A brief look back

PepMV was first detected in a greenhouse in New Zealand in April 2021. As it was an 'unwanted organism' the Government Industry Agreement on Biosecurity (GIA) partners were called to meet to decide how to respond to this detection. Testing at other properties took place and it quickly became clear that PepMV would be extremely expensive and challenging to eradicate, so the GIA partners decided to try instead to limit its spread by having this pathogen managed by industry.

Growers who had PepMV in their greenhouses were allowed to continue trading their tomatoes with a permission form issued by the Ministry for Primary Industries, but waste plant material had restricted movement - it needed to be left on-site or go to landfill (initially this was directed to deep landfill but was quickly changed to 'just' landfill). While tomatoes could still be traded, the extra hygiene costs to limit the spread within greenhouses, and the costs to dispose of the waste, were an added burden to growers.

? Why the change in status?

TomatoesNZ has been monitoring both the spread of PepMV and the effects that it is having on tomatoes by way of symptoms and crop losses for growers. The spread has been hard to fully understand as growers have been reluctant to bring plant material forward for testing, despite no plants ever having been pulled out due to a response directive. We are hoping that now PepMV is no longer classed as an unwanted and notifiable organism, that more growers will come forward with issues that they have been experiencing so that we can build a resource of ways to manage this unpredictable pathogen, which can be shared with all growers who require it.

Ultimately though, TomatoesNZ would like to attempt to register a vaccine product that is available in all other countries in the world where PepMV is an issue. This is

a multi-year and multi-project process which we started towards the end of 2023. Having the regulations removed from PepMV is a significant milestone on this journey.

“

We anticipate that this will form an important part of the work programme for TomatoesNZ in the coming years

Importantly for growers, imported seeds will still be tested for PepMV, despite the removal of the regulations.

? How does the vaccine work?

The vaccine contains a mild strain of the same variation of PepMV that is present in New Zealand - the Chilean strain, known as CH2. When applied to a young seedling, any virus that is then present, perhaps in the greenhouse environment, can infect the plant but enables the plant to then grow through the symptoms to be largely, if not completely, symptom free. This would be a huge tool in the box for growers who have not been able to get rid of the virus from their greenhouses for many years. We have heard reports from the last winter of up to 50 percent crop loss or reduction of quality due to extended periods of poor light levels. Seed companies are not interested in breeding resistant varieties because they are not needed anywhere apart from New Zealand!

We anticipate that this will form an important part of the work programme for TomatoesNZ in the coming years while we work through the Environmental Protection Authority 'denewing' application, which, if successful, will be followed by the Agricultural Compounds & Veterinary Medicines (ACVM) and Hazardous Substances and New Organisms (HSNO) applications.



Pepino Mosaic Virus is no longer listed as an unwanted and notifiable organism in New Zealand

Promotional campaigns

February is often the hardest month financially for growers - consumers are facing the expenses of holidays and Christmas, and retailers are doing whatever they can to get them spending money.

But if growing conditions have been favourable, there is often an over-supply of all fresh produce, cue retail specials and often the lowest returns for growers of the whole year. We are ramping up our promotional campaigns this year to have multiple streams of advertising, including on social media and in store.

Next month, following the first board meeting of the year, I will look at what other projects are on the work programme for 2026! ●

If you have any questions about anything fresh tomato related, please don't hesitate to contact me:

✉ dinah.cohen@tomatoesnz.co.nz

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THE 'INVISIBLE THIEF': STOPPING SPOILAGE IN THE COOLSTORE

For New Zealand's horticulture sector, the battle doesn't end at harvest. Every year, significant profit is lost in the coolstore due to two invisible enemies: **Ethylene gas** and **airborne pathogens**.

While temperature control is standard, air quality is often the 'missing link.' One batch of early-ripening fruit releases ethylene, triggering the rest of the fruit to soften and rot. It is an invisible chain reaction that eats into your export margins.

The Safe Solution: Bio Turbo

Traditional ozone generators can be hazardous to staff and corrosive to equipment. Venting cold air is expensive.

Distributed locally by **Indsol Ltd**, the **Bio Turbo** offers a smarter way. It effectively removes ethylene and 99.9 percent of airborne bacteria (like *Botrytis* and *Penicillium*) - but with a crucial difference.

