NZGROWER & ORCHARDIST®

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HORTICULTURE NEW ZEALAND

Kiwifruit stronger than ever

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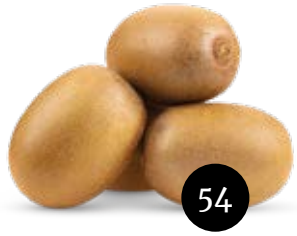

OCTOBER 2025

People and community

Sector resilience

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A regular advertorial section of new products and services. This publication does not endorse the products or services featured here.

On the cover:

Grower Nathan Flowerday is chair of Zespri. See page 16. Photo by Carly Gibbs

NZGROWER & ORCHARDIST

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INSPIRED AND POSITIVE ABOUT THE FUTURE

Every year, the Young Grower of the Year Final is a highlight. Bright, aspiring leaders from across the country come together, showing us that while the competition matters, it's the learning and support they give each other that truly stands out.

Bernadine Guilleux: HortNZ chair

By lifting the bar year after year, these young growers show how collaboration strengthens not only the individual but also the collective.

It's inspiring, and well worth our attention. This year it was a real privilege to be in Christchurch and present the national title to Phoebe Scherer, our 2025 Young Grower of the Year.

Phoebe, the Bay of Plenty regional champion and a technical lab manager for Apata in Tauranga, really impressed the judges with her knowledge, capability and calm determination across two demanding days of challenges at Lincoln University.

She also claimed the Best Technical Award, which reflected her strengths and passion for the science that underpins our sector.

The calibre of competition was outstanding.

Beyond the technical skill and industry knowledge, the camaraderie nurtured between the finalists is likely to continue long into the future.

For me personally, it confirms why we support this – to create opportunities for young people to thrive and to maintain those strong foundations upon which each generation moves horticulture forward. Strong relationships across the country and sectors are of benefit to us all.

The Young Grower competition is also a celebration of the talent we have and a reminder of the enormous opportunities ahead.

From soil science and technology through to crop management, machinery, quality assurance and marketing, horticulture offers a diverse range of rewarding careers.

Highlighting these opportunities is vital if we are to attract and retain the people we need to keep our sector strong.

At HortNZ, we see Young Grower as a cornerstone of the Aotearoa Horticulture Action Plan (AHAP). This plan sets out our ambitious goal of doubling the farmgate value of horticultural production by 2035.

Achieving this target will require many more highly skilled and motivated people like Phoebe and her fellow finalists – young growers who see horticulture not only as a job but as a career.

The competition helps build leadership capability, showcases the depth of our talent and tells the positive story of horticulture to the wider public.

Young Grower is an investment in our young people and in the future of our industry.

If this year's finalists are anything to go by, the future of horticulture is in very good hands. ●

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Growing Together

We are pleased to announce that, effective 1st July 2025, HM.Clause Pacific has taken over the distribution of **Hazera Seeds** in New Zealand. Since 2014, HM.Clause Pacific has proudly partnered with Hazera in Australia, successfully managing and developing their full product portfolio. With our deep understanding of Hazera's portfolio, we are incredibly enthusiastic about extending this partnership into New Zealand with our partner distributors - Seed & Field Supplies Ltd thus further strengthening the **Hazera** brand across the region.

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CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE IN MĀORI HORTICULTURE

One of the things I love most about our sector is the way it celebrates excellence. Across New Zealand, growers are proud to showcase innovation, leadership and the next generation of talent.

Kate Scott : HortNZ chief executive

We saw that most recently at the 2025 Horticulture Industry Awards (see page 56) at the New Zealand Horticulture conference in Wellington.

Few awards capture this spirit more strongly than the Ahuwhenua Trophy and its associated Young Māori Grower Award.

The Ahuwhenua Trophy has a proud history of recognising excellence in Māori agribusiness.

Each year, it alternates across dairy, sheep and beef and horticulture. In 2026, the focus returns to horticulture, creating an exciting opportunity for Māori enterprises – from trusts and incorporations to individual operators – to demonstrate the quality, sustainability and innovation at the heart of their businesses.

For horticulture, this competition was first introduced in 2020 and has already shone a light on some outstanding operations.

> **Research shows more Māori land is being converted to horticulture, reflecting both the opportunities in our sector and the strength of Māori enterprises**

The next competition cycle will culminate in field days and judging in 2026, with entries closing on 3 December 2025.

I encourage Māori horticultural businesses to consider entering. It is not only about recognition, but also a chance to share your story, inspire others and strengthen the reputation of Māori horticulture nationally and globally.

Alongside the trophy sits the Ahuwhenua Young Māori Grower Award, first introduced in 2012 for those in the wider agricultural sector and extended to horticulture in 2020.

The 2026 award is now open to young Māori currently working in horticulture. This competition recognises up-and-coming leaders and gives them the chance to learn, grow and connect with the very best in our industry.

I urge young Māori working in horticulture to step forward and enter. It is a fantastic personal development opportunity, and one that can open doors for future leadership.

Employers and training providers also have an important role to play by identifying talent in their organisations and supporting them through the entry process. Entries close on Friday 30 January 2026.

But these awards are more than competitions. They are part of a wider movement to ensure Māori are strong in horticulture, a key pillar of the Aotearoa Horticulture Action Plan (AHAP).

AHAP sets out our roadmap to doubling the farmgate value of horticultural production by 2035. One of its early priorities is to celebrate excellence in Māori horticulture through the Ahuwhenua Trophy, while also supporting the transition of young Māori from Young Grower competitions into the Ahuwhenua Young Māori Grower Award.

This builds a pipeline of future leaders and ensures we continue to share Māori-led stories of success and innovation.

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AHUWHENUA TROPHY
EXCELLENCE IN MĀORI HORTICULTURE AWARD 2026

AHUWHENUA YOUNG MĀORI GROWER AWARD 2026

Research shows more Māori land is being converted to horticulture, reflecting both the opportunities in our sector and the strength of Māori enterprises.

By celebrating this through competitions like the Ahuwhenua Trophy and Young Māori Grower Award, we not only recognise what is being achieved today but also inspire the next generation to carry that momentum forward.

We will not achieve the sector's goal of doubling the farmgate value of horticultural production without the talent, innovation and leadership of Māori growers and enterprises.

> **These awards are more than competitions. They are part of a wider movement to ensure Māori are strong in horticulture, a key pillar of the Aotearoa Horticulture Action Plan**

That is why competitions like these matter – they showcase success, build capability and help tell the powerful story of the Māori contribution to horticulture in Aotearoa.

So, whether you are a young Māori grower just starting your career, or part of an established enterprise, I encourage you to get involved.

Enter, support others to enter and help us celebrate the excellence and leadership Māori bring to our sector.

Following Cyclone Gabrielle, Alex has done a lot of work to revive his avocado trees, including foliar feeding and building back up organic matter and microbes in the soil

A KNACK FOR **INNOVATION**

After weathering tough times, multi-crop grower Alex Croasdale-Saunders is working tirelessly to improve orchard performance and bring innovation to the next generation.

Carly Gibbs

Mother Nature can make or break a grower's year in horticulture, and Alex Croasdale-Saunders has felt both her blessings and brutality.

The Tauranga multi-crop grower and operations manager of Pahoia Orchards is candid about the unpredictability of horticulture and how it can impact a grower's mental health.

During Cyclone Gabrielle in 2023, Alex's two-year-old avocado block went a metre underwater, triggering a series of personal battles he had to wade through.

As a young grower, the cyclone was his first serious challenge in horticulture, coinciding with a difficult year for his blueberry and kiwifruit crops as well.

Following the weather bomb that whipped his young Hass trees into "sticks", the 26-year-old relocated to Mount Maunganui to create physical distance from the orchard, achieve balance and spend more time surfing and with friends.

He says short overseas travel stints have also been invaluable, triggering a new growth mindset, and he's now more confident than ever in the sector.

At Pahoia Orchards Alex is constantly working to improve efficiency amongst his three different crops

Avocados: record yield

Alex's avocado block has produced a personal record yield of five tonnes per hectare this season, and while "not high enough yet", it's encouraging after the 2023 flooding.

His avocado trees, now mounded out of the water and coming into maturity, are healthy. He has done a lot of work to revive the trees, including foliar feeding and building back up organic matter and microbes in the soil, through various growing strategies.

"I also do a hard, structured prune a couple of times a year," he shares. "Obviously, the blocks have been through their struggles, so it's just trying to keep the trees low (about 3-5m). No ladders are the goal."

This season, Alex is also buoyed by avocado and kiwifruit returns, and he's pushing the boundaries with his blueberry growing.

Of his three different crop varieties, Alex is most fond of his blueberries, for which he grows the Eureka and Sunrise varieties for global marketer BerryCo as a third-generation grower on his family's land.

Blueberries: niche and stabilising

Blueberries remain a niche market in New Zealand, and Alex says the industry needs to work together to help create more demand.

Apart from last year, he's primarily been the first local grower to put a commercial pick into a packhouse, marking the start of the season, and it's something he's "extremely proud" of.

"I'd say the market is still very much stabilising," he told *NZGrower & Orchardist*. "The returns aren't as high this year, but I'm still confident in it. We were getting $120 a tray returns last year, and this year it's about $60, but that's just because there's more fruit and competition in the markets; these prices were never going to be sustainable long term."

At the time of writing this, the blueberry season was running late due to rain and a lingering cold snap. Alex was predicting 30 to 35 tonnes of berries from his 2ha crop under covered tunnel houses with 9500 plants currently in production.

> **"Overseas travel stints have also been invaluable, triggering a new growth mindset, and he's now more confident than ever in the sector**

He developed the block from a green field when he was 20, adding to an already existing 2.5ha of Hayward kiwifruit on the property.

Later, 1.5ha of avocados (489 Hass trees) were purchased, which Alex redeveloped and added irrigation to in 2021.

Alex Croasdale-Saunders says the blueberry market is still growing, but returns are down with more fruit and more competition

Fusing traditional with tech

Alex is constantly working to improve efficiency, which includes utilising a state-of-the-art irrigation system, Priva, that he can control remotely worldwide.

He was also an early adopter of Coir disc maps to suppress weeds in blueberry plant tubs, which has cut his weeding costs by 75 percent.

Adding to more differences, Alex adjusts the Electrical Conductivity (EC) levels at various times of the year to increase yield and employs foliar feeding at key times to slow or speed up the crop as required, aiming to achieve better yield and size results.

> **Alex is one of the first orchardists to launch an Instagram account and has a reel highlight where he shares his technical tips and general orchard activities**

And it doesn't stop there. He's spent the past year developing an in-house, custom-made blueberry picking trolley, with the assistance of an engineering friend.

Alex predicts that his low-lying, specialised trolley, manned by two pickers per machine, which moves down each side of a row, will enable blueberries to be picked 10-50 percent faster by eliminating the weight on pickers' shoulders.

Little detail can be shared about the prototype yet, as it will require IP rights. However, Alex feels confident in its potential to increase speed and financial margins.

"The idea came about to lower the number of pickers required and help make our harvest team's job just that little bit easier," he says.

At the time of print, he was awaiting the volume of his blueberry orchard to increase to conduct a first trial comparing the kilo rate with regular picking against different blueberry varieties. The initial trial would span three to four picking runs, during which data from three pack outs would be collated.

Alex was inspired to develop the trolley after one of his winter getaways, including a trip to South Africa last year and Australia this year, on invitations from BerryCo.

While in South Africa, he says he started to think, "They have so much scale and cheap labour, how can New Zealand have an edge?"

"The idea behind my trolley is to weather us in a low-return year and try to make blueberries a bit more scalable, because one of the most significant constraints of blueberries right now is labour," he says. "New Zealand is still adjusting to blueberries. The demand is there, but it's a slow, steady growth."

Runs in the family

It's not surprising that Alex has a knack for innovation, given that his father, Steve Saunders, is the co-founder of Robotics Plus, the developer of AI-orchard vehicles, which was acquired by the Japanese giant Yamaha Motor this year.

Steve also founded Pahoia Orchards, is a founder of Mpac and built GroPlus Ltd; and continues to oversee some of Alex's decisions. However, Alex, the youngest of Steve's two children, says, "I've been working hard on creating my own mark in the sector.

"Dad's way and approach to innovation triggered me to do something. It's also in respect to him and everything he's done for us as kids."

Expansion

Alex has goals to expand his operation over the next few years and add more kiwifruit to their portfolio. "Dad gives me targets, and if I achieve them, I can do more, so I'm extremely driven."

He works alongside Pahoia Orchards' 2IC, Darrie Andrews, who looks after the day-to-day operations when Alex is away on any trips.

"Darrie has been a huge help in keeping things moving," he says. "It's also cool to see what we are capable of as a team when one person is working remotely. Often, it's the case of sharing data so we can make informed decisions and reading the weather."

Alex's love of horticulture began with playing in the garden. "I know this sounds funny, he says, "But I tried so hard for years to get an acorn tree to grow from an acorn, and I managed to get it to grow."

He left Katikati College after Year 12 and worked for NZ Native Flora; built blueberry tunnels for Miro (a collective of Māori food producers set up by his father); worked for Eurofins, Farmlands, AvoWorks, part of the Darling Group, and BerryCo nurseries before going full-time at Pahoia Orchards. Alex also studied the Fruit Production for Profit course at Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology.

He was one of the first orchardists to launch an Instagram account and has a reel highlight where he shares his technical tips and general orchard activities.

"I started it because I wanted people to see how food is produced and as a creative outlet for me, as I've always enjoyed the marketing side of things," he says. I've known what I wanted to do since I was 18. I wouldn't be doing anything else."

Follow Alex on instagram:
@pahoiaorchards

Clyde Orchards owners Kevin Paulin (second from left), brother Raymond (right), with Kevin's son architect/ designer Robert Paulin (centre) and operations manager Kris Robb (left)

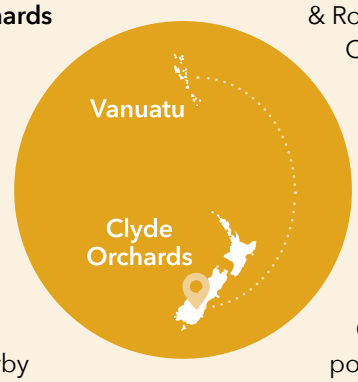
NI-VAN **HOME AWAY FROM HOME**

Clyde Orchards have officially opened their new Ni-Van house for their Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) workers – a sustainable timber building fully operated with solar powered energy and passive design principles.

Aimee Wilson

Completing the Ni-Van RSE house has been a three-year journey. It started with Clyde Orchards co-owner Kevin Paulin's son Robert, an architect, taking inspiration from a traditional Ni-Van meeting house to create a 10-room accommodation facility that the team can truly call home.

Officially opened in mid-September, the cherry blossoms were in full bloom when guests (including Horticulture New Zealand and Summerfruit NZ representatives) were invited for a walk through the house and nearby orchard block.



Designed in collaboration with Christchurch's Sheppard & Rout Architects and Central Otago's Meyer Cruden, and built by Central Otago's Breen Construction, the building includes a 30kW system of photovoltaic panels that acts as a powerhouse for the entire building as well as supporting the surrounding orchard block.

Robert, who grew up on the orchard and is now an architect working across Central Otago and Melbourne, says the surplus power from the home could also be fed back into the grid and sold back to the market.

The exterior takes inspiration from a traditional Ni-Van meeting house

"I don't think there has been anything quite like it in the industry before of this calibre," operations manager Kris Robb says.

Planning for the new accommodation started with a list from staff of what they wanted from their new home, which then had to meet RSE standards.

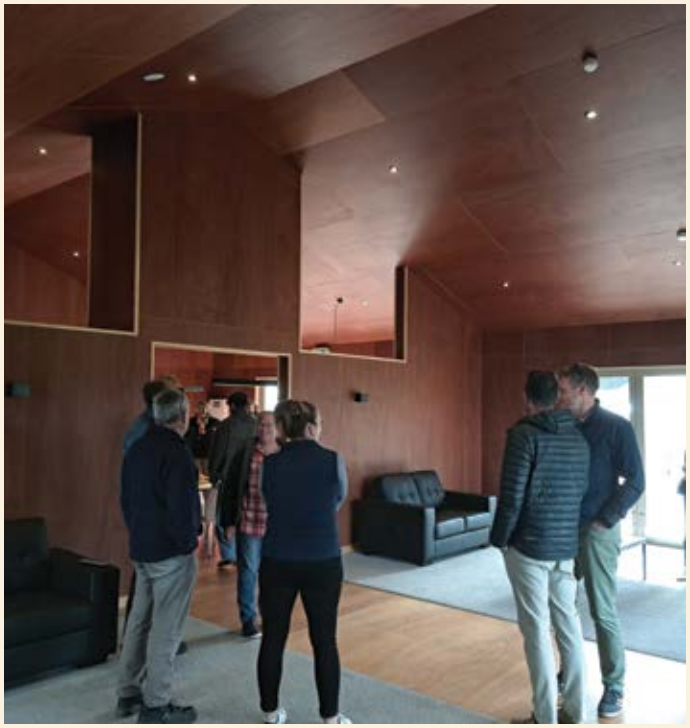
"It had to be robust, self-contained, easy to clean and efficiently built," Kris says.

