



## Processing a dramatic season

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# New Level 4 programme

In response to industry, we are excited to launch the new Level 4 New Zealand Certificate in Fruit Production for experienced staff who have completed a Level 3 Fruit Production programme (or have at least three years' experience) and are keen to move into supervisory roles.

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JULY 2023

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# Horticulture is the future, but it will be different

*We are going through turbulent times, trying to grow through ongoing weather events, the introduction of pricing for agriculture emissions, freshwater regulations and plans, and low prices for our products.*

Barry O'Neil : HortNZ president

**On and on it seems to go. But I believe these are only speed bumps on the path towards the expansion of horticulture and will not slow its growth. Horticulture will become the dominant food production source in New Zealand and in the world.**

If we take a twenty or thirty-year horizon, we can see past the immediate day-to-day challenges and gain a better view of what the future will be. I see a very positive future for horticulture, for all the right reasons. Plant-based diets are increasingly sought after, as are our natural, healthy and great tasting products which environmentally have the lowest overall footprint compared with any other outdoors food production system.

Traditional pastoral agriculture I hope will continue to succeed, but it has had its peak, and will over this horizon reduce in size to what some would argue is the rightsizing of this sector.

Covered cropping will probably be the area in horticulture with the most significant increase, with greater control of inputs including the weather, and management of discharges. We already have significant knowledge of undercover growing, but increasingly we are seeing more vertical farms, and after much hype they are at last starting to get a viable business model emerging.

Plenty®, the American based vertical farming enterprise, run by a Kiwi incidentally, is spending over \$1 billion building the largest vertical farm in the world, and is now looking to grow not only leafy greens and strawberries, but also tomatoes and kiwifruit. Up to 350 times the yield per acre of conventional farms with a fraction of the footprint, is their mantra.

So as we hit these speed bumps we need to keep our focus on the future, and not lose sight of all the opportunities ahead. Innovation has been a cornerstone of our country's success, and there are many pioneer innovators to thank for what we can enjoy today.

And congratulations to Murray McPhail who has just been awarded a King's Birthday honour for his contribution to horticulture. LeaderBrand, the company that Murray founded in 1975, has a focus on innovation, and provides a 200 percent guarantee on all its produce. Murray has not only been innovative but he is not afraid to take calculated risks.



It's great to see LeaderBrand expand into covered cropping with the nearly 12-hectare facility being built in Gisborne, a tremendous innovative effort, showing us all how we can do things differently and better.

The opportunity for horticulture is for us to continue being innovative and taking calculated risks. In today's namby-pamby world, I sometimes ponder whether we are rushing to become extinct as a species, being unwilling to take risks and just sitting back in comfort waiting for the inevitable to happen!

“

**Innovation has been a cornerstone of our country's success**

If we are not prepared to take calculated risks and innovate, we will stagnate and sooner or later be disrupted, displaced and become redundant. Around the year I was born I marvel at the innovations that amazingly talented men and women of that time achieved, with the invention and commercialisation of the microwave oven, the TV remote controls which I assume a man invented (!), jet aircraft and computers.

If these were being invented in 2023. I wonder whether it would take ten years to get permission to do the research, and then another 20 years to get regulatory approval for their use.

And what I think is absolutely great about Kiwi innovation

is that it often comes from the farm and orchard and not the laboratory. Clever farmers and growers who are also mechanics, engineers, pilots, breeders, and so on, and who can practically do or make nearly everything.

New Zealand was the first country to successfully use light aircraft for sowing seeds and spreading fertiliser. The world's first farm bike was invented in 1963 by a New Plymouth farmer, and of course there's Gallagher's electric fence. Deer capture by helicopter might have been risky but it worked, as did breeding sheep for New Zealand's unique farming conditions, such as the Corriedale, Perendale and Drysdale.

And what about the HamiltonJet, or the Martin Jetpack, or John Britten's superbike, all amazing inventions from Kiwis who were practical and who used their talents to achieve really innovative products.

In 1900 New Zealand had the highest number of patent applications per capita in the world. In 2006 New Zealand was ranked fifth in the world on the basis of population for patents filed. Still good, but slipping away from the lead we once had.

“

## A focus on a better future is definitely needed!

So how can we get innovative thinking and action back into our ethos and culture? A focus on the future rather than the here and now or the past, seems to be very much needed, and we seem to be spending too much time stuck in the past or romanticising it, when it wasn't always actually that flash! A focus on a better future is definitely needed!

Taking away the ridiculous amount of time spent unnecessarily ticking boxes for local and central government compliance would surely be another. And allowing those that want to push the boat out to do things differently to get on with it, while not adversely impacting others.

And investing in innovation is essential. Nationally our research and development (R&D) spend is about half that of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development) average, and government research expenditure in the agricultural sector has fallen since the early 1990s. Not only are we spending too little on innovation and science, but we also have a short-term investment focus, which doesn't support solving more complex issues.

In these turbulent times let's do everything we can to stay energised and positive, not lose sight of where horticulture is going, and reinvigorate our focus on innovation by trialling new and different ways of growing. And tell our story and aspirations to everyone that will listen!

Kia kaha. ●

# It's crunch time

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# Time to restore hope

*More than 100,000 people – including politicians and government officials from Wellington – attended the Fielddays at Mystery Creek last week.*

Nadine Tunley : HortNZ chief executive

**The Fielddays are a chance for the food and fibre sector to reflect, hear from different speakers, experience new technology, as well as socialise. It being an election year, these Fielddays were also an opportunity for politicians to have contact with the food and fibre sector's grassroots.**

KPMG used the Fielddays to release its annual Agribusiness Agenda, which is titled Energising a World of Anxiety this year.

The detailed report concludes that New Zealand's food and fibre sector is at a crossroad, and "uncertainty around the pathways for change is a significant factor in anxiety."

This statement says it all for me. The horticulture industry knows it must change the way it grows because of climate change, labour shortages and changes in consumer preferences, etc. The industry also knows it has the solutions to some of New Zealand's challenges, especially around reducing emissions and "feeding our five million first" - another of the points the KPMG report makes.

However, which way is the best way to go? Particularly when some growers - like those affected by Cyclone Gabrielle in the Hawke's Bay and Tairāwhiti Gisborne - need to know the best way to go, right now.

I have been associated with the food and fibre sector for more than 30 years. Over that time, we've had our uncertainties, but today's challenges are the most numerous and complex we've faced, which is why the sector is so anxious.

So, what's the solution? Coming together to develop the solutions must be the answer.

The challenge with this approach is to keep everyone in the tent while the different options are examined, as well as to ensure the process is as quick as possible, to give people the hope they need at this critical time.

In terms of the tent, there's a large number of stakeholders involved: central and local government, iwi, commercial players, as well as service providers like banks and insurance companies. And all these stakeholders must



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**Editor:**

Andrew Bristol  
Ph: 021 021 62 021  
Email: andrew.bristol@hortnz.co.nz

**Advertising Manager:**

Jackie Enright  
Ph: 04 494 9986  
Mobile: 0274 489 913  
Email: jackie.enright@hortnz.co.nz

**Design:**

Scenario.co.nz  
Ph: 04 385 9766  
Email: joy@scenario.co.nz

**Subscriptions:**

Email: info@hortnz.co.nz



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come together – and quickly – for the common good, and plan for a future that involves a greater number of extreme weather events.

These are the challenges with coming together to plan and deliver the fundamental change that’s needed. But coming together is the best way forward, as it will get us solutions that stick, empower, and restore hope. ●

“  
**Uncertainty around the pathways for change is a significant factor in anxiety**



Because of the size of the challenge, central government needs to take the lead. For a start, they must ensure that reform of the Resource Management Act supports communities to do what they must do to adapt – and quickly. Government also has access to a wealth of climate change impact modelling, which needs to be made freely available to support communities’ decision making.