How it works:

- Safety First:** The Bio Turbo uses ozone to destroy pathogens, but the reaction happens entirely inside a sealed chamber.
- Zero Residue:** A patented catalyst destroys the ozone before the air leaves the unit.
- Result:** Only fresh, clean air is returned to the room. **No ozone is ever released into the storage environment**, making it 100 percent safe for staff and sensitive produce.

Why NZ Growers Need It

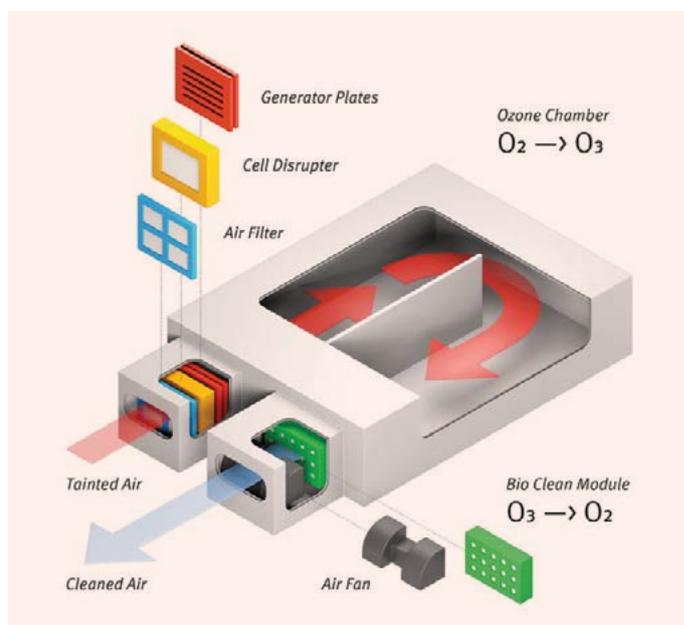
Whether you are storing Bay of Plenty kiwifruit, Hawke's Bay apples, or delicate floral exports, the Bio Turbo is your insurance policy against premature ripening and cross-contamination resulting in spoilage and lost shelf life.

It is scalable for any size facility - from the **Bio Turbo 100i** for transport trucks to the **Bio Turbo 6000** for large commercial packhouses.

Indsol pride themselves on guiding the customer to the right solution: "We don't just sell a box; we provide the engineering support to size the unit correctly for your specific crop and room size."



Bio Turbo unit installed on a coolstore ceiling



Bio Turbo unit close up

Indsol Ltd offers a comprehensive range of processing and post-harvest solutions. Whether a single machine or a complete line, the team of qualified and experienced engineers will provide a turnkey solution together with in-house consultation, design and engineering support. ●

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For more information visit www.indsol.co.nz





HPL REZONING AND SPECIAL AGRICULTURAL AREAS



In December 2025, the Government published changes to the National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land (NPS-HPL). These changes are now operative, as of 15 January 2026.

What's changed?

LUC 3 land can now be rezoned urban without needing to meet the tests of the NPS-HPL. This rezoning could happen through private urban rezoning proposals or council-led plan changes. However, Central Government still has a 'Plan Stop' in effect, so these plan changes would need the approval of the Minister to proceed. Rural lifestyle rezoning is still restricted on LUC 3 with the tests in the NPS-HPL. Councils now have more time to map their highly productive land. It is reasonable to expect that this won't happen until the new resource management system is in place.

What hasn't changed?

The Government decided not to introduce Special Agricultural Areas (SAA) for now. SAA were a proposal put up for discussion in July 2025 to designate all of the land in key horticultural areas as highly productive land, including LUC 3. The Government is still considering whether SAA might be a good idea under the new resource management system. This will come up again for discussion when the Government consults on national direction under the new system.

RSE ACCOMMODATION COSTS



Immigration New Zealand has announced the final Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) accommodation cost methodology. From April, accommodation costs and conditions for RSE workers will better reflect both employer and worker obligations. It provides transparency on calculations, which HortNZ has strongly advocated for since the accommodation freeze in 2019. This is critical for growers to enable certainty and investment decisions.

CHLORTHAL-DIMETHYL PRODUCTS BANNED



The Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) has banned the use of chlorthal-dimethyl, effective 18 December 2025. Chlorthal-dimethyl is an herbicide (trade names include Dacthal, Deramot Xtra, Chlor-Back 75WG). Onions, shallots and garlic growers have reduced chlorthal-dimethyl use in recent years and have been transitioning to alternative crop protection tools and methods to manage wireweed. All stocks of chlorthal-dimethyl-containing products must be disposed of safely by 18 June.

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