Robert involved the Ni-Vans in the design of their new 'home away from home' from the get-go, particularly the materials and the colour scheme that were important reflections of their home and culture.

"The exterior material palette blends harmoniously with the Central Otago landscape, while the interior features rich timber panelling and accents of blue, inspired by the traditional lavalava fabric."

The Clyde Orchards team has continuously sought ways to enhance and dignify the RSE experience, since the workers first started coming to Clyde Orchards 17 years ago.

"The brief was to design a space that provided a sense of belonging and ownership, which is often missing in typical worker accommodation across New Zealand. The Ni-Van crew is integral to Clyde Orchards' operation, and their temporary home should reflect that importance," Robert says.



Industry guests visiting the house at Clyde Orchards, which will be opened for Ni-Van RSE workers when they return in early November

The new accommodation will increase the number of RSE workers from 13 to 20 this season, with three wives, a daughter and three sons now also coming to work at Clyde Orchards for the first time.

Inside the accommodation, you can tell every detail has been intentionally designed to appreciate the Ni-Van culture and life working on the orchard.

Pacific-inspired materials have also been used throughout – timber panelling on the walls and ceiling are Okoume ply and Meranti ply for the floors.

The layout encourages communal living and dining, with a well-equipped double kitchen and large chiller, while the separate bedroom wing offers a quieter personal space.

The design was a great example of architecture that represented the Ni-Van heritage, with outdoor communal spaces that would eventually mesh with the existing accommodation and landscaping onsite.

Sustainability was at the core of the project, and timber the primary material. The house is built completely on piles and mostly from wood, including the floor system, with concrete footings only used for the perimeter poles.

Robert says they were aiming for the smallest carbon footprint possible. He notes that this RSE worker accommodation is likely to have the lowest operational and embodied carbon emissions for a building of this kind in the country.

"It has been one of the most rewarding projects I have been involved in," he says.

Summerfruit NZ chief executive Dean Smith, who travelled from Hawke's Bay for the opening, says the new house was a reflection of "just how aspirational we can be," and noted it had "a few more bells and whistles" than other RSE accommodation around the country.

The Ni-Vans will be back in early November to move in, but the original group of 13 workers that has been coming to the orchard for 17 seasons watched the construction of their house in 2024 and early 2025, before they flew home.

"There was a general feeling of excitement from the guys to be able to move in here. It feels more like a home for them," Kris said.

The new accommodation facility complements the existing 20-bed facility onsite that will be used for backpacker worker lodgings this summer.

Kevin told guests at the opening that their family business had survived over 100 years and was something they were quite proud of.

He said they ran quite a different model than corporate operations. Protection of their workforce with new accommodation was important to them.

"Fruit growing is a tough business and it takes a bit of skill to make it work."

This season the company has secured exclusive growing, packing and marketing rights for a new variety of cherry into the market, straight out of the United States, called Skylar Rae®.

The Picnic cherry, grown exclusively by Clyde Orchards as its premium brand in the Cravo house, is one of the first New Zealand cherries to hit the export market out of Central Otago, due to it being grown under cover.

Clyde Orchards also grows Kordia, Lapins, Sweetheart, Staccato, Rainier and Skeena.

Purchasing the first orchard block in Earnscleugh in 1921, Clyde Orchards moved into Bannockburn amongst wine growing country in the mid-1990s.

Today Clyde Orchards has 40ha of cherries, nectarines and Flattos™ peaches spread throughout Earnscleugh, of which 6ha is contained within a Cravo growing system.

Its Bannockburn operation has three blocks on Felton Road with cherries (5ha, 7ha and 6ha), and a further 11ha of cherries, Flattos and nectarines (summer blush) on the Cairnmuir block.

A nephew of the Paulins, Blake Lepper told guests that hospitality has always been important to the Paulin family, and it was also an important part of the family orchard story.

"It's great to see that tradition in looking after people continuing on through another generation and those values continuing for another 100 years."

CORPORATES FEELING **RENEWED OPTIMISM**

Half-year results from many of New Zealand horticulture's corporate growers and suppliers indicate a boost in grower confidence – particularly in kiwifruit and apple exports.

Scales Corporation, which owns Mr Apple, reported an exceptional result for horticulture in its interim results (for the six months to end of June 2025). Its Horticulture division delivered a significant growth in earnings with underlying EBITDA of $53.2 million (up 77 percent from the first half of 2024). Forecast total own-grown export volumes for Mr Apple are 3.7 million Tray Carton Equivalents, a projected increase of 21 percent.

Scales managing director Andy Borland comments, "The strong performance in Horticulture highlights the success of our long-term strategy to invest in apple varieties tailored for key markets in Asia and the Middle East."

Performance was accelerated by last year's Bostock transaction, which included 240ha of planted orchard area. "There were significant increases in our Dazzle™ and Posy™ volumes as a result of this strategy," Andy continues.

T&G Global's interim results also noted an improved performance and a return to profitability. T&G's Apples business delivered a sustained uplift in performance, with operating profit at $47.2 million (up 99 percent from the corresponding 2024 period).

Chief executive officer Gareth Edgecombe says, "Global demand for our premium apple brands is growing in line with our volumes, and across our business we've strengthened customer and grower relationships and optimised our value chain.

"Significant plantings of Envy™ apples over the past few years have contributed to it being a record year for branded apple volumes."

Seeka Limited announced an upgrade to its full-year earnings guidance, lifting forecast profit before tax to between $39 million and $43 million, up from the previous range of $35.0 million to $39.0 million.

The upgrade reflects solid trading through the third quarter, with improved earnings across Seeka's New Zealand Post Harvest and Retail Services (SeekaFresh) businesses, as well as continued strong performance in orcharding and Australian operations.

In its 2025 Annual Report, Te Tumu Paeroa noted that, despite the challenging economic environment, its primary sector enterprises performed well.

Te Tumu Paeroa, which supports the Māori Trustee Dr Charlotte Severne to administer whenua Māori on behalf of beneficial owners, holds a 50 percent interest in Huakiwi, as well as other horticulture operations.

"Orchards across the portfolio have performed better than anticipated," the report states, "achieving record-breaking tray amounts driven by meticulous management from both the respective orchard managers and Ratonga Whenua/ Whenua Services team. Favourable growing conditions have also positively influenced performance."

> **"The strong performance in Horticulture highlights the success of our long-term strategy to invest in apple varieties tailored for key markets in Asia and the Middle East**

PGG Wrightson's results for the financial year ended 30 June 2025 also reported improved results as the agri-sector continued to recover. However, its horticulture division Fruitfed Supplies faced a more challenging trading environment, notes chief executive officer Stephen Guerin, with market pressures affecting grower confidence and investment decisions – particularly in the viticulture and vegetable sectors.

"Encouragingly, we have seen renewed optimism in both the kiwifruit and apple sectors. Orchard investment, new plantings and a focus on varietal development signal confidence in the future of these crops. Buoyant export demand and improved post-harvest performance have contributed to this positive outlook for these growers."

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Samuel Whitelock – Plant Science Graduate, Lincoln University.

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CTAN0087_HORT

Nathan Flowerday says he's had an "accounting-type brain" since school. Now aged 48, it's helped him build a fast-paced career. Photo by Carly Gibbs

GETTING TO A **SOLID POSITION**

From a school maths whiz to a London financier to a large-scale kiwifruit grower, Zespri chair Nathan Flowerday's story is one of smarts and diversity.

Carly Gibbs

Three decades ago, just emerging from his teens, Nathan Flowerday was already one of kiwifruit's biggest supporters.

During his final year of a degree in rural valuation and farm management at Massey University, he was tasked with developing a banking proposal, and he chose to focus on the country's superfruit.

"So, I rang around different banks and asked, 'Do you lend on kiwifruit?'," he says.

It was a challenging proposition given that the New Zealand kiwifruit industry had just emerged from the financial crash of the early 1990s.

However, one banker was won over by a plucky Nathan, who delivered a convincing one-hour argument.

The banker told him, 'I think you might want to come and see me and have a chat'."

It led to Nathan being offered a rural bank manager position with ASB, which he held for five years, including a stint in Tauranga.

The anecdote offers a glimpse into his "accounting-type brain", which he developed at school and has helped him build a fast-paced career at the age of 48.

Partnership begins

Raised on a Waikato dairy farm, Nathan says his parents, Bill and Wendy Flowerday, were his muse for his university assignment and his foray into the industry.

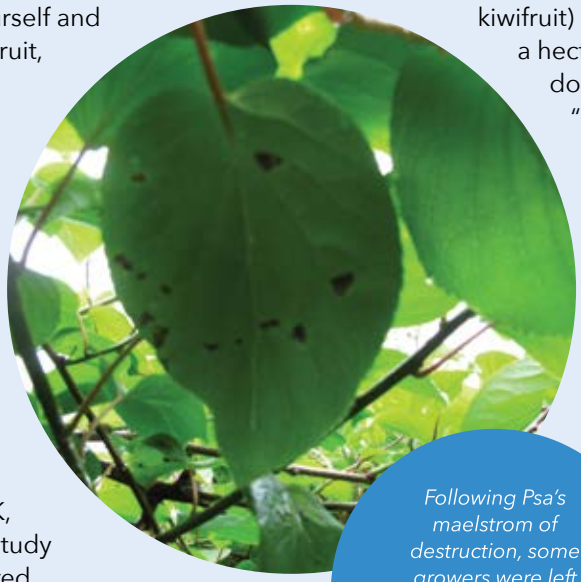
The couple moved to Te Puke in 1997, purchasing their first of many orchards while Nathan was at university.

Kiwifruit growing appealed to Nathan because "with dairy, you had to immerse yourself and be on the farm," he says. "With kiwifruit, I could see I could keep my job as a bank manager but still be sort of involved."

In 2000, Nathan and one of his two siblings, Matt, entered a partnership, purchasing a gold Te Puke orchard with their parents as 50 percent shareholders. He says, "This was the start of High Five Orchards."

Soon after, Nathan met his now-wife, Amanda, an occupational therapist, and they moved to the UK, but not before Nathan returned to study and reinvented himself as a registered management accountant. "I did accounting for investment management firms in London," he says.

While overseas, High Five Orchards purchased another gold Te Puke orchard, with Nathan recalling the decision as "highly leveraged".



Following Psa's maelstrom of destruction, some growers were left more exposed to gold and the location of orchards. Photo courtesy of Zespri

"I remember discussing that if (original gold kiwifruit) Hort 16A got to be worth $400,000 a hectare, we (as a family) should sell down and de-leverage," he says. "We just started doing that and purchasing young orchards for conversion before Psa hit. There are sliding doors, but that just happened to be the time.

"Before PSA, we were producing 300,000 trays as a family, and it decreased to 60,000 trays. Brutal!"

Diversification

The Flowerdays weathered the storm and today own 109ha of kiwifruit, comprising 66ha of Zespri SunGold™ and 43ha of Hayward, amongst three different orchard ownership entities.

Nathan Flowerday chaired the Zespri AGM in August. Photo courtesy of Zespri

Nathan's parents have recently retired, and the family has just undergone a succession process. Each of the three entities has its own in-house governance structure, quarterly board meetings, business strategies, implementations and ownership structures. The commonality among all three is that Nathan and Amanda have ownership stakes of 50 percent or greater, which provides stability to the entities.

"One of the reasons we did that is that [otherwise] you end up having governance discussions at a family barbecue," Nathan quips. "We were really deliberate in that when we have family time, we should have family conversations."

Following Psa's maelstrom of destruction, some growers were left more exposed to gold and location of orchards, and he prefers a balance in varietal ownership. While gold is far more lucrative, Hayward is showing that it is still a great fruit.

Alongside its new EU-approved health claim, Nathan says Hayward has loyal customers globally, and on a personal note, his wife is a "number one" Hayward fan. Still, the demand is being tempered to return value to growers, ensuring a Green orchard remains a viable and profitable business. "It is well and truly in this phase for this year," he says. "Green growers across New Zealand have a good crop, and now we're getting a good return."

From a holistic perspective, a varietal mix gives Nathan's employees a workload that spreads throughout the year.

Nathan and Amanda own Pro Kiwi, which employs 20 full-time orchard management and harvesting staff, as well as 70 Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) workers, with two on-site accommodation facilities. Pro Kiwi exclusively manages the Flowerday orchards, but they also harvest fruit for a select few growers.

Over the past few years, Nathan has transitioned from being a hands-on grower to one who fully entrusts his staff, some of whom are shareholders alongside him and Amanda, in two orchards.

However, he enjoys driving a forklift through harvest and jokes that Zespri Board members give him stick for being the "highest paid forklift driver in the industry". "Which I never agreed with, by the way. To me, it was my way of being connected with the kiwifruit."

Before landing at Zespri, he worked at Opotiki Packing and Cool Storage Ltd (OPAC) in various post-harvest roles after he and Amanda returned from the UK in 2006. Then, after becoming a dad to two children, Sam and Max, he switched to a full-time grower, contemplating his next step.

He undertook more training and secured a governance position at AGMARDT, preparing himself for a potential opportunity that might arise in Zespri. That occurred in 2012, when he was elected Zespri's youngest-ever grower-director at the age of 35.

It was the early days of Psa, and he spent time with individual growers, cutting out vines and trying to help growers through the rollercoaster ride. Sad conversations led to deliberate future planning on his part.

"It was at that point, I said to the family, 'If we're going to grow, we should grow in an area that we can keep an eye on – drive between (our blocks) within 25 minutes, that they're diversified in terms of altitude, location risks, flowering timing risks, frost protection – some are wind, frost-free, water; and varietal mix. It's critically important that even as you grow in scale, you've got that real close connection and eye on what is happening."

He says diversification and safeguarding may take different forms for different growers. "An example might be having an orchard, as well as industry shareholding."

"Massively excited"

Overall, the kiwifruit industry is in a solid position, though, and he's "massively excited" about where innovation will take it over the next decade.

As a founding director of the Kiwifruit Breeding Centre (KBC), he notes that KBC is pushing more cultivars in front of Zespri, giving them options in available kiwifruit varieties. "It's incredible," he says.

Additionally, Zespri's innovation in marketing and sales now makes kiwifruit available in 365,000 supermarkets worldwide, 20,000 of which are "perfect stores" – that's where customers walk in and immediately see Zespri kiwifruit on display.

The growing dominance of kiwifruit in New Zealand horticulture and exports is something he's proud of. Ten years ago, the industry set a target to reach $4.5 billion in sales, and it was exceeded a year early.

> **"The kiwifruit industry is in a solid position, though, and Nathan is "massively excited" about where innovation will take it**

"That was a very audacious goal, so to have exceeded that a year off target is just exceptional, and I don't think we should not be proud of that."

Zespri feels an "increasingly responsible role" as a horticulture leader; it's not something they take for granted. "You've got to remain humble and keep your feet on the ground."

They also have a responsibility to growers. When asked if he ever worries that there could be a glut in the market, particularly with the growing dominance of gold, Nathan says Zespri has a structured planning process that ensures supply does not exceed demand, which puts them in a strong position as a seller.

"Driving demand ahead of supply has been fundamental for two decades now at Zespri. If you haven't quite got that balance right, value gets eroded very quickly, and ultimately, the grower bears the cost of that, so we're very careful."

Recently, inviting growers to become Zespri shareholders through Loyalty as Shares (LaS) or Dividends as Shares (DaS) means there is an "aligned interest", and growers gain a personal stake in sales and marketing. However, all growers have a choice, and Zespri won't move to a compulsory co-operative model.

Being a shareholder, however, also allows growers interested in growing overseas to do so with Zespri. Doing it independently, as some have expressed interest in, is "not for the faint-hearted". "When you add in the cultural and legal implications, it's quite a different proposition," he says.

Nathan was elected Zespri chair last year and is also a member of the New Zealand China Council and the New Zealand International Business Forum.

His advice for growers wanting to move into a governance role themselves is simple: "Stay curious, committed and connected". ●

The Tietjens, Marcus, Jossi and Robyn, check out the growth of their five-year-old Avogrey Greenskin avocados at Braemark in Gisborne

HIGH HOPES FOR FAMILY ORCHARD

A new generation of orchardist, Marcus and Robyn Tietjen talk about their first year growing in Tairāwhiti Gisborne, including the new Avogrey® avocados.

Kim Parkinson

From rural banker to full-time orchardist, Marcus Tietjen, his wife Robyn and two-year-old son Jossi moved to the family farm Braemark in August last year.