Then there’s the funding of all this change. Taxpayer money needs to be applied wisely over a timeframe far longer than current government Budget setting processes allow. Plus, public/private funding arrangements need to be encouraged, and managed better than they have been in the past.



Fieldays setup

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# YOUR LEVY AT WORK

INDUSTRY WIDE ISSUES FOR INDUSTRY GOOD

## Horticulture's potential to achieve government goals

Michelle Sands : HortNZ general manager strategy and policy

Recently Horticulture New Zealand has submitted on the Second Emissions Reduction Plan, NZ ETS Price Settings, and the Rangitikei Spatial Plan - highlighting the value of horticulture in reducing emissions and diversifying the economy. Meanwhile, our team advocates for temporary law change to support growers in their recovery efforts following the cyclone.

### Second Emissions Reduction Plan

The Second Emissions Reduction Plan is focused on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. One of the most certain ways to reduce agricultural emissions is through land use change to horticulture. However, infrastructure limitations, market barriers, water access issues, and labour shortages must be addressed.

The Emissions Reductions focus on systems change for pastoral farming. We consider the lack of emphasis on the opportunity horticulture presents for reducing emissions and improving food security is a missed opportunity. The emissions reductions that can be achieved through investing in removing barriers to horticulture are some of the most certain investments in emissions reductions that can be made.

Improving infrastructure, including rural road networks, is vital for efficient transportation and emissions reduction. Implementing a mandatory Grocery Code of Conduct can ensure fair trade practices in the domestic market. Responsible water management and allocation that considers emissions implications is necessary. Support for

labour through programmes like the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme and investment in training projects will strengthen the horticultural industry and build confidence to support the investment required for diversification.

A comprehensive National Food Strategy should promote horticulture as an alternative land use. Climate policy assistance should prioritise food security for New Zealand and the Pacific and fund initiatives for decarbonisation, such as grants and investments in technology.

### NZ ETS Price Settings

The NZ Emissions Trading Scheme (NZ ETS) price settings consultation is on annual updates to the NZ ETS unit settings for 2024-28.

Horticulture New Zealand agrees with the Climate Change Commission that managing the impact of high ETS prices on lower-income households is best achieved through targeted policies rather than ETS price control settings.

HortNZ supports using Free Industrial Allocations for their intended purpose. Emissions-intensive, trade-exposed growers rely on these allocations to offset the costs of their activities. However, growers have expressed concerns about the administrative burden of accessing and registering with the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) for the Free Industrial Allocations process, as it is designed for larger participants and not well-suited for smaller growers. HortNZ believes that all eligible growers, regardless of size, should be able to complete the registration process without additional resources.



#### CONTACT US

Freephone: 0508 467 869  
Web: [www.hortnz.co.nz](http://www.hortnz.co.nz)

Phone: 04 472 3795  
Email: [info@hortnz.co.nz](mailto:info@hortnz.co.nz)

Horticulture New Zealand  
PO Box 10232  
Wellington 6140

Level 4, Kiwi Wealth  
House, 20 Ballance St,  
Wellington 6011



### Burning Cyclone and Flood Waste Order in Council

HortNZ has submitted on a temporary law change being proposed through Order in Council under the Severe Weather Emergency Recovery Legislation Act 2023 (SWERLA), to permit open-air burning of cyclone and flood waste.

The early weather events in 2023 caused extensive damage in rural areas of Hawke's Bay and Tairāwhiti, resulting in the accumulation of various types of debris and waste. These waste piles comprise a mix of trees, crops, support structures, chemically treated and untreated timber, and different types of plastic, wire, metals, and sediment. The impact of these waste piles is particularly significant for horticultural businesses.

Clearing the waste is an essential initial step to restore the land's productivity. Due to the urgency of meeting specific timeframes for crop growth, it is crucial to remove the waste promptly. However, physically separating and removing the debris poses significant challenges, including health and safety, and is not practicable for larger piles or where the waste is intertwined.

“

### Clearing the waste is an essential initial step to restore the land's productivity

HortNZ representing affected landowners has requested an Order in Council to provide a legal pathway (through a permitted activity status) for landowners to burn the mixed waste on their properties.

The feedback HortNZ has provided on the proposed Order in Council is to ensure the permitted activity standards are worded clearly enough to enable the user to judge the meaning and effect of the rule at face value without resorting to explanations or seeking advice from those who wrote it.

We have also discussed this proposed Order in Council with Hawke's Bay Winegrowers Association and support their submission seeking to shorten the time period within which burns could occur, changing the date that the Order in Council would lapse on 15 November 2023 - avoiding the risk of smoke tainting grapes after fruit set.

### Rangitikei Spatial Plan

The Rangitikei District Council's Draft Community Spatial Plan acknowledges horticulture as a potential growth area to diversify the primary sector.

To harness the social, economic, and environmental benefits of diversifying into horticulture, the council should address development barriers by zoning productive land as rural, maintaining infrastructure for transportation, and allocating resources to low emissions industries. While the Horizons One Plan restricts intensive farming in Coastal Rangitikei, horticulture, including orchards and glasshouses, is not subject to these rules. The spatial plan should not assume that new commercial vegetable growing will always be challenging to establish, as policy changes to support vegetable production for domestic supply are likely in the coming years.

HortNZ sees a potential synergy between the spatial plan's goal of expanding horticulture and developing Bulls into a food processing and distribution hub. This industrial capacity could support the growing horticulture sector by facilitating packing and distribution. Preserving quality soils for primary production and allowing auxiliary activities like packhouses to establish nearby are crucial for achieving this vision.

HortNZ recommends against considering a block of LUC 2 soils (Land Use Capability class 2 soils) near Bulls, for lifestyle development due to potential negative effects on horticulture. The spatial plan labels it as fragmented, but horticulture can be economically viable even at smaller scales. Setting appropriate minimum lot sizes in rural areas is important to prevent the subdivision of farmland for non-agricultural use, which would result in permanent loss of productive land. HortNZ encourages the Council to maintain minimum lot sizes at a level suitable for primary production. ●

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An adult brown-marmorated stink bug. Photo courtesy of Anna Rathé

# Ahead of the game

Gabi Hidvegi : HortNZ risk policy advisor

## Partnering to protect horticulture

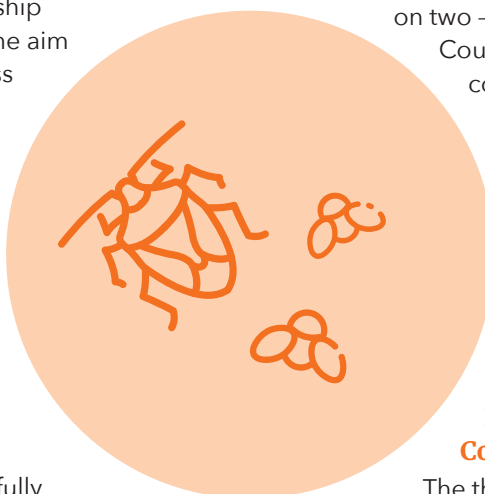
In 2014, the Government Industry Agreement for Biosecurity Readiness and Response (GIA) was established with the signing of the GIA Deed. The Deed provides a framework for a collaborative partnership between industry and the Crown with the aim of achieving better biosecurity readiness and response outcomes (GIA, 2023).

The GIA Deed sets out the principles and commitments that industry and government signatories agree to, which includes implementing biosecurity readiness activities at a national, sector and threat specific level. Central to this agreement is improving the integrity and effectiveness of our biosecurity system by raising awareness of exotic pests, sharing information, and successfully managing any detections and eradications. Collective response arrangements, biosecurity readiness capacity and capability are enhanced through signatory

engagement and co-investment, through contract like agreements called Operational Agreements (GIA, 2023).

In horticulture, there are many excellent examples of GIA readiness efforts in action, and in this article, we focus on two - the Brown Marmorated Stink Bug Council and the Fruit Fly Council. These two councils are composed of government and industry representatives who have been working hard behind the scenes to improve biosecurity readiness for their respective stakeholders (GIA, 2023).

In this article we highlight the successful contributions of these two councils to New Zealand horticulture.



## Brown Marmorated Stink Bug Council (BMSBC)

The threat of Brown Marmorated Stink Bug was identified in the mid-2010s due to the devastating impact it had overseas and ongoing interceptions pre-and-post border (MPI, 2019). The

BMSB Operational Agreement was signed in July 2017 which established the BMSB Council (BMSBC) which is leading New Zealand's national biosecurity readiness and response preparedness for BMSB (GIA, 2017). The BMSBC brings together the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), Horticulture New Zealand and eight other horticultural sector groups to enhance New Zealand's preparedness for this pest. The Council works to enhance our understanding of BMSB biology, its potential impact in New Zealand, establishment risk, ongoing surveillance, and response. Building support across the wider biosecurity system including international relationships remains key to achieving these outcomes.

Brown Marmorated Stink Bug Council chair, Nicola Robertson, noted that BMSB is a considerable threat to New Zealand.

"The potential impact of BMSB on New Zealand cannot be underestimated. It causes significant damage and is particularly difficult to control and overwinters in homes. With continued spread around the world, our risk of it establishing here continues to increase. This makes the GIA partnership particularly important to ensure we are all well prepared to respond as quickly and effectively as possible."

### Examples of BMSBC efforts

#### Biological control approval

The small parasitic wasp *Trissolcus japonicus* also known as the samurai wasp, was pre-emptively approved for release by the Environmental Protection Authority in August 2018 as a tool to combat a potential BMSB incursion. This biocontrol agent was a world-first pre-emptive biocontrol approval (EPA, 2023) and provides New Zealand with permissions (within agreed parameters) to use an additional biosecurity tool in protecting horticulture in the event of a BMSB incursion. The application was prepared by the BMSBC.

#### World leading biosecurity response plan

By 2020, the BMSB Council had developed a sufficiently well conceptualised response plan to drive supporting logistics and enable operations planning. The response



A nymph of the brown-marmorated stink bug. Photo courtesy of Anna Rathé

plan has been internationally reviewed and tested here to ensure New Zealand is well-equipped to mitigate and respond to any BMSB incursion. Efforts also extend to ensuring the appropriate chemistry has the approvals needed to control localised BMSB outbreaks.

#### Exercise Harvest Shield

Biosecurity New Zealand officials and industry partners completed a simulation - 'Exercise Harvest Shield' - in Hawke's Bay to test some elements of the BMSB operational plan in the field e.g., efficacy of trapping and surveillance and BMSB management in an incursion. Following the trial, industry and government refined the biosecurity readiness programme so that New Zealand is in the best possible position to respond to a BMSB incursion.

An advertisement for Thoroughbred Engineering. On the left, a black box contains the company logo and contact information. On the right, three photographs show the company's work: a large workshop with various green tractors and machinery, a welder working on a metal part, and two men standing next to a large green agricultural machine outdoors.

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*Exercise Harvest Shield: Biosecurity NZ officials and industry members*

### **National surveillance programme**

An extensive national surveillance programme to detect any potential BMSB incursion was established via the BMSBC and is now integrated into Biosecurity New Zealand's annual surveillance programme. In 2020, the total number of trapping sites increased from 25 to 80 to bolster our biosecurity defence and provide greater BMSB detection capability across New Zealand (Scoop, 2020). Significant work into optimising surveillance strategies and trapping systems continues to ensure we can detect BMSB as early as possible and respond effectively.

### **Public awareness campaigns**

The BMSB Council has undertaken several highly successful annual awareness campaigns including the spring-summer campaign of 2021-22 which saw over 13.5 million BMSB ads appear on household computer screens (MPI, 2022). A record number of public phone calls were received with potential BMSB sightings (Scoop, 2020). A high level of public awareness increases our chance of early detection of any BMSB incursion.

### **Fruit Fly Council (FFC)**

In May 2016, an Operational Agreement was signed between industry and government to reduce the impact of a fruit fly incursion and to deliver better biosecurity outcomes for combating economically damaging fruit fly species e.g., Queensland fruit fly and oriental fruit fly (GIA, 2023).

Critical to the Fruit Fly Council's purpose is ensuring early detection, and successful biosecurity response and

eradication of any exotic fruit fly incursion. The Fruit Fly Council also fosters the development of fruit fly-specific capability, coordinated and effective research and promoting awareness and education.

Fruit Fly Council chair, Matt Dyck, says the partnership between industry and government is continuing to deliver excellent outcomes for all New Zealanders.

"Fruit flies continue to be one of the biggest biosecurity threats facing horticulture. An unmanaged fruit fly incursion would cost the horticulture industry billions of dollars, and would have significant negative impacts on the economy, the community and New Zealand's trade relationships. By working together under GIA, government and affected industries have achieved far more than would have been possible working in isolation from each other," Matt commented.

### **Examples of FFC efforts**

#### **Comprehensive work programme**

The Fruit Fly Council has completed several projects as part of a comprehensive work programme. The council work spans prevention and readiness, further enhancing our surveillance programme and ensuring that in the event of a fruit fly incursion, New Zealand has the capability to respond quickly and eradicate any individual fruit flies to maintain trade. Many projects are relevant to operational plans including the use of new technologies such as lures, baits and traps. Developing an understanding of the effectiveness of a combination of lures for fruit flies is one area of work.

**Detection and successful eradication of Queensland Fruit Fly**

Between February and July 2019, ten individual Queensland fruit flies were detected and captured during a biosecurity response operation in Auckland. A response was stood up under GIA, with industry and government partners sharing decision making and funding of response activities. After six months of trapping, intensive baiting and inspecting hundreds of kilos of fruit, MPI declared the success of the eradication programme and New Zealand’s renewed fruit-fly free status (MPI, 2023). The total cost of the biosecurity response was \$18m between government and industry, however, the potential impact avoided to horticulture was immeasurable - the Queensland fruit fly is a serious threat to our multi-billion dollar horticulture sector with 80 percent of our crops vulnerable to this pest (RNZ, 2020, MPI, 2023).

**Readiness optimisation**

Fruit Fly Council efforts have ensured the readiness development for fruit fly is largely at an optimised state due to the ability to test and refine readiness products and processes over several past responses. MPI has sufficient stocks of fruit fly lures and traps, with the ability to procure replacements in a response situation. The council continually reviews and refines New Zealand’s readiness from previous lessons learned to make New Zealand a world leader in fruit fly readiness.

**Surveillance programme improvements**

An MPI-led annual fruit fly surveillance programme runs from September to July to match the risk season of fruit flies. In November 2022, more than 7,800 traps were stationed around New Zealand (MPI, 2022). To consolidate our existing surveillance programme, industry and

government worked collaboratively to trial 60 state-of-the-art RapidAIM traps which have the capability to detect the Queensland fruit fly and immediately send a notification of a suspected QFF individual to biosecurity officials (MPI, 2022).



**Readiness is never ‘done’, and the efforts of both Councils are ongoing**



BMSB and exotic fruit flies pose an ongoing threat to New Zealand horticulture, however, the partnership established between industry and government through the BMSB Council and Fruit Fly Council is proving successful in enhancing national biosecurity readiness and responding to incursions. Readiness is never ‘done’, and the efforts of both Councils are ongoing.