Marcus is from the fourth generation of Tietjens to farm the family land in Bushmere Road on the fertile Poverty Bay Flats in Gisborne. He is enjoying the challenge of working on the land and trying to grow the business for future generations.

They have the first commercially producing Avogrey® Greenskin avocado trees in New Zealand outside of David and Judi Grey, the specialist avocado growers who developed the varieties and partnered with MG Group to take the fruit to market.

The Tietjens have planted a mix of Eclipse and GreyStar on 9ha of land. Marcus's younger brother Sam planted the Avogrey avocados in 2020 and 2021, and the family has high expectations for the fruit.

They had their first harvest last year and were very happy with the quality and taste.

"We picked around 3 tonnes a hectare – about 40 bins in total – and we were getting a 95 percent pack out – so mostly class 1 fruit," Marcus says.

The new varieties have a delicious creamy texture, and the quality is more consistent than Hass. Unlike Hass, which goes black when ripe, the green skin remains green and shiny. People can check that it's ripe by slipping a toothpick under the stem; if it slides in easily, it's ready to eat.

Tractor-obsessed Jossi loves sitting up front with dad in the big red International

MG says the new Avogrey Greenskin have made a strong impression on the market with positive feedback from both customers and consumers. They have established just over 30ha of Avogrey Greenskin avocados as part of the planned planting programme with the majority (75 percent) of that volume coming out of Gisborne. They have smaller plantings in Riwaka, Hawke's Bay, Te Puke, Tauranga, Kaikohe and the Coromandel.

"Our initial entry into the market last year generated stronger than expected feedback, with customers loving the eating quality, size and shelf life of the fruit," says MG product development manager Michael Breitmeyer.

Marcus says he would like the new varieties to be further differentiated in market – so the retailers know these are different and special varieties.

The Tietjens' Braemark orchard on Bushmere Road in Gisborne with extensive planting of avocados up to the houses and lemons above

"I'm sure people would pay a premium for a superior avocado," adds Robyn. "So many people are disappointed when they get their Hass avocados home from the supermarket and cut into one to find it's stringy or brown. This doesn't happen with an Avogrey."

In future they would like to create their own retail channel and sell fresh, quality produce directly to consumers. But this is still in the planning stages.

Braemark grows citrus, apples, avocados and grapes on separate blocks. Marcus and Robyn live on the home block and Marcus's dad John is three kilometres down the road.

The farm has been in the family for more than 100 years. Marcus's great-grandfather Charles bought the land and started Bushmere Stud. They farmed cattle and grew annual crops such as pumpkins for stock feed and maize.

Sam did a lot of the development work on the farm over the past five years, which included renovating the house. It is modern and airy with lots of light, a new kitchen with a bench top made from old kiwifruit posts and a large deck. There is also an impressive vegetable garden where they are growing strawberries, Jossi's favourite fruit, and flowers.

Marcus is working closely with John and they look after separate areas. John takes care of the grapes – they contract grow Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc; Marcus looks after the apples, citrus and avocados.

A typical day will have him out on the farm assessing crops, monitoring the picking and pruning. There's a lot of tractor work as well as office work and managing their team.

Marcus and Robyn met when they were students at Lincoln University in Christchurch. He was studying commerce and agriculture and Robyn, who is from the Bay of Plenty, was studying viticulture. They spent some years in England and travelling in Europe before coming back to New Zealand and settling in Christchurch where Marcus worked as a rural banker. This was followed by a move to Bay of Plenty when Marcus got a banking job in Whakatāne.

Their move to Gisborne is part of a wider succession plan. They are trying to build the business so they can scale it for future generations. They also knew it would be the perfect place to raise a family.

Marcus has fond memories of helping his dad on the orchard as a young boy. The lemons were planted in the nineties with Afourer mandarins going in around 15 years ago. The most recent additions are apples, and the Avogrey avocados.

The goal with the avocados is to produce high yields and high-quality fruit, and keep input costs low. High density plantings with smaller trees mean most work can be completed from the ground and they can be sprayed more effectively.

They also have 250 finger lime trees. Robyn likes experimenting in the kitchen with the finger limes in different dishes and cocktails.

> **"MG says the new Avogrey Greenskin have made a strong impression on the market with positive feedback from both customers and consumers**

"One of the biggest challenges is the unpredictability of the weather, having to change plans if rain is coming and we need to spray urgently or get fruit picked before the rain comes. It's a juggling act," says Marcus.

"We were fortunate not to flood here during Cyclone Gabrielle, but the saturated ground has had an impact on our crops – all of our crops have shown some degree of water stress over the past two years. It's hard to believe it was that long ago now."

While there hasn't been a lot of downtime since they moved to the property, they try to get away for the occasional long weekend. But it's going to get busy at Braemark soon with bud break starting, and they're looking forward to picking Avogreys in December.

As they celebrate their first anniversary of being on the orchard, Marcus and Robyn are feeling optimistic about the future and have high hopes the new Avogrey avocados will become a popular favourite with domestic consumers. ●

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Vegetables NZ chair John Murphy made an impassioned defence of vegetables to the large crowd in Parliament

VEGETABLE INDUSTRY FRONTS UP AT PARLIAMENT

More than 100 industry leaders, growers and parliamentarians gathered in the Grand Hall at Parliament in Wellington in September. The inaugural Vegetable Industry Showcase brought growers face-to-face with senior government policymakers.

The showcase provided a rare opportunity for growers from across the industry to meet parliamentarians and discuss the issues affecting growers directly. It was grand to see MPs from all sides of the House attend to support the New Zealand vegetable industry.

The event was hosted by Associate Agriculture Minister Nicola Grigg in cooperation with Onions NZ, Potatoes New Zealand, Process Vegetables NZ, TomatoesNZ and Vegetables NZ.

Minister Grigg opened the event by outlining the Government's support for vegetable growers. She is hopeful of further announcements in the coming weeks. Her presence underscored the Government's recognition of the sector's vital role in New Zealand's agricultural landscape.

The Add One More Vegetable initiative aims to stem the decline in consumption

Call for regulatory reform

Vegetables NZ chair John Murphy delivered a compelling address highlighting the industry's most pressing challenges. He emphasised the urgent need for vegetable growing to become a permitted activity within the Government's new resource management legislation, accompanied by freshwater farm plans, if the industry is to flourish once again.

"Frustratingly, regional authorities continue to trip over themselves to limit us with completely unworkable consenting regimes," John stated. "They've missed the point. All of horticulture uses less than two percent of primary production land. We have robust assurance systems and increasingly high environmental standards – we have come a long way."

Jeremy Whitten from T&G Fresh, Rob Lindsay from Island Horticulture and Mike Saklani from Wing Shing Farms

Energy crisis threatens viability

John didn't mince words when addressing the energy crisis facing covered crop growers. These growers are bearing the brunt of soaring fuel costs, with potentially devastating consequences.

"Make no mistake – New Zealand faces an energy crisis," John said. "Many growers will not be in business in a year's time. Energy supply is the core issue. We need reliable, cost-effective, abundant energy. And we need assistance to tap into its supply."

Alarming decline in consumption

Perhaps most concerning was John's warning about declining vegetable consumption across New Zealand households. Drawing on data from Stats NZ and the Simplicity Research Hub, he painted a troubling picture of changing dietary habits over the past three decades.

"We have gone from 90 percent of New Zealand households purchasing vegetables weekly to just 65 percent of households. The trend suggests that in little more than a decade, half of New Zealand households will not be accessing vegetables weekly. This is appalling."

James Kuperus with Kirit Makan

Bobby Lowe and Jungeun (Jiny) Kim

Partnership essential

John called for a collaborative government-industry approach to reverse these trends and restore vegetables to New Zealand tables, building on initiatives like Add One More Vegetable.

The inaugural Vegetable Industry Showcase has established itself as a platform for dialogue between growers and policymakers. The showcase concluded with a passionate defence of the industry's broader contribution to New Zealand society. He emphasised the industry's unwavering commitment to quality and sustainability.

"Our growers are all determined to grow fresh, healthy New Zealand vegetables for our people. We work to provide the market with high-quality, reasonably priced food. And we grow the right way – with our produce assured by schemes such as NZGAP," John explained.

> **John emphasised the industry's unwavering commitment to quality and sustainability**

"What we do is vital: we provide employment that sustains communities, and we grow fresh, healthy food at reasonable prices for the people of New Zealand. And that is something to be proud of." ●

GROWERS (INCLUDING ROBIN OAKLEY PICTURED) FEATURED IN A **VIDEO PLAYED AT THE SHOWCASE, HIGHLIGHTING THE CHALLENGES THAT ALL GROWERS FACE**

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www.youtube.com/watch?v=tOp2mv2Nw8o

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The 2025 Young Grower of the Year contestants (from left): Sam Carter, finalist Hawke's Bay; Jack Haddon, finalist Pukekohe; Amelia Marsden, third place and Nelson finalist; Rhiannon Morrell, finalist Gisborne; Lydia Goodman, Central Otago finalist; Phoebe Scherer, 2025 Young Grower of the Year and Bay of Plenty finalist; Steven Rink, runner-up and Canterbury finalist

PHOEBE SCHERER WINS 2025 YOUNG GROWER NATIONAL TITLE

Bay of Plenty technical lab manager Phoebe Scherer has won the coveted 2025 Young Grower national title.

The 29-year-old competed against six other regional winners in a series of challenges at Lincoln University in Christchurch on 10-11 September.

Phoebe, who works for Apata in Tauranga, is also the Bay of Plenty regional champion.

Runner-up was Steven Rink, the Canterbury regional champion, who is a production manager for Oakley's Premium Fresh Vegetables in Southbridge.

Third spot went to Amelia Marsden, representing Nelson, who is a kiwifruit manager at Willisbrook Orchards in Brightwater.

The seven finalists competed in a series of practical and theoretical horticulture modules, testing their vegetable and fruit-growing knowledge and skills needed to be successful growers.

Phoebe said she had thoroughly enjoyed stepping up to the many challenges.

"The science and technical modules were my 'safe space' but others I found much more challenging, particularly the machinery section. We had to drive a big tractor along a GPS line. It was the biggest piece of equipment I have ever stepped into, but we were very well supported.

"It was a very high calibre field of competitors and everyone did so well. I could not have asked for a better cohort to have shared such a great experience with.

"In some ways, it didn't feel as if we were competing because we were all so supportive of one another – it was more like being among friends, all going out there to take on the challenges and do our very best.

"Thank you to the organisers – a big shout out to HortNZ – to the sponsors and all the people who are part of making Young Grower such a great event."

Phoebe gained an evolutionary biology degree and did an OE before taking a job in the kiwifruit industry in Tauranga seven years ago.

That led to a laboratory job and ongoing career progression. She joined Apata, a specialist service provider for New Zealand kiwifruit and avocado growers, last year.

The Young Grower competition celebrates the success of young people in the industry as well as encouraging others to consider a career in horticulture.

Steven Rink is a production manager for Oakley's in Southbridge

Amelia Marsden is a kiwifruit manager in Brightwater

The Annual Awards Gala Dinner at the Airforce Museum

Winners were announced at the annual awards gala dinner held at the Airforce Museum of New Zealand, Wigram, on 11 September, where finalists also participated in the Leadership panel event sponsored by Ballance.

Phoebe also won the Best Technical award and Steven the Best Innovation award.

Lydia Goodman, representing Central Otago, won the Outstanding Leadership Award. Lydia is assistant orchard manager at Central Orchard Management and Packing Manager at CentralPac.

> **The regional and national competitions play an important role in raising awareness about the many career and personal development opportunities across the horticulture sector**

Regional organisers host and run the regional competitions independently, with HortNZ hosting the final in a different part of the country each year.

Entry is open to commercial fruit and vegetable growers from across the regions, up to the age of 30.

The regional and national competitions play an important role in raising awareness about the many career and personal development opportunities across the horticulture sector.

They're made possible by the dedication of people from across the sector who have given significant time and effort to organise and help run the events.

This year's finalists, along with the many young growers who competed in the regional competitions, epitomise the skill, passion and commitment of talented people across the sector.

This talent in the sector is important as the horticulture industry focuses on the ambitious goal of doubling the farmgate value of horticultural production by 2035.

The sector needs many more highly skilled young people who want to build rewarding careers in jobs they really enjoy, take advantage of the many opportunities for professional development and be prepared to step up as the leaders of the future.

There are many opportunities, from crop management and machinery operation to soil science, quality control and marketing and much more. ●

FELLOW 2025 FINALISTS WERE:

- **Rhiannon Morrell**, a member of the technical team for apples for Craigmore Sustainables.
- **Sam Carter,** assistant manager for T&G's Pakowhai Sector.
- Crop manager **Jack Haddon** who oversees the cauliflower and cabbage operation for Balle Brothers.

LOWER YOUR BILLS **WITH SOLAR?**

You don't need a large-scale, sales-to-grid operation to benefit from solar technology, says EECA. A new programme aims to support solar and battery installations for everyday horticulture energy use – such as irrigation, refrigeration and processing lines.

Tony Benny

Solar panels at Clearwater Gardens in Christchurch

Christchurch hydroponic vegetable grower Robert Cole says installing two large arrays of solar panels has helped him trim his $100,000 annual power bill as well as satisfy his green beliefs.

"I saw it as an opportunity, not only as something that at current electric electricity prices could pay for itself in seven or eight years, but also as a sustainable, and more environmentally responsible approach," Robert says.

"In Australia and the States, a lot of the companies are now marketing that they're greening and I think eventually this is going to happen in New Zealand as well."

The 108 panels are mounted on stands, beneath which sheep graze, on spare land next to his greenhouse business Clearwater Gardens. The panels can generate up to 52kW, providing enough electricity to power Clearwater Gardens' packhouse and chillers with any excess going into the national grid.

> "Electricity is one of the few operational costs growers can actively manage

"Today we're consuming 30kW and 21.4kW is going to the grid," says Robert on a sunny spring afternoon. "At the moment they'll pay me 13.80 cents a unit for that, but anything that I consume from the grid will be charged at 24.33 cents."

Installing the panels doesn't take any space that would otherwise be used for more greenhouses.

Setup costs were around $195,000 but that included nearly $51,000 to install cable and a purpose-built switchboard to future proof the system for later expansion. "It would now cost about $100,000 to double the size."

Long term Robert says he'd like to add more panels and battery storage to provide enough power to run the total operation.

"We're working on decarbonisation. We used to burn coal but we now use a 20kW heat pump to one of our greenhouses for heating and cooling of water."

Only when it's really cold is the heat pump supplemented by burning diesel. Robert hopes as battery technology improves, using solar will become more flexible and with more demand, prices will come down, allowing for more cost benefits.

Grower Robert Cole has installed 108 panels on spare land next to his greenhouse in Christchurch to power his packhouse and chillers

Even before that happens, Robert has found another advantage of solar power – charging his electric car when the sun is out instead of sending it to the grid.

"That means I'm actually paying the equivalent of 13.80 cents a kilowatt as opposed to 24.33 cents a kilowatt," he says, adding that his petrol car doesn't get used much these days.

> **Modelling indicates that if 30 percent of New Zealand farms installed larger systems they could generate as much as 10 percent of New Zealand's current electricity demand**

Electricity is one of the few operational costs growers can actively manage, says the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority (EECA).

EECA is offering to help other farmers and growers install solar and battery systems in return for taking part in a programme that will show how solar and battery systems can cut energy costs and build resilience on New Zealand farms.

Modelling indicates that if 30 percent of New Zealand farms installed larger systems they could generate as much as 10 percent of New Zealand's current electricity demand.

The initiative will support farmers to install solar and battery systems, monitor performance, and share practical insights – particularly around battery use – with the wider farming community.

EECA suggests starting with irrigation – it's the easiest and most impactful load to electrify using solar directly. Summer irrigation pumps typically operate hardest during daylight hours, coinciding with peak solar output.

Compared to other primary sector producers, horticulture's load profile is less evenly spread and sometimes peaks at night or during cold snaps, so storage or hybrid setups become more important. For example, cold storage facilities can utlilise solar during the day, with battery storage helping to manage evening demand.

"Farmers are looking for reliable ways to manage rising energy costs and improve resilience," says Megan Hurnard, EECA general manager insights, data and communication.

"By showcasing real-world results across different farming systems, this programme will give the sector confidence about what solar and battery technology can deliver."

In return for helping demonstrate how the technology performs day-to-day, by sharing experiences, lessons and real time energy use date with EECA, participating farmers will be eligible for up to 40 percent of inverter and battery system costs and up to 20 percent of other solar array costs.

There are conditions to satisfy to qualify for the programme; they can be found on ECCA's website (eeca.govt.nz).

This funding is part of a broader Solar on Farms programme that EECA is developing in collaboration with farmers, sector bodies and technical experts. EECA will provide independent, sector-specific advice, assessments, and return-on-investment tools so growers can clearly understand the potential for their own operations. Work is also underway to develop finance solutions, providing more options for managing the capital investment.