We acknowledge and thank the continued hard work and contribution made by those involved in protecting the horticulture sector and growers’ livelihoods from exotic biosecurity threats. ●



For comments and questions, please contact Gabi Hidvegi: [Gabi.Hidvegi@hortnz.co.nz](mailto:Gabi.Hidvegi@hortnz.co.nz)  
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*Wi Pere Trust won the Ahuwhenua Trophy for the top Māori horticultural enterprise, accepted by trustees Kingi Smiler and Trudy Meredith*



Front: Kingi Smiler and Trudy Meredith, Wi Pere trustees. Back: Barry O'Neil, president HortNZ; Brydon Nisbet, director HortNZ; Nadine Tunley, chief executive HortNZ; Wayne Hall, general manager horticulture Wi Pere Trust; Kate Longman, general manager engagement HortNZ; Dr Bruce Campbell, director HortNZ

## 124-year-old trust wins major Māori award

*The Wi Pere Trust established 124 years ago by a man described as 'ahead of his time' has won the Ahuwhenua Trophy for the top Māori horticultural enterprise.*

Elaine Fisher

Photos by John Cowpland

**The Minister for Māori Development, Willie Jackson made the announcement at an awards dinner, attended by 900 people in Tauranga on 10 June and there were jubilant scenes as Wi Pere whānau accepted the award.**

It was Trudy Meredith, trustee and granddaughter of Wi Pere who founded the trust in 1899, who received the Ahuwhenua Trophy on behalf of the trust. This is the second time that Wi Pere Trust has won this prestigious award. In 2022 they were named the winner in the Ahuwhenua Trophy for the top sheep and beef farm.

The other 2023 finalists were Māori Investments Ltd (MIL) - Whiritoa Orchards at Te Teko in the Bay of Plenty and Ngāi Tukairangi Trust which has orchard operations in four regions, the largest near Hastings in the Hawke's Bay.

Trudy said winning the Ahuwhenua Trophy was absolutely wonderful and her ancestor Wi Pere would have been amazed at the trust winning the Ahuwhenua Trophy for the second year in a row.

"I thought we had gaps in our business where Ngāi Tukairangi and MIL, Whiritoa Orchards had many strengths - so everybody's taken lessons back from each other," she said.

Trudy said the win was important and meant a lot for the people of Tairāwhiti because of what the region had recently gone through, including the ongoing impacts of Cyclone Gabrielle.

Located in Gisborne, Wi Pere Trust Horticulture has 79ha of



More than 900 people enjoyed the Ahuwhenua Trophy awards evening in Tauranga

permanent fruit crops, made up of 26ha of Gold kiwifruit (11ha of which is organic), four hectares of persimmons, 15ha of citrus, four hectares of blueberries and 20ha of Rockit and ten hectares of Tarzi® apples. Three separate orchards combine to make up the diverse horticultural operation: Toroa orchard at Waerenga-a-Hika, Tangihanga orchard at Waituhi and Manutuke orchard at Manutuke. Wi Pere Horticulture is managed by general manager Wayne Hall, with eight full-time staff and up to 85 casual workers at key times.

“

**All the finalists have once again demonstrated the strength and excellence of Māori horticulture**

The trust's founder, Wi Pere, a rangatira, tohunga, soldier, politician, Māori Land Court conductor, legislator, historian and entrepreneurial businessman was against the sale of Māori land and used his influence as a Member of Parliament to constitute the Wi Pere Trust on 14 April 1899.

It was because of the united focus and determination of Wi (Wiremu) and his whānau to preserve the ancestral lands they owned that his descendants still own them today.

Kaitiakitanga (guardianship) and sustainability reflect the founding legacy of the ancestral lands that their tīpuna (ancestor) Wi Pere left to future generations to retain, protect, build and grow them for the benefit of his whānau.

Nukuhia Hadfield, chair of the Ahuwhenua Trophy Management Committee, said it had been a difficult year for most growers and farmers in the primary sector, but especially hard for all the finalists in the competition. A combination and accumulation of events such as frosts, floods and other unseasonal conditions created major problems for all the entrants. Despite this adversity, all the finalists remained in the competition and put together exceptionally good field days to showcase their respective orchards.

“I would not like to have been a judge in these circumstances, but certainly full praise to Wi Pere Trust for being judged the winner. I have seen their property and they are very worthy winners. But having said that, all the finalists have once again demonstrated the strength and excellence of Māori horticulture,” she said. ●





“ If I can do it, so can our future wāhine and tāne

Ahuwhenua Young Māori Grower Grace Rehu, right, thanked the two other finalists Alix Te Kere (left) and Erica Henare for their support

## GRACE'S AHUWHENUA WIN HIGH POINT IN TURBULENT TIMES

The last few months have been tumultuous for Grace Rehu, a leading hand for Turners & Growers in Puketapu, Hawke's Bay. In February, Cyclone Gabrielle caused widespread damage to the Hawke's Bay orchards she works on and then in June, Grace won the prestigious title of Ahuwhenua Young Māori Grower for 2023.

At 21, Grace (Rangitāne, Taranaki), was the youngest of the three finalists in the competition and her win was announced by Te Hāmua Nikora, Pou Tikanga, Te Tumu Paeroa. The other finalists in the competition were: Thirty-year-old Alix Te Kere (Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāti Tu, Ngāti Maru, and Ngāti Maniapoto), health and safety advisor for Rockit Management Services, Hastings, and twenty-seven-year-old Erica Henare, (Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāti Maniapoto), pipfruit and kiwifruit manager at Kono NZ LP, Motueka.

Grace said being part of the competition was an amazing experience and opportunity, and one she could not have completed without the support of the two other finalists by her side. She admits she was pushed into entering the competition without really knowing what was involved, but as her participation evolved, she fell in love with the kaupapa and kept on going.

This is the first time in the history of the competition that three wāhine Māori have been selected as finalists. To mark this special occasion each of the finalists received, in addition to their other prizes, \$5,000 from Te Tumu Paeroa (the professional trustee organisation for Māori).

Te Hāmua Nikora explained that Dr Charlotte Severne, the Māori Trustee and chief executive of Te Tumu Paeroa, has a very special place in her heart for other wāhine.

“The way we see it at Te Tumu Paeroa is that if we help this younger generation, particularly the women in this business, then they are going to do better for the land. When the land is healthy, the people are healthy,” he said.

Grace's aspirations are to inspire rangatahi in horticulture and demonstrate that the industry is about more than just picking apples.

“Turners and Growers' vision is to “grow healthier futures through fresh produce” and I want to execute that vision every day. If I can do it, so can our future wāhine and tāne.”

Being part of the Turners and Growers Emerging Leaders programme had a huge impact on her personal and professional development and also helped give Grace confidence to enter the awards.

Grace is part of a team of 15 permanent staff employed to work on 100 hectares of apple orchards, and in that role supervises a Samoan team of 11 Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme workers for the harvest season, as well as undertaking crop spraying, pruning and all tasks involved with fruit production.

Grace's passion for horticulture developed when she worked alongside her grandmother every summer school holidays at a strawberry farm in Hastings.

During her last year in high school, she worked night shifts at Turners and Growers East site packhouse, and after finishing school, Grace stayed on as a Quality Controller. She spent some time in the development team planting and redeveloping blocks, and then was offered a permanent position. ●



I could've given up if I hadn't seen that other things are growing amazingly

Rebekah Vlaanderen at home in her orchard near Tauranga

## Passionfruit orchard unlocks a passion for plants

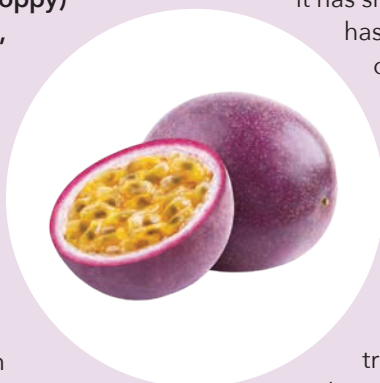
*Trading a career in IT for horticulture was a daunting step for a mother of a young child, but buying an orchard revealed a knack for growing plants for one Bay of Plenty woman.*

*HELENA O'NEILL talks with Rebekah Vlaanderen about her horticulture journey.*

**Rebekah (Beks) Vlaanderen and Graeme (Hoppy) Hopcroft own a 9-hectare property at Oropi, near Tauranga. About half a hectare is planted in passionfruit, tamarillos, bananas and chillis.**

When the couple first took over the orchard, there were around 450 passionfruit plants.

"I diversified to spread the risk a little bit, and now also grow tamarillos, dwarf Cavendish bananas, and rocoto chillis. When I first started diversifying, I was very cautious, but



it has snowballed in the past year. The passionfruit hasn't been doing too well so when I saw the other crops doing quite well, I decided to put more of those in."

Passionfruit yield has declined significantly in the orchard due to passionfruit wilt which is affecting orchards across the Bay of Plenty in the past few years.

Passionfruit wilt (or *Fusarium*) is a fungus that infects the plant through the roots, travels up the plant stem and causes the leaves to yellow, killing the plant.

"Once it's in the soil, it's there for good. The purple passionfruit (*Passiflora edulis*) is highly susceptible to passionfruit wilt. In some orchards it has wiped them out within six months, every plant has died. In my orchard it has been a slow decline over a few years - I didn't recognise it at first... some plants died quickly but others are still alive and sort of growing but not doing very well."

"It's been very difficult going from such a highly producing orchard to basically nothing this year."

Christine Herbert and Diana Pearse's Cosy Cat Orchard in Whakamarama west of Tauranga (featured in *The Orchardist*, April 2021) succumbed to the disease in 2022.

"The first season, 2021, went really well. It was amazing and production exceeded expectations. Covid put a few market access challenges in front of export wholesalers, but the domestic market was strong," Christine says.

They started noticing vine issues during the 2021 season and lost about 25 percent over that time, and over the rest of the year, despite doing remedial work, didn't arrest the problem enough and they headed into their second season with only 25 percent of their vines left.

"So, the second season produced only 10 percent of what we did the first season and the rest of the vines fell over," Christine says.

The couple made the hard decision to exit the industry as growers.

Passionfruit wilt "is just devastating," Beks says.

The NZ Passionfruit Growers Association is trialling rootstocks from Australia in the hope this can combat passionfruit wilt.

Beks was the president of the association for four years, but before she left that role last year, she started a rootstock project. The project trials the Australian passionfruit variety used there as a rootstock and how it will perform in New Zealand conditions.



Graeme (Hoppy) Hopcroft at home on the orchard with his two children

"We're trialling that in orchards at the moment, we're now 12 to 18 months into the project. My orchard is one of those trialling the rootstock, but we don't know if it's going to be too cold here for that rootstock to do well. The solution is a rootstock, it's just finding the right one."

Despite the challenge of passionfruit wilt, Beks says growing food is rewarding and full of satisfaction.

When she and Hoppy bought the orchard in 2017, she had never even eaten a fresh passionfruit, let alone driven a tractor or fixed a fence.

"The previous owner built the orchard and offered to teach me. He was here every day for months, helping me learn how to drive a tractor, mix the sprays, drive the ride-on mower, pruning, planting and grading. He taught me everything."

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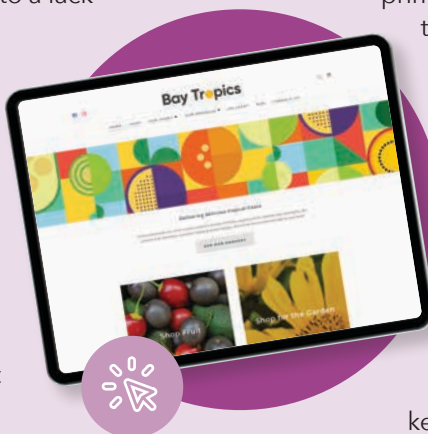


Rebekah Vlaanderen and Graeme Hopcroft with their children at Graeme's recent investiture ceremony where he received a New Zealand Bravery Decoration for his efforts as a helicopter pilot rescuing people from White Island when it erupted

The orchard is primarily Beks' domain, with partner Hoppy doing a lot of maintenance work around the orchard while working primarily as a helicopter pilot.

They launched Bay Tropics during the Covid-19 lockdowns to sell the orchard's fruit, as the independent stores they sold to were closed due to government restrictions, and the export market was strained due to a lack of airfreight space.

"The website went well during the lockdowns because people were enjoying online shopping. We partnered up with similar, small commercial growers close by. We had avocados, feijoas, tamarillos and blood oranges; we also had navel oranges, lemons and limes at different times. They were all growers who are small like us, and were having trouble moving fruit on the wholesale market."



“

### I like the idea of working with other growers

Beks says she thinks those growers liked being able to set their prices, and she then priced them accordingly on the website.

"They had surety for the price they would get. From my perspective, it helped to sell the passionfruit having a variety of fruit available. This year we've had feijoas, tamarillos and passionfruit from other growers. I like the idea of working with other growers."

As for the orchard itself, Beks is now following organic principles and incorporating biodiversity on the property.

"That brings quite a lot of challenges because there's a lot more to manage, and it's a lot more labour. It's much easier to spray the weeds than it is to cut them by hand or mow them. All the extra plants for biodiversity need to be managed, so it's a lot of pruning and keeping them out of the way.

"You still get disease on the fruit, particularly in the rain. The challenge is keeping the fruit looking nice and keeping the disease off the plants."

She says having other crops that are doing well helps keep her passionate about her orchard when the passionfruit is struggling.

"I could've given up if I hadn't seen that other things are growing amazingly; we've got good soil. We just need to find the right disease-resistant rootstock for our purple passionfruit." ●

# 2023 HortNZ AGM.

## (Notices of Motion)



Please visit [www.hortnz.co.nz](http://www.hortnz.co.nz) for up-to-date information about the AGM and related documents. A proxy form and AGM information will be provided to eligible growers by email or by post, where we do not hold an email address for voting members. If you have not received the information please contact Edison Harris.

These motions will be considered at the Horticulture New Zealand Annual General Meeting (AGM) being held at Te Pae Convention Centre, 188 Oxford Terrace, Christchurch on **Thursday 3 August 2023 at 1.00pm.**

### MOTION 1

**That the minutes of the 17th AGM of Horticulture New Zealand (HortNZ), held on 21 September 2022 at Richmond, Nelson be taken as read and confirmed as a true and correct record of that meeting.**

Proposed by the HortNZ Board

#### EXPLANATORY NOTE

A PDF of the Minutes of the 2022 AGM is available at [www.hortnz.co.nz](http://www.hortnz.co.nz). If you have any questions or would like hard copies, please email [edison.harris@hortnz.co.nz](mailto:edison.harris@hortnz.co.nz)

### MOTION 2

**That the President's and CEO's Reports for the financial year ending 31 March 2023, as published in the Annual Report, be taken as read and adopted.**

Proposed by the HortNZ Board

#### EXPLANATORY NOTE

A PDF of the Annual Report will be available at [www.hortnz.co.nz](http://www.hortnz.co.nz). If you have any questions or would like hard copies, please email [edison.harris@hortnz.co.nz](mailto:edison.harris@hortnz.co.nz)

### MOTION 3

**That the audited financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2023 be adopted.**

Proposed by the HortNZ Board

#### EXPLANATORY NOTE

A PDF of the Annual Report and Financial Statements will be available at [www.hortnz.co.nz](http://www.hortnz.co.nz). If you have any questions or would like hard copies, please email [edison.harris@hortnz.co.nz](mailto:edison.harris@hortnz.co.nz)

### MOTION 4

**That the 2023 year levy rate for the purposes of the Commodity Levies (Vegetables and Fruit) Order 2019 remain and be set for domestic sales at 0.14% of the price received at the first point of sale, for export sales remain and be set at 0.14% of the price received after the deduction of all offshore costs and for processed sales remain and be set at 0.14% of the notional process value.**

Proposed by the HortNZ Board

#### EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Commodity Levies (Vegetables and Fruit) Order 2019 allows a maximum rate to be set for vegetables and fruit at 0.15% for domestic sales and processed sales taken at the first point of sale and at 0.15% for export sales at the first point of sale after all offshore costs (including international freight) have been deducted. For processed vegetables and fruit the levy is deducted from the notional process value, which is defined in the Order. At the AGM levy paying growers may set any rate up to the maximum for the next calendar year. The current rate for vegetables and fruit is 0.14%. This levy funds the activities of HortNZ. The Board recommends that the levy rate be set and remain at 0.14% for the 2023 year to meet the commitments identified in HortNZ's Budget.