> **"By showcasing real-world results across different farming systems, this programme will give the sector confidence about what solar and battery technology can deliver**

"We think there is a lot of potential for powering activities like irrigation, harvesting technology, and heating and cooling systems through solar systems," says Megan. ●

In seed growing regions like the Canterbury plains, isolation between flowering crops is crucial to maintain seed quality

NO FLOWERS FOR YOUR NEIGHBOURS PLEASE

Vegetable growers have been relocating from blocks near urban centres to the plains – which is increasing the chances of market gardeners and seed growers becoming neighbours. That's why Seed & Grain NZ is keen to highlight the growing need to cooperate to maintain seed quality for both vegetable and seed growers.

New Zealand is recognised internationally as an important producer of vegetable seeds which are destined for professional growers all over the world.

The key seed production regions are Hawke's Bay, Wairarapa, Marlborough and Canterbury. Large volumes of radish, carrot, spinach, beetroot, Asian brassicas such as pak choi, corn or sweetcorn and many more species are grown for seed.

If producers supply seeds to market gardeners and process growers that are not uniform in type, they can incur a loss of market, or at the very least, increases in processing costs.

Off-types in stock seed are often the result of cross-pollination at the time of flowering with a similar or same species that has been growing nearby.

Hybrid radish seed crop flowering

Pollen can travel vast distances. Beet pollen is known to travel up to 8km, while honeybees used for pollination may carry pollen up to 4km away from their target crop.

Consequently, seed producers may be penalised when such outcrosses are found in the product they supply. Crops are required to meet close to 100 percent genetic purity to comply with the conditions of seed contracts.

Seed producers are hoping to enlist the help of the market gardeners by making sure all growers are aware of the potential financial loss of income that can be caused – even if only a few vegetable plants go to bloom and cross-pollinate with vegetable seed production fields.

Bolted flowering radish plant

Bumble bee pollinating brassica flowers

There are no regulatory isolation requirements between neighbours, and the complexity of crop rotation and planning can make it difficult to identify risks.

The Seed Crop Isolation Distance (SCID) mapping scheme is voluntary and used by producers of vegetable or cruciferous seed crops or oil seed crops. The SCID system minimises the risks of a crop failure from contamination through cross-pollination by identifying crops that are planted too close to each other, and enabling the better utilisation of the available areas for intensive seed crop production.

However, neighbouring vegetable growers are not mapped in SCID and cannot be identified as having potential cross-pollinating crops.

With good communication and cooperation, these issues can be avoided. In the perfect scenario, a seed producer plans their crop well away from a market garden crop of the same type. Or a market gardener will hoe in a crop once it has lost its commercial value (which is when it goes to seed).

In another scenario, the seed producer asks if they can come in to remove some early flowering plants, or the market gardener makes their neighbour aware that there might be some carrots, radishes, beet, cabbage or Asian vegetables flowering and will give the seed producer an opportunity to remove them.

Seed & Grain NZ, by way of this article, hopes to promote cooperation between farming members in our communities, to maximise everybody's opportunities to grow their business in the primary sector.

If you have a question or concerns about your crops affecting someone else's, please do not hesitate to contact the seed company providing you with your stock seed. ●

Please contact Arjen Buter who is a representative of the SCID working committee for the NZ Grain & Seed Association, on **021 652 219**.

WINTER CHILL IN REVIEW

Orchardists in many parts of New Zealand may be in for a bumper crop, thanks to winter chill conditions that could lead to more uniform bud break and better fruit setting.

HortPlus (www.hortplus.com)

This analysis from weather data experts HortPlus explores the accumulation of Richardson Chill Units (RCUs) in Bay of Plenty, Hawke's Bay, Gisborne, Nelson-Tasman and Canterbury.

Weather station data for the 2025 winter reveals a fascinating story. While average temperatures were higher than usual across New Zealand from 1 June to 31 August, crops were still exposed to above-average winter chill.

This is likely to be the result of a winter that saw less variance in temperature than some other years, and a higher proportion of days that approached the winter chill accumulation sweet spot of 4°C.

The data reveals that winter chill exposure this year was particularly high for North Island growers. The average cumulative Richardson Chill Unit (RCU) total across Hawke's Bay weather stations involved in our analysis was 19.3 percent higher than the 2021-2024 average, while winter chill exposure in Gisborne was 13.9 percent higher and Bay of Plenty was 13.3 percent higher.

These conditions could result in healthy yields across the three regions. Growers should also be aware of the possibility of earlier bud break and may want to consider preparing frost protection systems earlier.

In the South Island, chill unit exposure was much closer to the norm but still slightly elevated.

Canterbury's average cumulative RCU total across the three weather stations analysed was 1.1 percent higher than the 2021-2024 average, while in Nelson-Tasman it was 3.1 percent higher. However, the extreme rainfall and flooding experienced by Nelson-Tasman in June and July is likely to negate the benefit of above average winter chill for growers at the top of the South Island, some of whom are still in the midst of recovery efforts.

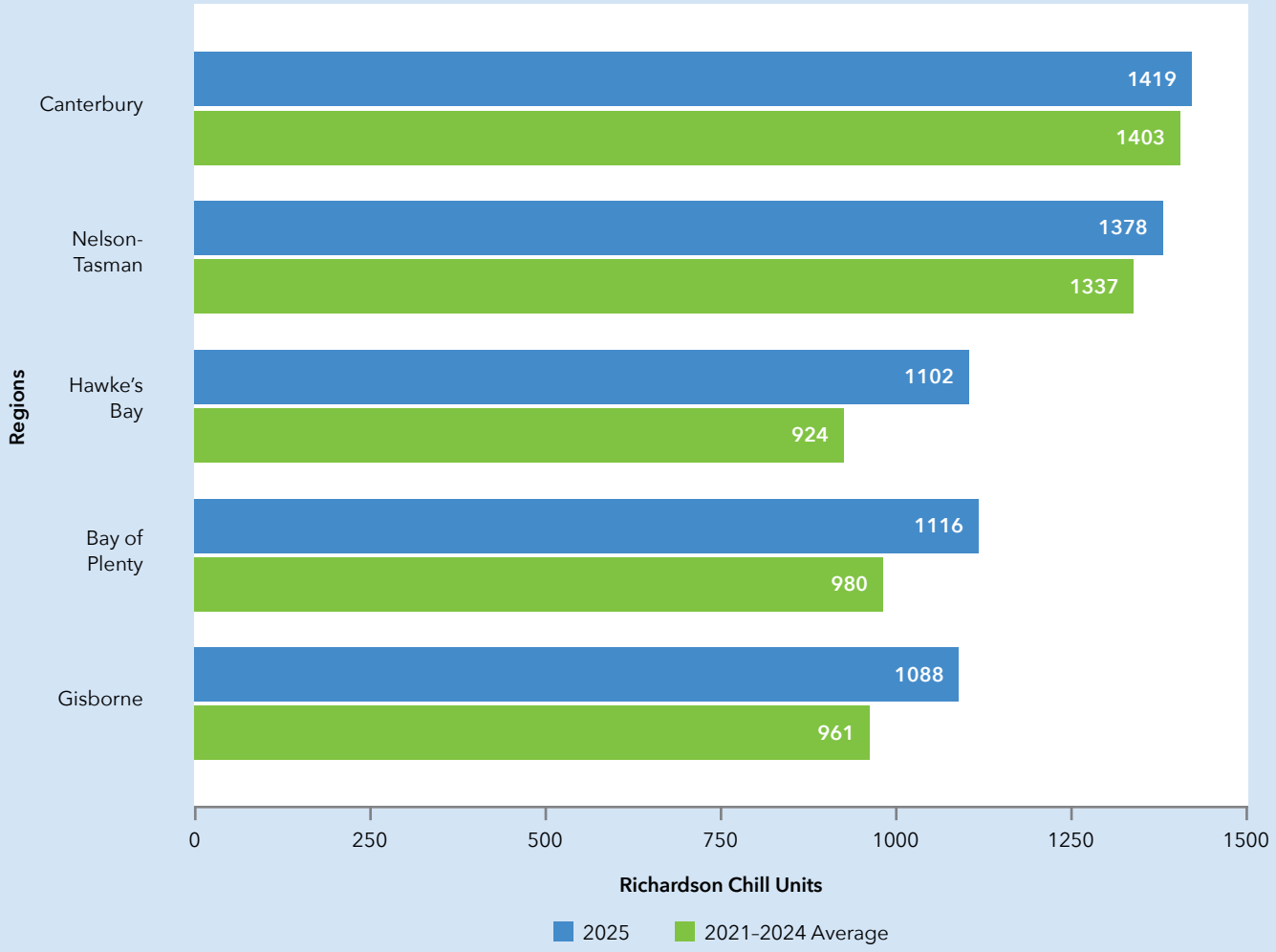
Note that the presented data is sourced from a carefully chosen group of research-grade weather stations located within each of the regions analysed. For every region, three stations were selected based on their proximity to key growing areas. Attention was given to ensuring the selected stations provided wide geographic coverage within each region.

CHILL UNIT REQUIREMENTS: BY CROP

The Richardson Chill Unit (RCU) model works well in New Zealand. There are some nuances, but in broad terms, this model attributes optimum winter chill at 4°C, no accumulation below 0°C, and it takes away winter chill accumulation at 16°C. The table below shows RCU accumulation requirements for normal spring growth for various species, noting differences in requirements for different varieties within some species as well. For example, grapes require less winter chill, allowing them to more easily grow in warmer climates without the need for dormancy breakers, whereas crops such as apples need a cooler climate or help from dormancy breakers.

Species	RCU requirements
Apple	400-1000
Apricot	500-600
Cherry	700-800
Grape	100
Pear	600-800
European plum	800-900
Japanese plum	300-500
Kiwifruit	600-800

RICHARDSON CHILL UNIT ACCUMULATION: 2025 VS RECENT YEARS



CONSIDERATIONS WHEN WINTER CHILL IS HIGH

- Prepare for earlier flowering in some crops and consider impacts on harvest timing.
- Monitor bud break indicators for optimal dormant spray timing decisions.
- Service and test frost protection systems earlier than normal.
- Consider earlier fertiliser application if dormancy is broken earlier.
- Complete any dormant pruning earlier as bud break may advance in some areas.

OWN THE **POWDERY MILDEW THREAT!**

Property® brings new chemistry to the fight.

New chemistry in the orchard industry has been a bit thin on the ground lately. So it's no surprise that a fresh take on controlling powdery mildew has been welcomed by savvy growers.

Property powdery mildew protectant fungicide has been on the market for just two seasons, but Ryan Pierce, UPL NZ Ltd regional manager lower North Island, says uptake has already been strong. "Orchardists are seeing its value."

The first of its class to be approved in apples, Property has pyriofenone as its active ingredient. Pyriofenone belongs to the FRAC (Fungicide Resistance Action Committee) Group 50 and works by preventing spore formation and inhibiting the pathogen's ability to penetrate the tree tissue. There is no known resistance to pyriofenone.

> "It gives you a very effective and very flexible tool in your powdery mildew control programme

Ryan says Property has been a breakthrough in combatting powdery mildew. "It's very effective, and because it is novel chemistry, it helps protect existing chemistry and prevent resistance.

"In addition, pyriofenone has excellent crop safety, with little to no impact on beneficials including ladybugs, which will feed on the fungus that causes powdery mildew."

A serious disease in orchards, powdery mildew is caused by the fungus *Podosphaera leucotricha*. It typically presents as a dense, white mycelium, which impacts photosynthesis and leaf vigour and is responsible for tree water and nutrient loss. This can seriously impact production and stunt tree growth.

Heavily infected trees can also be an easy target for secondary pathogens.

Ryan says orchardists have been fighting pathogen pressure over the past couple of seasons. The weather did not help.

Powdery mildew can over-winter in trees but it is in spring that problems really start. Dewy mornings, followed by warm temperatures, provide powdery mildew with an ideal environment and in the right conditions, spores spread quickly.

Ryan says powdery mildew is a regularly occurring disease and should be factored into every spray programme.

Property Fungicide is a breakthrough in control of Powdery Mildew

Property has excellent rain fastness and is compatible with the insecticides and fungicides used most often in orchard spray programmes. It has a withholding period of 65 days.

Property's systemic performance is well proven, and it also demonstrates excellent preventative activity. Ryan says it has a strong translaminar action moving through the leaves resulting in outstanding distribution within the leaf surface and from one side of the leaf to the other.

"It gives you a very effective and very flexible tool in your powdery mildew control programme."

It is recommended to apply Property as part of a protectant programme at 10-to-14-day intervals when conditions favour disease development. The shorter interval should be used when conditions are conducive to powdery mildew infection and/or there is rapid plant growth. Property applications per season should not exceed two.

Thorough coverage is important, and the addition of Du-Wett® Super-Spreader is advised in low to medium water volumes to ensure optimal foliage deposition.

For more advice on how to combat powdery mildew with Property, ask your local technical specialist or contact Ryan Pierce, UPL NZ regional manager lower North Island on

027 286 5685

Du-Wett: Exempt from ACVM. Property: Registered pursuant to the ACVM Act 1997, No. P009953. See www.foodsafety.govt.nz for registration conditions. Approved pursuant to the HSNO Act 1996. Approval Code Du-Wett: HSR002503, Property: HSR101410. See www.epa.govt.nz for approval controls. Du-Wett and Property are registered trademarks.

UPL

The factory can produce 180 tonnes of seed a day to supply process growers with a consistent size seed piece

PRODUCTIVITY INVESTMENT DELIVERS RESULTS

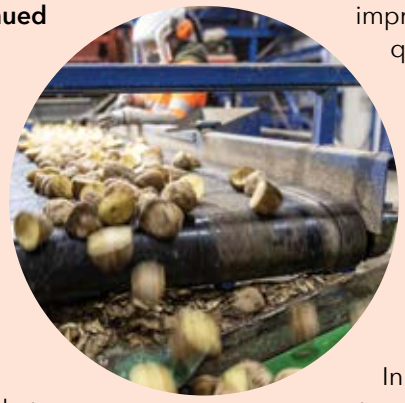
Cutting edge technology has increased efficiency, reduced waste and trimmed seasonal labour requirements at Canterbury's Potato Seed Co-operative, a feat recognised by the presentation of the Innovation Award 2025 by Potatoes New Zealand.

Tony Benny

Since it bought a multimillion-dollar Optimal Vision potato seed grading system three years ago, the Ashburton-based co-op has continued to innovate, adding specialised equipment to cut larger tubers into optimally sized seed pieces.

"The optical will size the seed piece so we get whole seed, single cut, and multi-cut coming out at once and then that goes down one of the two lines to the cutter and it cuts the tuber, depending on that size data," says general manager Ken Small.

"We're aiming for a certain size seed piece that can support the plant until it's got its roots down."



Thanks to the advanced system the seed produced by the plant has consistent shape and size, dramatically improving planting efficiency and overall quality for commercial potato growers.

The plant specialises in producing seed for process growers who supply McCain Foods in Timaru. Previously McCain supplied the seed to growers, but in 2017 it handed that responsibility over to the growers, 12 of whom combined forces and formed the co-operative to handle the task.

In 2021 the co-operative's purpose-built storage facility in Ashburton was opened, featuring two 3000 square-metre coolstores with capacity for 8000 tonnes of seed.

Canterbury's Potato Seed Co-operative general manager Ken Small

The system dramatically improves planting efficiency and overall quality

The co-op works with seed growers, overseeing the five-year long process of taking newly imported genetic material that is multiplied in a laboratory via tissue culture to create mini-tubers that are then grown out in tunnel houses.

The line is further multiplied in the field by seed growers over four seasons until there are sufficient numbers to supply process growers.

"We start with maybe 20 to 30kg of mini-tubers and we end up with up to 600 tonnes of seed," says Ken.

Even when the variety being grown hasn't changed, new genetic material needs to be taken from the parent lines every year to ensure there is always fresh, vigorous stock coming through because with each new generation potatoes lose their vigour.

"We get asked why we don't push out to G5 or G6 (fifth or sixth generation) to get the cost down, but if you do that vigour disappears, disease levels climb and it all starts going wrong. So they'll keep that stock in the lab the whole time and they're just basically multiplying that up each year."