### MOTION 5

**That directors' remuneration remain at the 2022/23 level for the 2023/24 financial year as follows:**

Position	Current Figure
Director	\$31,477
Vice-President	\$39,097
President	\$84,665

#### EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Board considered that with recent extreme weather events and the anticipated impact on levies, an increase in Board fees was not fiscally prudent. Therefore Board fees will remain at the 2022/23 level for the next 12 months.

Director fees are all inclusive; therefore, no additional per diem fees will be paid for Board sub-committee meetings, and regional or industry committee meetings attended on behalf of the Board.

### MOTION 6

**That the Budget for the year ended 31 March 2024 be endorsed.**

Proposed by the HortNZ Board

#### EXPLANATORY NOTE

A copy of the Budget for the year ended 31 March 2024 is available on request. If you have any questions please email [edison.harris@hortnz.co.nz](mailto:edison.harris@hortnz.co.nz)

### MOTION 7

**That BDO, Wellington, be appointed auditors for the year ended 31 March 2024.**

Proposed by the HortNZ Board



If you require further information about the AGM or would like a hardcopy of any of the AGM documents, please visit our website [www.hortnz.co.nz](http://www.hortnz.co.nz), call us on the HortNZ free phone **0508 467 869** or email Edison Harris at [edison.harris@hortnz.co.nz](mailto:edison.harris@hortnz.co.nz).



Central Otago Young Grower of the Year Gregoire Durand accepts the trophy from HortNZ Vice-President Bernadine Guilleux

# Central Otago young growers find opportunities in horticulture

*When Gregoire Durand first came to Central Otago to pick fruit back in 2015, he never imagined that eight years later he would be still living here, raising a family and owning a small orchard of his own.*

Aimee Wilson  
Photos by Clare Toia-Bailey

**This year's Central Otago Young Grower of the Year winner, the Frenchman originally moved to the Teviot Valley and picked fruit at Fairview Orchard.**

He met his wife, Eilish, in the small town of Roxburgh, and then an opportunity came up to work for the newly established Cheri Global in 2017.

"My wife, who is a Southlander, moved to Roxburgh with me in 2017, when she was pregnant with

our daughter. We were living in backpackers' accommodation and I was waiting for my work visa. It was a scary time for us and we weren't too sure what the future held."

Phil Alison, the chief executive of Cheri Global, took Greg on and gave him so many opportunities to evolve into the role that he is in today.

The sector manager for Clyde and Roxburgh, overseeing 48ha of cherries, he lives in the Waikerikeri Valley near

Alexandra, where he also owns a half-hectare of lapins with Eilish.

"I'm trying out different growing systems," he says, in between raising a young family and working full-time. Cheri Global has an orchard in Bendigo, north of Cromwell, as well as another in the Hawke's Bay.

This was the second year Greg entered the young grower competition, and although he held an advantage of experience, no amount of study could



*Anahera Bridger from Cherri Global had to contest with rain and wind during the Agricentre tractor and machinery activity*



*Tim Officer from Dunstan Hills competing during the WaterForce Irrigation activity*



*Gregoire Durand from Cherri Global competing in the Central Otago Young Grower of the Year*

really prepare you for the big day.

“You really just don’t know what they are going to throw at you,” he says.

He did well in the irrigation component because he enjoys maths, “and I know a lot of people don’t like it.”

The weather on the day was difficult for some competitors, including colleague Anahera Bridger, also from Cherri Global, who had to contest with rain and wind in her tractor and machinery section.

Organiser Mariette Morkel said the weather made it difficult with the set-up of the event, but overall she was stoked with how the day went, and that two new people entered this year.

Russell Benington from Darlings Fruit in Ettrick came second and Tim Officer from Dunstan Hills third.

First timer Devon Attfield, a 23-year-old orchard manager at Clyde Orchards, said he found all of the tasks challenging but particularly the tractor section, because he was used to driving older models from the 1980s at his workplace - this was his first time manoeuvring a new 2022 model.

“The tractor activity definitely made me think hard about what to do as I’ve never used a loader before, let alone

detached one from a tractor, so it was definitely new to me.”

Although he knew what to expect in the competition and had prepared well, he says it certainly wasn’t easy on the day and a great challenge.

Devon’s boss Kris Robb had asked him two times in the past if he wanted to enter, and this year he decided to give it a go. He knew if he didn’t win he could have another go next year, and every year up until he was twenty-nine.

“It gives you a good perspective of what you know and what you don’t know. So you can go away and learn a lot more about those subjects.”

Born in Clyde and surrounded by family that were involved in sheep farming, Devon entered horticulture by starting out pruning and enduring cold winters, before moving on to picking fruit and tractor driving.

After spending his youth following uncles around on the farm, he decided orchard life really suited him.

Quickly moving up through the ranks, and after five and a half years Devon now has his sights set on being a general manager, before starting his own orchard one day.

Greg has worked in all areas on

the orchard, first as a picker, then supervising, spraying and working on irrigation.

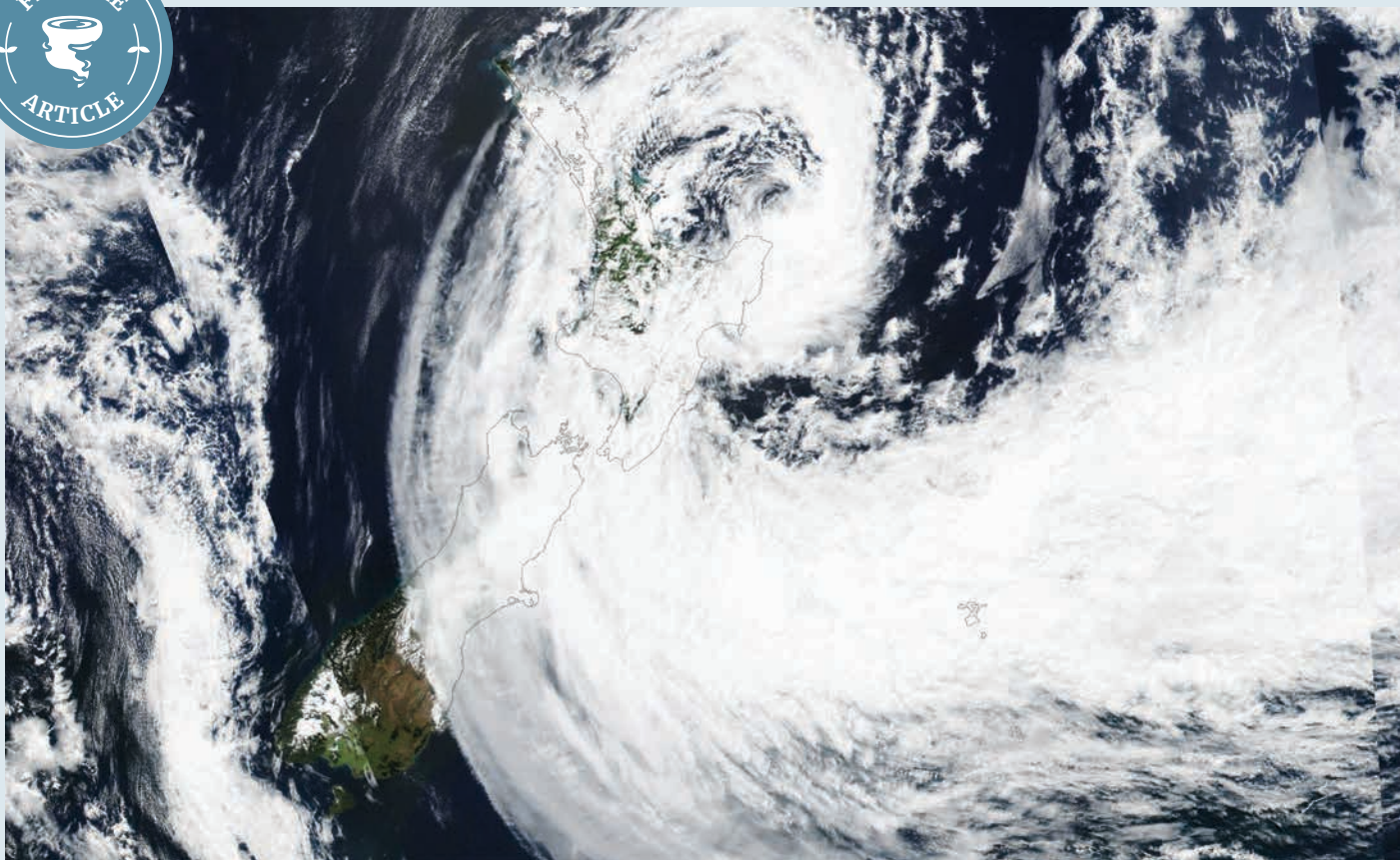
“Cherri Global has always pushed me to challenge myself and would give me small projects to manage.” The opportunity to move into a higher position came after a manager left and his boss asked him if he wanted to try, “and everything went smoothly,” he says.