The optical grading system sorts seed potatoes into whole, single cut and multi-cut sizes

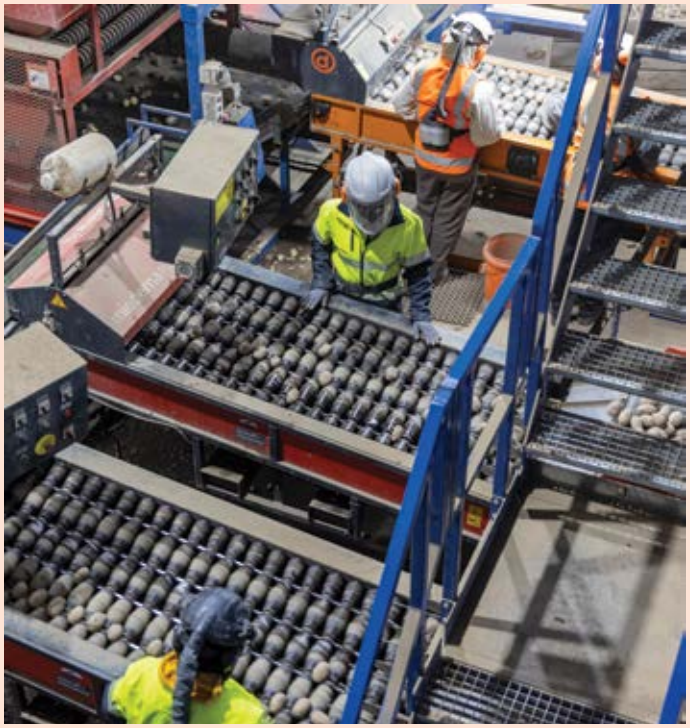
The co-op then buys the G4 seed from the seed growers and in the following spring that seed stock is graded and cut for supply to process growers.

"The whole driver is to try and make it sustainable for both the seed grower and the process grower. Bringing it all together in this facility and installing the optical grader has meant that yields for the process grower have gone up two percent year-on-year."

Ken attributes that to better control of the storage process and the cutting process.

He says the seed growers are growing a better product as well. "They are doing a great job and keeping the seed at high quality."

Cutting begins in the Ashburton plant prior to the planting season, in an effort to get ample supplies of seed stockpiled in the coolstore before demand skyrockets when planting starts. The factory can produce a maximum of 180 tonnes of seed a day.



Graded seed potatoes head down the lines to the cutting machine

"We have 13 growers and they would take 400 or 500 tonnes a day if they could, but we can't supply that much so we have to start early. We have a six-week window to plant it all and so if we don't pre-cut, we can't keep up with the planting crews.

"I'm the only one that prays for a little bit of rain at planting time to give us a little bit of a break and catch back up again."

> **"Thanks to the advanced system the seed produced by the plant has consistent shape and size, dramatically improving planting efficiency**

The success of the Ashburton facility has been great for growers, says Potatoes New Zealand chief executive Kate Trufitt.

"This technology allows growers to maximise seed placement and spacing in the field with their potato seed planters.

"The result is improved potato plant stand in the field and even emergence, which optimises crop inputs of fertiliser and water whilst increasing potato crop quality and yield per hectare. Through a collaborative effort and a shared commitment to technological innovation, these growers are seeing exactly the practical return on investment in productivity that the industry needs innovation to deliver.

An established cover crop under the vines at a Waikato kiwifruit orchard

Regenerative workshop participants doing visual soil assessments in the orchard at Whitehall Fruitpackers in Waikato

REGENERATIVE PRINCIPLES FOR PERENNIAL CROPS

My background in arable cropping has given me insights into how regenerative principles can support sustainable production in vegetables (see my article in the September 2025 issue of NZGrower & Orchardist*), but my limited experience in the fruit industries got me thinking how these principles would work in perennial systems.*

Diana Mathers

A recent visit to a young apple orchard, planted for automation with intentionally managed tidy laneways and bare herbicide strips, made me think I was as far from regenerative principles as I could be – but perhaps I am wrong.

The apple industry's goal for sustainable production is to produce high quality apples and pears, prioritising human health and the environment through sustainable production techniques, including integrated pest management, soil and water management, food safety, biosecurity, health and safety and social responsibility.

Similarly, the kiwifruit and wine industries have their lenses on sustainability, all investing in science and technology to support profitable production and the delivery of their goals with an eye to the environment.

Orchard manager Levi Belcher

I met recently with Richard Mills, technical manager for Summerfruit NZ, to find out about the work being done under the A Lighter Touch programme in their orchards. I asked, "is it regenerative agriculture?" His reply, "Well, we prefer to call it understorey management".

Summerfruit NZ is following the lead of the citrus sector with biodiverse understorey plantings to support natural enemies for orchard pests, potentially reducing the reliance on agrichemicals.

Richard says, "We're losing pesticides and fungicides. We can use off-label products, but we need other strategies to keep pests under control."

They are interested to see if increased plant diversity in the orchard can reduce herbicide use, boost soil organic levels and improve soil health with root-zone activity. "We need diversity; especially diverse soil communities that support disease suppression."

Four apricot orchard trials in Central Otago are underway. Insect diversity, particularly the beneficials, is being monitored in the conventional and diverse understorey plots. The understorey plantings are mixed species of flowering annuals, legumes and cereals. Richard has trialled similar plantings in Hawke's Bay where he found that what worked in Central Otago didn't necessarily work in Hawke's Bay where some plants dominated, becoming tall and unmanageable. Plant selection is key, as is the ongoing management of the laneways once the cover crop is established. Crimping, mowing, grazing and just batting them down with bin movements are all possibilities.

The citrus industry has found diverse understorey planting is "not mainstream", but growers are interested. Richard also observes that uptake is slow. Acceptance of new management practices takes time and it is often a small group of growers leading the way, bearing the brunt of trial and error. Others watch with interest waiting to see the pitfalls and costs and benefits before giving it a go. Success comes with perseverance.

Richard says the herbicide strip is important when trees are establishing and they look clean and tidy, but perhaps a diverse low-growing ground cover is a better option once the trees have established.

"With soils, understanding the soil you've got and how to look after it, giving it the support to look after itself, is the key to resilience," he says. "We have a lot to learn from the other sectors and we should pool and combine experience and learning."

Levi Belcher is young and keen and has a passion for regenerative sustainable growing. He manages ten kiwifruit orchards in the Waikato with conventional and organic blocks. Levi told me he wants to "farm in a way that's not depleting the soil. I want to leave it in a better condition than I found it by looking after soil microbes and building soil carbon."

For the past two years Levi has been using cover crops between the vines. He direct drills a cover crop mix in late August, giving the plants a chance to get to "red-band height" before the canopy closes over, then it is mulched. "Growing

the crop under low light intensity is certainly a challenge but getting it away early in the spring works." It is grazed and mulched again in winter and resown in the spring.

I asked Levi if he had noticed any differences. Fewer tractor movements associated with mowing was one – a tick for emission reductions – and better water-holding capacity. He explains that the cover crops are in a troubled part of the orchard for water, unirrigated and prone to dryness.

"The grass didn't grow, and the vines and fruit were dehydrated," Levis says. "The cover crop provides a soil armour, so the soil surface is not beaten up by the sun and wind, and water holding capacity under the vines has improved."

Levi has introduced stock into the orchard and is considering trying intensive sheep grazing and calves in the future, believing they will contribute to his soil's health. "I'm looking to decrease my synthetic inputs and chemical herbicides, one natural solution could be intensive stock management."

As well as the soil, Levi is thinking about beneficial insects in the orchard. He has planted pollinator strips in the headlands to encourage natural pollinators and attract bees. He is interested to learn more, following growers who are using mobile planter boxes, and he is aware of the opportunity of planting the orchard perimeters and other non-productive parts with plants that support beneficial insects and natural pollinators. "I haven't planted pollinators yet, and there's a possible cost benefit, but it would be difficult to measure."

I asked Levi if the industry supports regenerative practices. "Not as such, but they do support sustainable production."

At a recent young growers discussion, he was the only one not in favour of genetic modification to build innovation and sustainability. Levi believes regenerative-style management is a better path for New Zealand to sustainable, quality production. "We need to tailor our management, making deliberate decisions, being proactive not reactive."

Levi's final word, "The industry must support young people wanting to enter. We want to learn. It's all in the books, but it's better to walk through the orchard with someone who's done it all before and tried things out. We want to toss ideas around and not repeat other people's mistakes. We need to find a wise older guy or gal to follow."

I like Levi's attitude. ●

REGENERATIVE PRINCIPLES FOR PERENNIAL PLANTINGS

- Minimise soil disturbance – reduce opportunities for compaction.
- Always have ground cover – make herbicide strips transient.
- Support soil ecology with active roots.
- Return plant wastes to the soil to build organic matter.
- Integrate animals.
- Increase plant diversity in laneways and orchard surrounds to support beneficial insects.
- Use integrated pest management and biofungicides to support pest and disease control.

This year Jess (right, with Rural Leaders chief executive Lisa Rogers) completed a Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme report titled Softer Crop Protection, The Way of The Future?

OPINION
THOUGHT LEADERS

IF BIOPESTICIDES GET APPROVED, WILL GROWERS USE THEM?

Government policymakers are working to simplify new crop protection approval pathways – including for the new generation biopesticides that multinationals are pouring investment into. NZGrower & Orchardist's *John Gauldie sits down with Jess Ross to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing growers as they navigate the transition to more sustainable crop protection practices.*

Jess Ross recently completed her Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme report titled *Softer Crop Protection, The Way of The Future?* In her role as field biologist at Field-Tek, she works at the coalface of crop protection trials and research.

What got you interested in Kellogg Rural Leadership?

"I've always been really interested in development and growth. After finishing my Master's at Lincoln University two years ago, I wanted to understand where the horticulture industry was heading.

"In my work at Field-Tek, we're doing trials on biopesticides developed overseas and domestically, and I can see more of those products coming in the future. But commercially, you don't really see them applied in this country compared to some other countries.

"I think we're getting to the next wave, which is exciting. But if we're going to get these new products onto the New Zealand market, it does make me question whether industry is ready to support growers.

"It worries me that there might be some great products out there, but if we don't have that extension piece correct, they might just be left on the shelf. My Kellogg's research aims to bridge the gap – so growers can actually use these products in a way that works for them."

Jess Ross, a field biologist at Field-Tek works at the coalface of crop protection trials and research

What do growers think about biopesticides?

"From my interviews I think a lot of growers have felt a bit of a sting from previous use. They're putting it under that big umbrella of 'biopesticides don't work'.

"There's been multiple waves of biopesticides onto the market, and I think the industry hasn't always done a very good job at setting expectations. Growers have used these biopesticides thinking it's going to be like-for-like with their synthetic control. So when it just doesn't meet the mark or they haven't applied it in the correct way, they haven't got the control they thought they were going to get.

"Cost is also a large barrier, they're not always as stable as synthetic chemistry and reliability is a big challenge for some compounds.

"But I think the more people want it, that will change the market. It's that whole supply and demand dynamic. In saying that, you want to make sure you've got the efficacy right."

What is driving innovation in biopesticides?

"Consumers are driving change in the crop protection space. Globally, I think a lot of countries are starting to utilise biopesticides more. The multinationals are buying up some smaller companies that have been innovating in this area. There is a lot of investment.

"It seems domestically, there isn't a big consumer-led demand here yet. Kiwis just trust that our growers are going to do right by them, following the rules and producing a good product. Whereas in other countries, they aren't as trusting.

"In our export markets we're moving into that space where consumers are really wanting to know what's in their food and being more conscious around residue limits. So for our export growers, demand for these biopesticides is really going to be driven by our international consumers, and the domestic market will follow suit afterwards.

"Of course New Zealand is small in the grand scale of things, so these big companies are developing for global demand. Whether New Zealand uses them or not, they're still going to get developed. It's just whether they get to our shores."

What's the biggest challenge with extension services?

"Throughout my Kellogg's interviews it sounded like some time ago there was really good research for growers to get information and support. There was a lot of resources and funding towards extension, and it's just has gotten thinner and thinner.

"It makes it hard for growers to know what's going on. They've got so many different hats on, so knowing where they can actually go to talk to someone is really critical. In some sectors, it's not there.

"The range of knowledge in New Zealand agronomists and advisors varies hugely so growers are not getting uniformed service or advice. There certainly can be a conflict of interest with some advisors or agronomists having incentives towards selling products. Some growers I spoke with were concerned about the recommendations that they got at times.

"Countries like the United Kingdom have quite strict rules in place. If you're going to recommend a product or a chemical, you have to have certain qualifications. Advisors can still be tied to a company or a merchant, but they do have to have a baseline understanding. New Zealand doesn't have anything like this and would certainly benefit from a similar national qualification.

"I think some of the corporates are doing a pretty good job through their internal processes. They set their own benchmarks – sometimes better standards than the national regulations, which is just epic. Those corporates can do that because they have internal agronomists and experts. Maybe those smaller growers, they don't have that, so they may rely on industry a lot more for that information to understand those technologies and tools and keep them moving in the right direction."

How do biopesticides fit within IPM (Integrated Pest Management) strategies?

"Biopesticides and beneficial insects can complement each other, but not always. Some biopesticides will take out beneficials. That's just something that people need to bear in mind when they are looking at biopesticides.

"The growers that I spoke to thought IPM was being used pretty much everywhere but it's on such a wide scale. People have so many different definitions of IPM. It's a toolbox and biopesticides are part of that – but so are synthetics.

"If you're using 90 percent synthetic chemicals, but you're crop scouting and you use some sticky traps, that would be IPM for some growers. But someone else using one chemical product and allowing nature to do the rest with careful monitoring, well that's IPM too but both examples are very different crop protection approaches.

"There are some great technologies coming out. AI is here and we should try to utilise it to our advantage. There are insect traps such as Scoutlabs as an example of technology being trialled to understand pest pressure and risk to a target crop. I think these tools are great and I think they

Jess is hoping for small wins by switching one synthetic product for a biopesticide in spray programmes

WHAT ARE BIOPESTICIDES?

Biofungicides, bioinsecticides and bioherbicides, collectively known as biopesticides, are crop management products including live microbes (such as bacteria, fungi and viruses) and/or their extracts, crude or purified plant extracts, pheromones and other natural biochemicals. The regulatory approval and registration processes for biopesticides currently follow a similar pathway to synthetic agrichemicals.

have a place in most farming systems but it comes down to educating and supporting growers through the changes. Biopesticides are just another IPM tool.

"If you look at kiwifruit and apples, they're doing a tremendous job in the IPM space. Tomatoes is another one. Whereas other sectors have more opportunities to explore IPM."

Where does biopesticide adoption go from here?

"From my Kellogg's interviews, it really was apparent that growers don't like change. If their current controls are working, they're going to just continue to use those until they can't.

"It's just human nature that people feel uncomfortable with change. They would rather stay in their comfort zone than try something different, especially when there's money on the line. It's a hard market out there – particularly for the veggie sector.

"But another thing that came out of the Kellogg's report is that people are starting to look at biopesticides a bit differently. So it's not 'we're all in, we're going from all synthetic chemistry to all biopesticides'.

"Instead, people felt that if we could switch one product out – one synthetic product for one biopesticide in a spray programme, those are the small wins that build trust in a programme. It really comes down to trust in your advisors and trusting these products.

"So if we can just move everyone a little bit closer with those small wins, that would get biopesticides into the market and also save some of that synthetic chemistry from resistance.

"I'm pretty excited to be in this sector, with a lot of change to come in the next ten years. There will be a lot of teething issues, but it's a really exciting time."

Read the report here: **ruralleaders.co.nz/softer-crop-protection-the-way-of-the-future**

SMALL GREENHOUSE **WARMED BY WOOD PELLETS**

At 82 and 78 Ed and Lyn Paul should have their feet up enjoying their golden years. Well, we think they are enjoying their golden years, but they hardly have their feet up.

Their well-laid-out property in Te Puna, about 15 minutes north of Tauranga, has three greenhouses. They have retired two of them but still run their winter house.

It has 800 plants, and they sell the complete crop (about 300kg per week) every winter weekend at the Tauranga Farmers' Market. They have somewhat of a following. The tomatoes are gorgeous, and they get a few complaints from the other stallholders, as the queues for their tomatoes block off other stalls.

> "Since 2011 Ed and Lyn Paul have been loyal customers of Nature's Flame

They moved on to the property around 18 years ago. Previously it was used to grow citrus and to breed dogs. After a major clean-up job Ed and Lyn got to work and built the greenhouses.

Ed tracked down a 1985 old Beacon coal boiler. He was having trouble finding a supply of coal and ended up getting in touch with Gerard Dobbs who at the time was working for Nature's Flame, a wood pellet manufacturer. Gerard helped with modifying the boiler to take wood pellets. Gerard is still in the biofuel game with Canterbury Woodchip Supplies Ltd in Christchurch.

In the beginning the pellets arrived in 1-tonne bags, then Ed tracked down a silo and modified it so they could receive the pellets by blower truck. At 82 he still climbs the silo ladder to see how much he has left.

Ed transfers the pellets by tractor from the silo to the boiler, as the boiler is at the back of the glasshouse. Every morning, he rakes the ash out of the boiler. He gets half a small bucket.

Over winter, Ed uses around 31 tonnes of wood pellets to keep the glasshouse at about 18–19°C.

Ed and Lyn at the Tauranga Farmers Market

The re-purposed Beacon coal boiler now runs on wood pellets

Since 2011 Ed and Lyn Paul have been loyal customers of Nature's Flame. Ed thinks he has only run out once, but given the only way he has of knowing how much stock he has is to climb the silo, that's not a bad effort. These days Nature's Flame have a lot more clients and simply ring him each time a truck is going past to get an estimate of how much he can take.

Ed and Lyn sell all their tomatoes at the local Farmers' Market, on 5th Avenue in the Tauranga primary school. If you're ever in Tauranga on a Saturday morning, it's well worth a look. ●

If you have any questions about wood pellets, get in touch with Nature's Flame.

info@naturesflame.co.nz

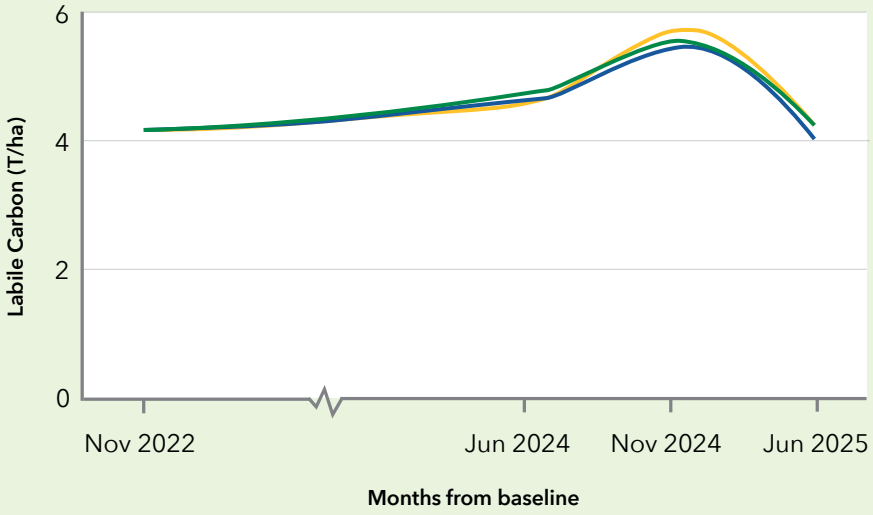
0800 735 538 or 07 376 0170

www.naturesflame.co.nz

Nature's Flame

COMPLETE CROP CYCLE TIMELINE

Total labile carbon to 600mm depth (T/ha) for three management approaches from Nov 2022 to June 2025



Total soil carbon (T/ha) showing the complete farming cycle: summer crop harvest (March-April), June sampling, winter cover crop establishment and growth, November sampling at cover crop peak, then repeat cycle. All treatments follow similar patterns despite different winter management. Note: No data for 2023

Conventional
Hybrid
Regenerative

SUMMER CROPS TRUMP WINTER MANAGEMENT?

What if the crop you plant in spring matters more for soil carbon than how you manage your paddocks over winter? Surprising results from a Hawke's Bay soil carbon trial are questioning conventional wisdom about regenerative farming practices.

Dan Bloomer and Olivia Webster : LandWISE

After three years of comparing conventional, hybrid and regenerative systems on a Heretaunga Plains vegetable operation, we have uncovered a pattern that surprised us: regardless of whether winter covers are grazed by stock or left undisturbed, soil carbon levels follow remarkably similar trajectories. The real driver might be which summer crop was grown the previous season.

Three systems, one story

The trial, run at the LandWISE MicroFarm at the Centre for Land and Water, compares three winter management approaches. The conventional system plants annual ryegrass each autumn and grazes it with lambs through winter. The hybrid and regenerative systems both use diverse cover crop mixes including radish, crimson clover and Italian ryegrass, but leave them ungrazed to build soil biology naturally.

As part of the research programme, the team is measuring hot water extractable (HWE) carbon – the 'labile' or readily available carbon that soil microbes can quickly access. Think of it as the fast food of soil carbon: easily digested and rapidly cycling through the soil system.

We expected to see clear differences between grazed and ungrazed systems. But what we found instead was that all three treatments track each other almost identically through the seasons.

The Tomato Effect

An interesting pattern emerged when the team tracked the carbon levels chronologically. Baseline measurements in November 2022 showed all treatments hovering around 4.1-4.2 tonnes per hectare of labile carbon. By June 2024 – following the 2023-24 tomato harvest but before

winter cover crops had established – levels had increased modestly to around 4.5-4.7 tonnes per hectare.

The biggest change came over the following winter. By November 2024 – after winter cover crops had grown on the tomato residue – all treatments had spiked to 5.2-5.4 tonnes per hectare. Following the 2024-25 pea and bean crops, levels returned to baseline around 4.1-4.2 tonnes per hectare by June 2025.

That's a 25-30 percent increase across the board after tomatoes. But notably, it happened equally in the grazed conventional system and the undisturbed regenerative plots.

Why tomatoes made the difference

Several factors could potentially explain why tomatoes created this carbon response. Process tomatoes likely produce substantial residues when harvested in March, though the exact amount and composition compared to other crops isn't yet known.

The data reveals another intriguing clue: by June 2024 – immediately after tomato harvest but before winter cover crops had established – the deep soil layers (30-60cm) already showed elevated labile carbon levels across all treatments, actually peaking at this point. Meanwhile, surface and subsurface layers continued building to their November 2024 peak as winter covers established.

This suggests two different processes might be at play. Deep layers seem to respond directly to live tomato root activity during the growing season, while surface layers respond later to residue breakdown combined with winter cover crop growth. However, both effects appear quite transient – by June 2025, all soil layers had returned to baseline levels.

The exact mechanisms aren't clear yet, but tomatoes may differ from other crops in their root architecture, residue quality or timing of organic matter release. When you combine whatever the tomato legacy effect is with the winter cover crops that followed, you get this remarkable carbon spike.

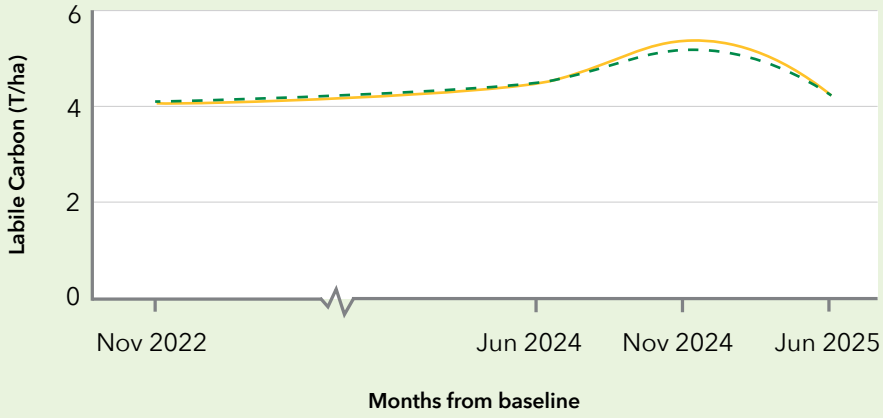
The timing may also be crucial. November sampling occurs in spring after winter covers have had months to grow on soil that previously supported tomatoes. Whether the covers actually amplify the tomato effect or simply coincide with it remains unclear.

Grazing doesn't break the pattern

Perhaps most surprising is how little difference winter grazing made to this cycle. Despite lambs trampling, camping, and depositing dung and urine across the conventional plots, soil carbon levels tracked the ungrazed treatments almost perfectly.

WINTER MANAGEMENT PATHWAYS

Comparing grazed ryegrass vs. ungrazed multispecies cover crops – different strategies, similar carbon outcomes

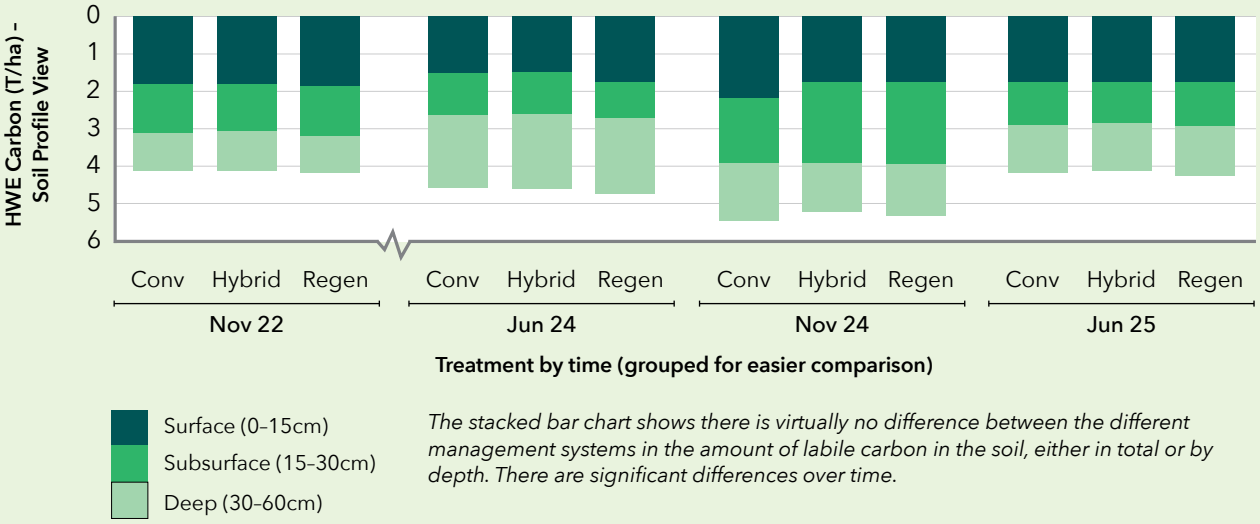


Individual plot responses showing how grazed ryegrass (Conventional) and ungrazed multispecies mixes (Hybrid/Regenerative) achieve similar carbon cycling through different biological pathways. Note: No data for 2023

Grazed Ryegrass
Ungrazed Multispecies

TREATMENT COMPARISONS BY TIME PERIOD

Grouped by sampling – compare treatments within each time period



Surface (0–15cm)
Subsurface (15–30cm)
Deep (30–60cm)

The stacked bar chart shows there is virtually no difference between the different management systems in the amount of labile carbon in the soil, either in total or by depth. There are significant differences over time.

This could suggest the soil biological system is remarkably resilient. Whether carbon cycling happens through natural plant decomposition or through the animal gut and back onto the paddock, the end result for labile carbon appears similar in this system.

This finding supports the view that livestock can be successfully integrated into soil-building systems. While the trial's regenerative treatment used diverse cover crops without grazing – focusing on feeding the soil directly rather than through animals – the results suggest both approaches can achieve similar carbon cycling outcomes.

What this means for growers

For growers, these preliminary results suggest that crop selection and rotation planning may deserve more attention than winter cover crop management when it comes to soil carbon outcomes. While the research is still early-stage, it hints that the biological legacy of different crops could be more important than previously realised.

We're not saying winter management doesn't matter. But if you're trying to boost soil carbon, what you grow in summer might be the bigger lever to pull.

The conventional system achieved similar carbon cycling outcomes to the ungrazed systems, demonstrating that different management approaches can lead to comparable soil health results.

The next chapter

With three years of the Carbon Positive project still to run, the team will keep monitoring labile carbon and any trends related to crop cycles. Next summer's buttercup pumpkin crop will provide another data point, followed by sweetcorn in Year 5 and tomatoes again in Year 6.

The real test will be whether we see that same carbon spike when we grow tomatoes again. If the pattern repeats, it will give us much stronger evidence that certain crops create lasting soil biological impacts.

The planned rotation also raises intriguing questions about cumulative effects. Will the pumpkin crop behave more like tomatoes or sweetcorn? Could repeated cycles gradually shift the baseline carbon levels higher?

Caution required

The team emphasises that three years of data, while compelling, isn't enough to draw definitive conclusions about crop-specific effects. Year-to-year weather variation, soil type differences, and management nuances could all influence results.

We need to be careful not to over-interpret limited data. But the consistency of the pattern across all three treatments is remarkable.

For now, the research serves as a valuable reminder that soil systems are complex, and our assumptions about what drives carbon cycling may need regular testing. As this trial continues, it promises to deliver more insights that could reshape how we think about regenerative farming practices in New Zealand conditions.

The Carbon Positive trial is being conducted at the *LandWISE MicroFarm at the Centre for Land and Water in Hawke's Bay. It is a partnership between LandWISE, the HB Future Farming Trust, Heinz-Wattie's and McCain Foods, funded by the Ministry for Primary Industries, McCain Foods, Heinz-Wattie's and Process Vegetables NZ.*

Follow Carbon Positive on **www.landwise.org.nz**

USE OF AI: The analysis for and preparation of this article had assistance from Claude AI (Anthropic).

RECORD SALES IN RESURGENT EUROPE

One year on from our Free Trade Agreement, exports to the European Union are growing again. NZGrower & Orchardist *asks Zespri's Nikki Johnson why kiwifruit – New Zealand horticulture's leading export to the trading bloc – is driving the surge in revenue.*

John Gauldie

When the New Zealand-European Union Free Trade Agreement (NZ-EU FTA) came into force in May 2024, kiwifruit and onions were predicted to be the big winners in the primary sector. Indeed, after a full year of trading under the FTA, Stats NZ data show a record surge in horticulture export value well above $1 billion FOB.

However, whether the agreement's tariff benefits are reaching New Zealand growers or passing through to buyers might depend on the crop.

Europe's market for onions remains very competitive. Sales into the European Union face tough competition from local producers as well as other Southern Hemisphere competitors. Although volumes of New Zealand onions into the European Union increased slightly in the last year, the overall trend shows falling demand as European onions grow and storability technology improves.

The FTA's tariff relief is much welcomed and has supported New Zealand exporters to be on the same playing field as competitors (and ahead of Australia, which has not yet ratified an agreement), but challenges around price for a commodity product remain. Onions NZ continues to focus on a market access strategy that not only develops markets but diversifies into new market opportunities, says Onions NZ general manager Kazi Talaska.

This year apples have overtaken onions as the second biggest crop heading to the European Union, but both the crops' exports are modest compared to kiwifruit, which represents 90 percent of New Zealand's horticulture exports to the European Union.

Zespri's vice president for Europe Nikki Johnson says increased kiwifruit volumes for Europe from New Zealand in the 2024/25 season and this 2025/26 season are a result of the rebound in crop volume after the 2023 crop was severely affected by weather events, along with strong demand for Zespri kiwifruit and strong sales.

Zespri kiwifruit for sale in the Netherlands recently – SunGold sales volumes in Europe are up 25 percent on last year

Based on its latest forecast figures for the 2025/26 season, Zespri is expecting an increase of New Zealand Class 1 volume to Europe of around 15 percent on last season with sales expected to surpass $1.5 billion. The majority of the increase in Class 1 expected volumes in Europe is SunGold™, up 25 percent on last year.

"It's been encouraging to see Europe performing so strongly this 2025/26 season," Nikki says. "We've seen strong sales rates with more than two million trays sold each week since mid-May when the first sales of Green occurred for the season. To support this demand, additional fruit has been reallocated to these markets from Asia, where local economic conditions have been more challenging.

"Sales rates in Europe are also expected to exceed three million trays per week for several weeks in the near future before the transition from New Zealand to Zespri Global Supply fruit grown in Europe."

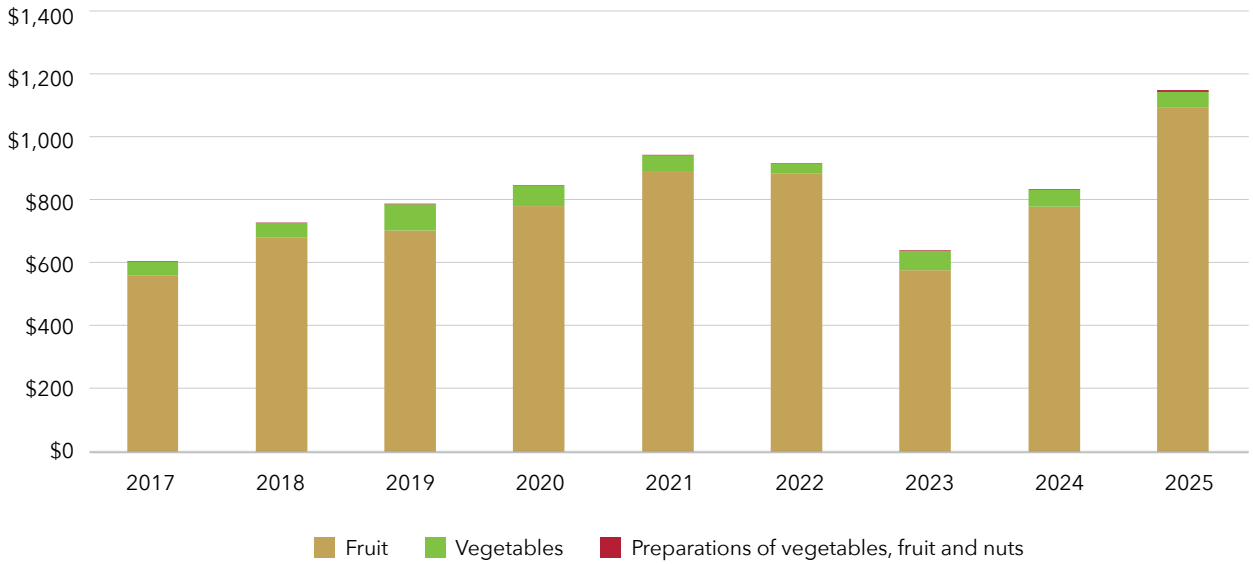
Zespri Global Supply (ZGS) production (including orchards in France, Italy and Greece) plays a central role in supporting Zespri's objective of maintaining 12-month supply to global markets, which helps Zespri lead the kiwifruit category and thereby strengthening New Zealand grower returns.