Greg’s job naturally expanded, and looking back how far he has come, he now appreciates all he has learned in the industry, in each of the orcharding communities.

“I just learned to ask questions. People are quite open about what they are doing and you know you can call on them - those with more experience. We’re all wanting to achieve the same thing.”

It is that community spirit and connection that helps people like Greg, from the South-East of France, to settle here and call this place home.

With his own slice of productive land allowing him to learn more about fruit growing, along with a secure job and supportive employer, there are many opportunities to advance for young New Zealand growers. ●



A NASA image of Cyclone Gabrielle bearing down on Tairāwhiti

# Horticulture losses in Tairāwhiti will stretch into hundreds of millions

*In February Cyclone Gabrielle wiped out almost a third of Tairāwhiti's annual crop value, however those losses pale in comparison to the mounting losses the cyclone damage will cause over the next five years. KRISTINE WALSH previews the long-awaited report outlining the economic damage from Cyclone Gabrielle and, for horticulture, the news is not good.*

**Of the more than \$400 million in economic losses sustained in the Tairāwhiti region as a direct result of Cyclone Gabrielle, around half came from the horticulture industry, a new report says.**

The long-awaited Trust Tairāwhiti *Economic Recovery Plan: Economic Losses From Cyclone Gabrielle* report was in late-June released by Trust Tairāwhiti, which was nominated to

co-ordinate the overall response by East Coast MP Kiritapu Allan in her role as Regional Disaster Lead for Tairāwhiti and the Bay of Plenty.

For the growing and orchard sector the research was done by the Tairāwhiti Horticulture Cyclone Recovery Group, made up of locals Bill Thorpe, Trevor Lupton and Elliot Callender, who were appointed by Trust Tairāwhiti in the weeks after the cyclone.





However, the horticultural report in itself has not been made available.

That was because the Horticulture Cyclone Recovery Group did “not consider it appropriate to publicise the detail of their submissions until the government process was completed”, Bill Thorpe said.

“We can say that the losses endured are significant and that government financial assistance to date covers only a small portion of the business loss,” he added.

“We are hopeful that assurances given by Ministers (Grant) Robertson and (Kiri) Allan when they addressed the Gisborne post-cyclone grower/farmer meeting are followed through.”

Prepared by Dr Paul Winton, founder/principal of capital investment company Temple, the Economic Recovery Plan drew on reports from across the five focus areas of small and medium enterprises (SMEs); tourism/hospitality/accommodation; agriculture; forestry; and horticulture.

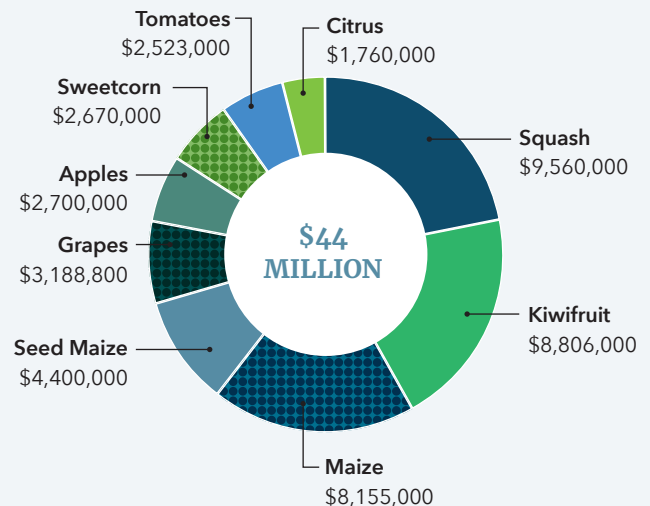
Overall, the approach in Trust Tairāwhiti’s Recovery Plan is an economic one, rather than the multi-issue approach taken in the Gisborne District Council’s own *Our Road To Recovery* report.

“These sectors were identified in early post-Gabrielle discussions with stakeholder groups as having experienced significant loss and representing a large proportion of the business economy and land use,” the Temple report says.

“In total, these sectors represent 42 percent of the region’s GDP (\$1.0Bn), around half the number of employees and businesses (12,000 and 3000 respectively) and 74 percent of the land in the region (622,000 hectares).”

(The areas of Māori business and whenua were explored but put aside - for now - because of poor data quality.)

## FEBRUARY’S CROP LOSSES IN TAIRĀWHITI



February’s crop losses in Tairāwhiti reached almost \$44 million according to a preliminary summary

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**The report’s “snapshot of the Tairāwhiti economy and land use” graph shows that, in the Tairāwhiti region, horticulture represents:**

- Just under 6 percent of Gross Domestic Product (out of a total of \$2461 million);
- Just over 9 percent of employees (out of a total of 24,658);
- Just over 7 percent of businesses (out of a total of 5463); and
- Just over 2 percent of hectares used (out of a total of 838,000).

The report puts total losses across the five sectors at around \$415–475 million not including the costs of public infrastructure replacement and repair, nor second-order losses (such as less money spent in the region due to less income).

And even then it says that total estimate is conservative: “Longer term losses across land use and funding were recognised but due to data inadequacy and time constraints were not estimated. The total estimates of \$415–475m should therefore be considered a minimum estimate of the total business economic losses to Tairāwhiti.”

Given the figures Dr Winton was working with, the report states that horticulture and agriculture accounted for around 80 percent of the losses, with forestry representing a further 12 percent of the total.

“

**In both cases the largest losses, accounting for around half of their totals, were caused by the loss of future crops due to downgraded land productivity**

“Horticulture was estimated to have suffered the largest losses (\$200–220m) followed closely by agriculture (\$140–160m),” the report says.

“In both cases the largest losses, accounting for around half of their totals, were caused by the loss of future crops due to downgraded land productivity.”

Over half of the losses in the horticulture sector were attributed to loss of perennial crop productivity over the next five years, with the next largest loss of crop from the event itself such as through silt, flood damage and access issues.

However, the report notes that the regional losses in horticulture it records are likely to be much higher than estimated as it does not include figures from large, vertically integrated companies – those that take care of their own supply chain, such as LeaderBrand – “who chose to deal directly with government rather than contribute to the regional analysis”.