"In terms of ZGS, we're currently preparing for our 2025/26 Northern Hemisphere harvest," Nikki continues. "Our growing regions have experienced mostly favourable growing conditions despite some localised weather challenges. We're expecting a total volume of more than 24 million trays of SunGold from ZGS this season, which is an increase of more than 20 percent on last season."

With 7 million trays of Green from Italy and Greece, the total ZGS production will top 30 million trays.

NEW ZEALAND HORTICULTURE EXPORTS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

Year ending June, NZ$ millions FOB



Source: Stats NZ

Last month *NZGrower & Orchardist* reported on Zespri Green Kiwifruit becoming the first fresh fruit to have a health claim validated by the European Commission, following many years of investment from Zespri. The fruit's digestive health benefits can now be marketed in the European Union, supporting value back to Green growers.

"We know consumers in Europe are becoming increasingly proactive about their health and seeking naturally nutritious foods with proven benefits," Nikki says. "We're confident the claim will have a positive impact in market following its approval, with widespread media coverage showcasing the Zespri brand across Europe."

ZESPRI GLOBAL SUPPLY KIWIFRUIT ORCHARDS IN EUROPE

Accepting the Manaaki Award are (from left) Heather Kean and Heather Rawlings from T&G Global; presented by Brydon Nisbet, HortNZ Board deputy chair and Bernadine Guilleux, HortNZ Board chair

OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTIONS RECOGNISED

Research and healthcare initiatives, leadership and dedication to the sector have been recognised in the 2025 Horticulture Industry Awards.

The awards are presented in recognition of outstanding contributions to commercial fruit and vegetable growing in New Zealand.

Horticulture Bledisloe Cup

The Horticulture Bledisloe Cup, the premium industry award in the horticulture industry, was awarded to Andrew Fenton, current president and chair of the NZ Fruitgrowers Federation and chair of the NZ Fruitgrowers' Charitable Trust, which he has served on since 2003.

The cup is awarded to a person who has made an outstanding and meritorious contribution to the New Zealand horticulture industry.

For more than five decades, Andrew has brought his passion for the industry, his experience, practical common-sense approach and constructive and positive team attitude to many aspects of the sector.

His deep interest in industry good matters, in kiwifruit and the wider horticulture industry has benefited all growers. He enjoys making a leadership contribution to industry progress and advocacy.

President's Trophy

The President's Trophy, which recognises a person showing promise in a horticulture industry business and/or leadership, was presented to Daniel Kenna.

In a relatively short time in the sector, Daniel, an orchard manager and researcher with Katikati-based KWKIWI, has made a significant contribution in the fields of research, community, innovation and sustainability.

He is co-chair of Future Farmers New Zealand and has established, in partnership with Zespri, the Impact Orchard Network (ION) programme, which is designed to develop, improve and demonstrate sustainable and effective orchard practices.

The Horticulture New Zealand Life Member award went to Stewart Burns, managing director Camelot Fresh Fruit Company/Summerfruit NZ Board grower representative – presented by Bernadine Guilleux, HortNZ Board chair and Brydon Nisbet HortNZ Board deputy chair

Trevelyan's Pack & Cool Ltd's Pranoy Pal (centre) accepted the Sustainable Innovation Award from Bernadine Guilleux, HortNZ Board chair and Brydon Nisbet, HortNZ Board deputy chair

Sustainable Innovation Award

The Sustainable Innovation Award was presented to Gordon Skipage and Pranoy Pal of Te Puke-based Trevelyan's Pack & Cool Ltd.

The award celebrates those who are developing, or have developed, technologies, an innovation or undertaken research that increased productivity, profitability or environmental sustainability in the horticulture sector.

Gordon, Trevelyan's head of technical and Pranoy, kiwifruit technical manager, are working with research partners conducting regenerative agriculture trials to provide evidence-based knowledge for the New Zealand kiwifruit industry.

This is laying the groundwork for further research that can help the industry move towards sustainable, low-carbon production and climate resilience.

Manaaki Award

The Manaaki Award was awarded to a cross-collaborative team comprising T&G Global, Hastings Health Centre and the OrbitProtect/nib NZ.

Daniel Kenna (centre) with the President's Trophy awarded by Bernadine Guilleux, HortNZ Board chair and Brydon Nisbet, HortNZ Board deputy chair

The 2025 Horticulture Bledisloe Cup recipient Andrew Fenton with Bernadine Guilleux, HortNZ Board chair and Brydon Nisbet, HortNZ Board deputy chair

The award recognises a person, group or organisation that has risen beyond the call of duty to support employers and workers. It recognises the positive impact an act of service has had on employers, workers, the community and the whole Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme.

> **Award winners showed exceptional dedication to worker health and wellbeing, development of innovative and sustainable practices and growth of the sector**

Working together in 2024, the team established the RSE satellite health clinic at T&G's Whakatu packhouse in Hawke's Bay – accessible to all RSE workers in the region.

The clinic, a first for New Zealand, proved so successful that a pilot programme was extended to May 2025 and the clinic will run again for the 2026 RSE season.

Horticulture New Zealand Life Member award

The Horticulture New Zealand Life Member award went to Stewart Burns, managing director of the Camelot Fresh Fruit Company in Hastings and a member of the Summerfruit NZ board of directors since 2014.

The award recognises distinguished and honourable service to horticulture.

Stewart is a strong supporter of broader sector development and grower representation and is known for sharing his knowledge and fostering collaboration among growers.

He has also introduced new orchard techniques, trialled emerging fruit varieties and is always ready to engage with others in the industry to improve outcomes.

Award winners showed exceptional dedication to worker health and wellbeing, development of innovative and sustainable practices and growth of the sector. ●

Read more about the awards here:
www.hortnz.co.nz/news-events-and-media/events/industry-awards

Award recipient Brett Wotton with his daughter Emily. Photo by Brydie Thompson

Kiwifruit New Zealand

HUMBLE PIECE OF PVC IS A GAME-CHANGER

Eastern Bay of Plenty kiwifruit grower and harvest contractor Brett Wotton has won the 2025 Kiwifruit Innovation Award. His initiative – covers for picking bags during harvest to improve handling practices and prevent fruit damage – helps to reduce quality costs and to maximise returns to growers.

The cover acts as a protective bib at the top of the bag supporting good practice picking, while also shielding just-picked kiwifruit fruit from any soft, damaged or overripe fruit which may accidentally fall. It ensures a high-quality product is delivered to packhouses.

Kiwifruit New Zealand (KNZ) chair and award judge Samantha Sharif says the simple yet effective solution has been widely adopted by the industry, with post-harvest service provider EastPack's orchard management arm, Prospa, making the use of bag covers compulsory. Both picking bag manufacturers in New Zealand now also offer a covered bag option.

Brett says, "It's incredible to see how a humble piece of PVC has become a game-changer for fruit quality."

www.knz.co.nz

GROWING SUCCESS: **CELEBRATING THE POTATO INDUSTRY'S FINEST**

New Zealand's potato sector recently gathered in Christchurch for the biennial Potato Industry Awards, celebrating outstanding contributions to one of the country's most vital agricultural industries.

Kate Trufitt : Potatoes New Zealand chief executive

Held alongside the Potatoes New Zealand Conference in August, the Potato Industry Awards 2025 recognised individuals and organisations demonstrating exceptional leadership, innovation and commitment to sustainable practices.

These winners strengthen our entire industry and set standards for excellence. The potato industry continues evolving through passionate, dedicated people who play vital roles in growing a resilient and innovative future.

The evening's top honours went to three industry veterans who received Life Member Awards for their distinguished service. John Jackson's nearly 50-year career spans from pea viner driver to industry authority. His legacy includes spearheading the Canterbury Potato Liberibacter Initiative, a world-leading research project combatting the devastating Zebra-chip disease.

His work with McCain Foods for three decades helped establish Canterbury as a premium potato-growing region, whilst his recent involvement in forming the Potato Seed Co-operative demonstrates his ongoing commitment to industry advancement.

Joining John as a Life Member, Pukekohe grower Peter Reynolds was honoured for transforming his family's multi-generational farming operation into a showcase for sustainable practices. Operating across more than 200ha, Reynolds has pioneered reduced tillage methods and sophisticated soil management systems that protect both productivity and the environment.

Following major flooding in 1996, Reynolds became a driving force in the Franklin Sustainability Project, establishing shelter belts, riparian systems and advanced erosion control mechanisms that now serve as a model for sustainable vegetable growing throughout the region.

The third Life Member, Harsad 'Harry' Bhula, represents the multicultural foundation of New Zealand agriculture. Following his father's pioneering journey from India in 1950, Harry and his brother Sam built B. Das & Sons into one of the region's most respected vegetable operations, employing 40 staff across 250ha at its peak.

Beyond farming excellence, Harry has been a pillar of community service, leading the Indian Association and consistently giving back through donations to local schools, food banks and community organisations.

> **"The ceremony highlighted an industry successfully balancing tradition with innovation, environmental responsibility with economic viability, and individual achievement with community benefit**

Innovation took centre stage with the Potato Seed Co-operative Ltd claiming the Innovation Award for their transformative investment in cutting-edge processing technology. The Ashburton-based co-operative, owned by 12 process grower shareholders, has revolutionised seed preparation through advanced optical grading and cutting systems.

Sustainability excellence was recognised through Matt and Heidi Hart from Canterbury's Longlane Farm, who have transformed their 890ha operation into a model of environmental stewardship. Their data-driven approach includes soil moisture monitoring, variable rate fertilisation and innovative practices like nature strips for natural pest control.

Potatoes New Zealand awarded Life Memberships to Harry Bhula (left) and Peter Reynolds (above)

Pukekohe agronomist Jamie Wells took home the Shining Star Award for rising stars under 35

John Jackson was recognised with a Life Member award for his instrumental role in developing New Zealand's potato processing sector and leading the fight against Liberibacter

Heidi and Matt Hart from Canterbury's Longlane Farm were presented with the Sustainability Award by Potatoes New Zealand chair Paul Olsen

Seed potato growers Tracey and Andy McKay, winners of the Community Award

The Harts' comprehensive sustainability model extends beyond environmental considerations to encompass staff wellbeing through fatigue management policies and investment in training, proving that sustainable agriculture benefits people as well as the planet.

The industry's future was celebrated through Jamie Wells, who claimed the Shining Star Award for rising stars under 35. The Pukekohe agronomist has already achieved remarkable success, in both regional and national Young Grower competitions and serving as inaugural chair of Potatoes New Zealand's Youth Council.

Jamie represents the new generation of agricultural leaders, having discovered his passion for vegetable growing at school before completing his agricultural science degree whilst working with Balle Bros. His story demonstrates that horticulture isn't limited to traditional farming families but welcomes passionate newcomers.

Community spirit was recognised through Andy and Tracey McKay, winners of the Community Award for their positive impact on local communities and support for fellow growers.

Their most significant community contribution has been supporting Woodbury School's fundraising efforts for a new bike track. Over three years, the McKays helped raise approximately $30,000 for the school through an innovative community partnership.

The ceremony highlighted an industry successfully balancing tradition with innovation, environmental responsibility with economic viability, and individual achievement with community benefit – demonstrating why New Zealand's potato sector remains a cornerstone of the country's agricultural 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**

GOOD SEASON FOR TAMARILLOS

Initial feedback indicates 2025 has delivered a great harvest for most tamarillo growers despite some challenges along the way.

Robyn Wickenden : Chair NZ Tamarillo Growers Association

While we don't have the mechanisms to collect detailed industry data during the season, the numbers we're hearing are encouraging. One wholesaler reports that they have shifted more than 60 percent more volume this season – a substantial increase.

Harvest winding up

The increase in volume comes down to several factors: generally favourable growing conditions, new growers entering the industry and an increase in plantings. Plus, particularly here in Northland, it's been heartening to see our region finally recovering from the devastation of Cyclone Gabrielle, although some orchards – including ours – are still not fully back to form.

When ex-Cyclone Tam struck in April, it damaged some of Northland's early green fruit that would have served the season's tail end, creating a somewhat abrupt stop to the season for many Northland growers.

Field days and orchard visits make a huge difference in learning to spot signs of Liberibacter infections

Fortunately, Bay of Plenty growers continued harvesting well into the season, with many expecting to reach Labour Weekend before finishing.

Pricing pressures

Higher volumes hitting the market was always going to present pricing challenges, particularly during a tough economic climate and ongoing cost-of-living concerns. As a result, this season orchard gate returns have dropped back to 2021 levels – averaging around $7 per kilogram. Back in 2023 prices reached a high of average price of $9.58 per kilogram, although that was influenced by supply constraints from the cyclone and after being hit badly by Liberibacter, the disease spread by Tomato Potato Psyllid, in the previous seasons.

Northland growers missed out on some early season premiums due to warm autumn conditions in the Bay of Plenty, which meant their early fruit came to market simultaneously with our usually earlier Northland fruit.

Export markets haven't helped either. Tamarillo exports to the United States, which reached 13.8 tonnes in 2019, have stalled, with minimal exports for the last 3 years. Supply chain challenges (including aircraft engine maintenance woes) continue to hit winter air freight capacity to the United States – and were recently compounded by the new tariffs.

Given the small number of tamarillo growers, as niche producers, our spray programmes and harvests don't always align well with exporter requirements, and so we miss out to more predictable air freight exports.

Consumer preferences

Retailers have been bagging fruit to shift higher volumes more effectively. Interestingly, this season we've seen New Zealand consumers preferring medium-sized fruit over large – which probably reflects cost-of-living pressures and people having the idea that more fruit for your dollar equals value for money.

Most of us are growing large varieties, so that market dynamic isn't ideal. But you just can't get around consumer psychology sometimes.

Supporting new growers

Our Association has welcomed new members, particularly a few avocado growers diversifying to tamarillos, which has helped bump our numbers up to 28 members.

Tamarillo full year regeneration (right) after (left) hard pruning during a workshop for NZ Tamarillo Growers Association members

I strongly urge new growers to join the Association because it is really important for the whole sector to work closely together – particularly to keep Liberibacter at bay by good orchard hygiene and a preventive spray programme. The Tomato Potato Psyllid can travel up to 16km on the winds, so cooperation among growers is vital. The NZ Tamarillo Growers Association is working actively across horticulture, particularly with other Solanaceae crop groups, to evaluate controls.

> **The key lies in maintaining our collaborative approach, sharing knowledge and ensuring new growers receive the support they need**

Unfortunately, it seems that psyllid pressure is back on the rise. At our orchard we keep pretty good data and we saw a noticeable increase in Liberibacter infected trees at the end of summer – up to 12 percent infection rates, after being down in the single digits for a couple years since we were hit badly in 2021. Back then we saw up to 40 percent.

I believe most growers in Northland are experiencing similar increases, although Bay of Plenty appears to be faring better at present.

It's really important that new growers are aware of the risks. The learning curve can be steep. They can get a lot of support and know-how through the Association, provided they join up.

It can be particularly difficult for new growers to spot signs of Liberibacter infections, and that's where field days and orchard visits make a huge difference to learn to spot signs of infections. There's simply no replacement for actually seeing the symptoms yourself together with someone knowledgeable.

Looking forward

Despite the pricing pressures and disease challenges, this season's volume demonstrates the resilience and potential of New Zealand's tamarillo industry. The key lies in maintaining our collaborative approach, sharing knowledge and ensuring new growers receive the support they need to succeed in what can be a rewarding but challenging industry.

For more information about the NZ Tamarillo Growers Association, visit: **www.tamarillo.com**

NEW BENCHMARK IN **INDUSTRY TRANSPARENCY**

In a step forward for grower representation and industry transparency, New Zealand Kiwifruit Growers Inc. (NZKGI) has released the inaugural Kiwifruit Industry Performance Report – a comprehensive publication designed to give growers a clearer, more detailed view of how the kiwifruit industry is performing.

The report, distributed to kiwifruit growers throughout July and August alongside NZKGI's AGM pack, marks a milestone in NZKGI's evolution. While the organisation has previously produced quarterly and annual Key Performance Indicator documents focused on Zespri, this new report expands the scope and depth of performance measurement across the entire post-harvest sector.

"This is a big step forward for NZKGI," says chief executive Colin Bond. "Performance measurement of Zespri and post-harvest is a core role for us, and we saw an opportunity to deliver more value to growers in this space. The new report allows us to better fulfil one of our key responsibilities under our constitution."

The move comes in response to increasing calls from growers for greater transparency and timely insights into the performance of the industry. NZKGI has responded with a publication that not only aligns with Zespri's financial calendar, but also caters to a wide range of information needs – from high-level summaries to in-depth analysis.

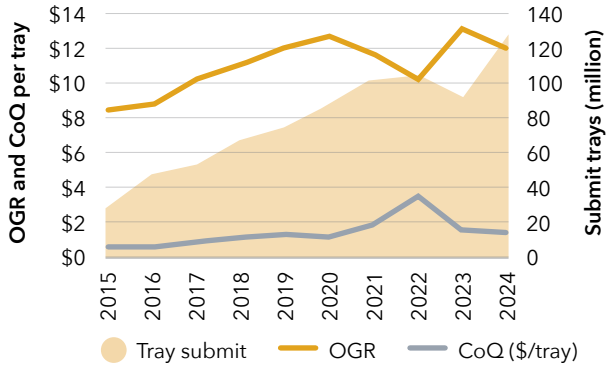
"We know growers consume information in different ways," Colin explains. "Some want a quick overview, others want to dig into the detail. So we've designed the report to meet those varying needs, with summaries, context and deeper data all in one place."

One of the features of the report is its traffic light system, which helps readers quickly identify areas of concern or success. This visual cue adds clarity and immediacy, making it easier for growers to focus on what matters most.

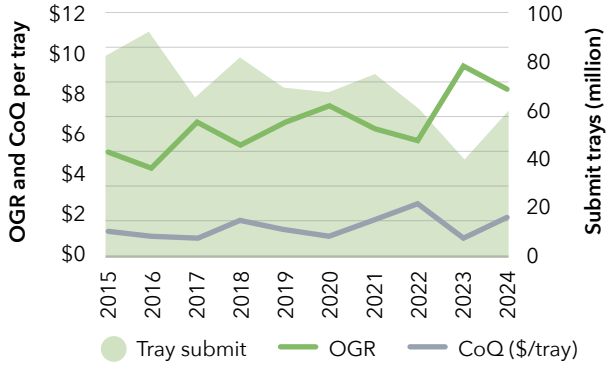
The first edition of the report has already received positive feedback from growers, and NZKGI is keen to build on that momentum. "We're proud of what we've delivered," Colin says. "But this is just the beginning. Our intention is to improve the report year on year, and grower feedback will be essential in shaping future editions."

The report is also available on the NZKGI website, ensuring accessibility for all growers, regardless of location or preference for digital formats.

TRAYS SUBMITTED, OGR AND COST OF QUALITY PER TRAY BY YEAR, GOLD CONVENTIONAL



TRAYS SUBMITTED, OGR AND COST OF QUALITY PER TRAY BY YEAR, GREEN CONVENTIONAL



Supply chain effectiveness

Among the many insights in the report, one key example is Cost of Quality (CoQ). Given the industry's shifting dynamics with a trend of declining Green kiwifruit volumes and rising gold kiwifruit volumes, the report highlighted concerns with the direction of travel of the CoQ despite increasing Orchard Gate Returns (OGRs) over the past decade.

Green CoQ as a percentage of the Green OGR is almost identical to what it was 10 years ago despite the volume decreasing. The report notes that years where Green conventional did experience an increase in submit, there was a corresponding rise in CoQ from the preceding year.

In gold, despite a very strong demand-growing-ahead-of-supply story, there has been a long-term increase of CoQ as a percentage of the OGR over the last decade. "These are the kinds of insights that growers have been asking for," Colin notes. "By highlighting areas like CoQ, we're helping growers and industry stakeholders focus on where improvements can be made."

Delivering more value for the levy

At its core, the Kiwifruit Industry Performance Report is about delivering more value for the levy growers contribute to NZKGI. By expanding the scope of reporting and providing timely, relevant data, the organisation is reinforcing its commitment to advocacy and accountability.

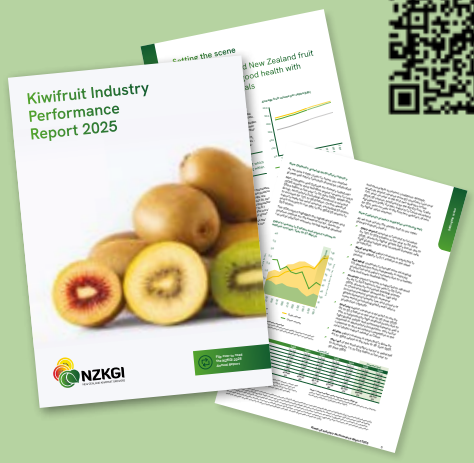
"This report is a reflection of our ongoing commitment to growers," Colin says. "It's about making sure they have the information they need to make informed decisions and to hold the industry to account where necessary."

The depth and clarity of the report speak volumes and sets a new standard for industry reporting.

As the industry continues to evolve, NZKGI is positioning itself as a proactive, data-driven advocate for growers. The Kiwifruit Industry Performance Report is not just a publication – it's a promise to keep improving, keep listening and keep delivering.

"We're excited about where this can go," he concludes. "This is just the first edition, and with growers' input, we'll make it even better."

Download on the full report via the QR code or visit **www.nzkgi.org.nz**



TomatoesNZ

TOMATOESNZ BOARD **CHANGES AND AWARDS**

The end of August saw TomatoesNZ support the Horticulture Conference in Wellington. What a great event this was. It was a good chance to connect with other members of the wider horticulture industry, some really interesting presentations both from local speakers and from Australia, and TomatoesNZ took the opportunity to hold our AGM. Thank you to the growers in the room and online who attended.

Dinah Cohen : TomatoesNZ general manager

As part of this meeting, we said goodbye to long standing board director Ben Smith from T&G who has always been extremely generous with his time and knowledge. Despite being head of growing for New Zealand's largest tomato growing operation, Ben always saw the wider perspective on industry matters, which made him a very valued member of the board.

Our AGM was also the chance to welcome our newest board member. With Ben retiring, and Mike Saklani putting himself forward to stand again on rotation, we had one nomination for one position and Jeremy Whitten, head of operations at T&G, joins the board uncontested.

Jeremy brings a wealth of knowledge from other industries such as Fonterra and James Hardie, the building material producer. Jeremy has already shown he tackles issues with a knowledgeable, calm head and we look forward to having him on the TomatoesNZ Board.

We also enjoyed honouring two retired stalwarts of the tomato industry by awarding Mark Tregidga and Lex Dillon with 'Life Membership'.

Mark and his family were involved in building the first greenhouse on Favona Road in 1945. They were leaders of their day with the technology that they adopted. Mark went on to be a long-standing director at T&G.

Lex on the other hand started his career in the field of accounting and only came to horticulture by way of a crate company which saw him land a job at NZ Hothouse. Twenty-five years later, Lex tried to retire but TomatoesNZ saw in Lex the ability to champion R&D in pest management by bridging the gap between commercial growers and science. Lex understands what is important to commercial growers and is trusted by them. He has now delivered many great workshops in the learnings from our A Lighter Touch trial and has been instrumental in developing an IPM guide that growers can pick up and use.

Well done to both of our award recipients!

The new board met in early September and hot topics remain biosecurity and energy. Having consulted growers on what position TomatoesNZ should take when Tomato Brown Rugose Fruit Virus (ToBRFV) is detected in New Zealand, the board is pressing ahead with consulting other GIA partners on this. The overwhelming feeling is that eradication should be limited to a small, extremely contained outbreak but that for all other cases, growers would be better supported by having a management plan in place. So this is what TomatoesNZ is now working towards if the other GIA partners agree. From a grower perspective, the hope is that management of this easily spread pathogen would see growing operations using resistant varieties that fight ToBRFV with high levels of hygiene in the greenhouses.

Reporting unusual symptoms and taking part in surveillance water testing are still important measures for managing the spread.

TomatoesNZ is very aware that growers in New Zealand face the unpleasant prospect of having both PepMV and ToBRFV in their operations. While this is the case in many other countries, these growers have access to one of the 'vaccines' to help manage PepMV symptoms. This is why TomatoesNZ has been working on the many aspects required to hopefully register the mild strain organism in New Zealand in the not-too-distant future. We will keep you updated on how this project is progressing.

New TomatoesNZ Life Members Lex Dillon (left, with TomatoesNZ chair Barry O'Neil) and Mark Tregidga

Energy continues to be a 'hot topic' with volatile prices for gas and electricity and growers who are trying to renew contracts, facing huge cost increases that outstrip potential profits. There isn't a one size fits all solution, which is why TomatoesNZ and Vegetables NZ continue to advocate for all types of energy to be made available to growers and for financial assistance given to those who do want to make the change from fossil fuels.

Our energy supplier event in Pukekohe on 18 September allowed many growers to have one on one conversations with suppliers including wood chip, solar and geothermal.

On this theme, we are holding a webinar with our colleagues at Grodan to hear about the results from the last two years of trials in the Netherlands whereby the team aimed to reduce their energy inputs by 40 percent in the first year and they surpassed this. Come along to understand the lessons they have learned and what they hope to achieve next winter.

WEBINAR DETAILS

When: Monday 13 October, 7pm New Zealand time

Where: Online, link will be sent out to those who RSVP

RSVP: via the QR code or on **https://forms.office.com/r/pggBQB2JK1**

If you have any questions about anything fresh tomato related, please don't hesitate to contact me: **dinah.cohen@tomatoesnz.co.nz**

TRUST'S **GRANTS TOP $550,000**

For the financial year ended 31 March 2025 the NZ Fruitgrowers' Charitable Trust provided grants of $552,590 to support the fruit growing industry.

The trust's chair Andrew Fenton says that while the total spend is up almost 10 percent against the previous year, the number of grants more than doubled to 31. The increase in grantees reflects the broad range of activities funded by the trust.

The trust offers grants to the New Zealand fruit growing industry and is interested in applications that focus on research, education, fruit grower groups, generic industry issues, industry people and the flow-on benefit for New Zealand.

The trust awards grants from funds generated from financial assets as well as rent from the trust's key commercial building asset – the iconic heritage Huddart Parker building on Post Office Square in Wellington.

Grants distributed in the last financial year include:

- Support to local district associations with a focus on the Young Grower of the Year competitions
- Supporting the sector's training initiatives, with an emphasis on developing leadership skills at all levels within the industry – including HortNZ's Leadership Programme and Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme scholarships
- Assisting with education resources at the secondary school level to attract school-leavers into the industry
- Helping to fund: *NZGrower & Orchardist* magazine, New Zealand's premier grower resource for the horticulture sector; *Fresh Facts*, which provides data about New Zealand's fresh produce industry; and New Zealand Horticulture Export Authority's *Barriers to Export Trade* report
- Providing postgraduate scholarships to students for study in the fruit growing industry
- Assisting in funding various sector organisations that are actively promoting the health benefits of fruit consumption, including the 5+ A Day programme.

The Huddart Parker building is a key asset for the NZ Fruitgrowers' Charitable Trust

SUPPORT IN ADVERSE WEATHER EVENTS

To assist fruit growers in the Tasman/Marlborough area who have been affected by the weather events in June and July, the NZ Fruitgrowers' Charitable Trust has made $50,000 available for fruit growers to assist with flood recovery, insurance assessment and to review financial and production outcomes.

The Motueka Fruit Growers Association is administering the funds. This funding follows on from the $219,000 that the NZ Fruitgrowers' Charitable Trust spent to support fruit growers following Cyclone Gabrielle in 2023.

Full details of grants for the financial year 2024/25 are in the annual report, published on the New Zealand Fruitgrowers' Charitable Trust website.

Visit: **www.nzfct.org.nz**

For further information, contact the trust's executive officer: **alan.bird@nzfct.org.nz**.

UPDATE ON EPA REASSESSMENTS

Active reassessments

- **Oxadiazon**: Decision expected in early-mid 2026. HortNZ previously submitted that it is an effective weed control product (Foresite®, Exadia®, Oracle™) for the horticultural sector, specifically blackcurrants and onions.

Planned reassessments and indicative dates

- **Bifenthrin**: An insecticide planned to be reassessed in late 2025/early 2026. It is used on kiwifruit, kūmara, potatoes, processed vegetables, squash and pumpkin crops as detailed in HortNZ's 2024 submission.
- **Carbendazim**: Second half of 2026.
- **Thiacloprid, acetamiprid, thiamethoxam** (neonicotinoids): First half of 2028.

For information about crop protection, contact HortNZ senior risk policy advisor natalie.wong@hortnz.co.nz

PRODUCT LABELLING REVIEW

The Ministry for Regulation's review into product labelling explores how to reduce compliance costs related to labelling, encourage innovation (like digital labelling and QR codes) and align better with global trading partners. The terms of reference are currently being shaped. HortNZ had an opportunity to provide a submission, which is published on our website. The main points include:

- Country-of-origin labelling is important for our horticulture industry and needs to remain. In some cases, there would be benefit from better enforcement to ensure New Zealand-grown produce is not disadvantaged in the market. This also means greater transparency for consumers.
- Labelling for basic food safety information should remain on a physical label, with other forms of labelling (such as digital) allowed to convey other types of information.

The review is moving at pace and is expected to be complete by December 2025.
For more information contact HortNZ senior risk policy advisor felicity.lawlor@hortnz.co.nz

VEGETABLE GROWER WORKSHOP – AUCKLAND/WAIKATO

Vegetable growers are invited to a workshop on effective water and irrigation management in collaboration with IrrigationNZ. The workshop assists growers with on-farm practices and support with compliance. It will focus on hard hose gun irrigators and pivot and linear irrigation systems and consist of a theory session at the Tuakau Hotel, followed by an outdoor session (weather dependent) on a nearby grower site.

When: Wednesday, 15 October
Time: 10:00am – 2:00pm (refreshments provided)
Where: Tuakau Hotel (downstairs conference room), 1/3 George Street, Tuakau, Waikato

Numbers are limited; early registration is encouraged.
Please contact arjune.dahya@hortnz.co.nz or call 027 336 4994.

SIGN UP

Get the latest horticulture policy and risk updates, industry programmes and events in your inbox and have your say with HortNZ's Weekly Briefing.

Email comms@hortnz.co.nz to receive the weekly email.

HIGH RESISTANCE ToBRFV

HREZ

ENZA ZADEN

High Resistance by Enza Zaden (HREZ) is a growing collection of tomato varieties that convey High Resistance to ToBRFV. The HREZ collection includes varieties in all significant tomato types including large plum (Roma), beef, baby plum (grape/snack), cherry, cocktail and tomatoes-on-the-vine (TOV/cluster).

Follow the QR code for more varieties and information on ToBRFV

Or speak to one of our representatives:
email: sales@enzazaden.co.nz
Phone +64 9 963 0122

ENZA ZADEN

E15A.43687:
Heated Large TOV
Resistances:
HR: ToMV:0-2/ToANV/ToBRFV/Pf:A-I/Va:0/Vd:0/Fol:0,1
Heated Production.
Strong growth habit.
High production. Uniform bunches with firm fruit and nice red colour. Pruning to 6 or 5.
Strong against botrytis.
Weight approx 160-170g.

Formoza:
Heated Large TOV
Resistances:
HR: ToMV:0-2/ToBRFV/Pf:A-E/Fol:0,1/For
IR: On
Heated Production. Strong and vigorous plant. Maintains fruit size and quality throughout the season. Deep red fruit colour with excellent truss balance and uniformity.
Weight approx 180g.

Rhodium:
Heated Large TOV
Resistances:
HR: ToMV:0-2/ToBRFV/Pf:A-E/Va:0/Vd:0/Fol:0,1
IR: TSWV/On
Heated Production. Vigorous, well-balanced plant. High early yield, with regular fruit setting. Generative open plant habit, labour friendly. Firm, shiny red fruit, dark green calyx.
Weight: 140-160g.

Avalantino Rei:
Heated Large Cocktail
Resistances:
HR: ToMV:0-2/ToANV/ToBRFV/Ff:A-E/Va:0/Vd:0/Fo
IR: TSWV/On/Ma/Mi/Mj
Heated production.
Open plant habit with regular truss production. Medium to early maturing. Strong against splitting. Excellent flavour and quality. Best grown 6-7 fruit per truss. Weight: 70-80g.

Icaria:
Heated Mini Plum
Resistances:
HR: ToMV:0-2/ToANV/ToBRFV/Fol:0,1
IR: Ma/Mi/Mj
Heated Production. Strong, well-balanced plant. Productive, with compact trusses. Excellent colour, fast colouring. Great flavour with consistently high Brix. Long shelf-life. Weight: 11-15g.