LeaderBrand chose the direct approach as the company’s

situation could be quite complicated and had a lot of moving parts, says chief executive Richard Burke.

“Rather than counting what has been lost the real issue for us is about how we stand up business and our region going forward,” he says. “This is still the focus and we are actively involved in both.”

In the other sectors, over half of the estimated \$50–60m loss in forestry losses was also crop loss (followed closely by crews unable to access logging sites or the port for several weeks) while SME and tourism, hospitality and accommodation businesses suffered a wide range of losses estimated at \$20–30m and \$5m respectively.

In putting the losses to horticulture in Tairāwhiti at \$200–\$220m, the report notes that Cyclone Gabrielle was the largest and most recent of an ongoing series of extreme events. ●

**IMPACTS TO BE FELT FOR YEARS TO COME**

The Trust Tairāwhiti *Economic Recovery Plan: Economic Losses From Cyclone Gabrielle* estimates that more than \$400 million in economic losses were sustained in the Tairāwhiti region as a direct result of Cyclone Gabrielle, around half of that from the horticulture industry.

**Issues identified as having a particular impact on horticulture in the short term included:**

- Immediate clean-up including the removal of silt;
- Crop loss from event;
- Higher costs incurred in order to overcome constraints and keep operating (such as freight, or paying for trucked-in water for vegetable processing);
- Volume impacts from upstream and downstream value chain constraints (such as packhouses that did not have enough product);
- Infrastructure loss (such as fencing, orchard infrastructure and culverts).

**In the medium term included:**

- Perennial crop productivity loss affecting revenue in the medium term and in some cases extending to 2030;
- Risk to future crops due to changes in factors from trees and vines to lands and water;
- Annual crop replant loss due to constraints such as land, infrastructure, labour or finance.

**In the long term included:**

- Land use loss or heightened risk;
- Inability or difficulty to retain or gain banking finance of acceptable terms. ●

# Organic grower values depth of advice on offer

*Passionate about growing organically, Adam Alexander grows quality fruit while providing his team with a safe work environment.*

*Through his business Cultivate Horticulture, Adam manages orchards including one owned by his family, the Yvonne Alexander Family Trust in Aongatete, Bay of Plenty. The orchard grows 11 ha of kiwifruit for exporting. A further 20 ha has been developed and includes avocados, to help diversify the trust's income.*

*Without access to the same range of products as conventional growers, organic growing can prove challenging. Adam values the service he receives from Fruitfed Supplies Technical Horticultural Representative (THR) Alastair Reed.*

*"I've been a customer of Fruitfed for six years. I met Alastair through a research and development trial he was running on our block. Since Alastair became a THR, it has been great to leverage off his product knowledge, having been involved in trials and seeing first-hand their efficacy."*

*Adam appreciates Alastair's ability to help him problem-solve. "I can ring Alastair and ask a question. If he isn't sure of an answer, he contacts the technical team whose experience he can draw on. I always receive an articulate and cost-effective solution to implement."*

*Adam enjoys the Facts magazine produced by Fruitfed Supplies as it contains articles across the major horticultural*

*crops. "A few years ago, before going organic, I started using an alternative to copper after reading an article about it being successfully trialled on vegetable crops. I was struggling at the time with copper slowing the growth of the kiwifruit canopy early in the season, so I checked with Alastair and applied the product within a mix. It worked well."*

*Two years ago, Cultivate Horticulture purchased land to grow bananas, planting six varieties including lady fingers, misi luki, and two Australian commercial varieties. Adam says the journey has been exciting and challenging, noting the difficulty in finding people who are growing bananas commercially in New Zealand.*

*Having been in the ground for six months, the bananas are growing well. Adam says he has been fortunate with Alastair having experience growing bananas in Zimbabwe. "By following Alastair's advice, I have been able to establish the bananas easily."*

*A Fruitfed Supplies team member for 17 years, Alastair worked within the crop monitoring team and assisted with research and development (R&D) trial assessments, before becoming a THR. He acknowledges the value R&D trials hold for growers. "Our R&D capabilities put us at the forefront of innovation bringing new products to New Zealand for testing on crops in local conditions. With crop safety measured in trials, for instance, if a product becomes registered for use, as THR's we can confidently advise growers to use the product, giving them peace of mind that what we're recommending will work."*

Grower, Adam Alexander (right) is with Fruitfed Supplies Technical Horticultural Representative, Alastair Reed.



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**Fruitfed Supplies**

# Wattie's: Values at the core of the core of iconic brand



Kristine Walsh  
Photos by Florence Charvin

*Wattie's agriculture manager Bruce Mackay has for decades worked at the business end of primary production, but for him, it's not all about the bottom line.*

"I see processors as being the people who put food on your shelves for the ten months of the year it is not available as fresh produce," he says. "What would happen if they weren't there?"

In his role, and with the support of a fruit agronomist, and two agronomists looking after arable crops, Bruce oversees the procurement and production of seasonal crops including peaches, pears, Black Doris plums, boysenberries, tomatoes, butternut pumpkins, beetroot and sweetcorn.

In Hawke's Bay it is all done by around 65 growing businesses across about 1400 hectares. And it all goes to the company's Hastings cannery, by far the largest in the country.

But that's not all that is pumped out of the Hawke's Bay facility.

"What a lot of people don't know is just how many brands we own and product groups we produce," says Bruce. "As one of New Zealand's largest suppliers to the grocery sector, we have multiple foods spread across supermarket shelves, freezers and chillers. And that's a big responsibility."

Founded in a four-room Hastings cottage in 1934, J Wattie Canneries (Wattie's) has over the decades been involved in a number of mergers, from its 1960s takeover of Melbourne companies Thompson & Hills and S Kirkpatrick & Co, to its 1968 union with General Foods (leading to the name change to Wattie Industries Ltd), to the 1987 merger with Goodman Fielder and, eventually, the 1992 sale of the Wattie's group to the US-based H J Heinz Company (Kraft Heinz), which retains ownership to this day.

Today, Heinz Wattie's Ltd has manufacturing bases in Hawke's Bay and Christchurch, with other facilities in Dunedin and Auckland, and across its product groups maintains relationships with some 2000 growers across the country.



*Liaison with growers is a big part of Wattie's agriculture manager Bruce Mackay's role*

"Basically, our work is all about liaison with the growers, planning, agronomic advice, operating structures and maintenance and if you have all that in place, then the season is a breeze," says Bruce. "If you don't, it's going to be a nightmare."

One thing Bruce and his team could not plan for, however, was the nightmare of Cyclone Gabrielle, which hit with devastating effect to parts of the region causing loss of life, loss of property and of course, loss of crops.

At home near Havelock North, Bruce watched the Red Bridge all night as flood waters threatened to destroy it, along with the 14 other bridges lost in Hawke's Bay. But in the morning all he noticed was a tree had been downed and some of the driveway had been scoured out.

"In contrast, in places like the Esk Valley some people, including our growers, got absolutely dealt to with homes and properties flooded and buried under metres of silt."

Back in the 1980s Bruce owned a property at Haumoana where a Wattie's tomato crop approaching harvest was wiped out by the blast of Cyclone Bola.

“

**We're making do and accepting that we're facing depleted inventory**

"That event saw bricks from the partially-built houses swept for miles down the road, but it was nothing compared to Gabrielle. In addition to the personal devastation felt by many, we as a company lost nearly 80 percent of the

crops expected from Hawke's Bay growers – more in some product areas, less in others.

"That was on top of 2022's horrible spring and huge rain events in both December and January. So in terms of the quality of the season, Gabrielle was the icing on top of a pretty nasty cake."

Like many growers – albeit on a much larger scale – Wattie's generally makes things work by using diversification to extend its season.

"At the factory in Hastings we have around 600 full-time employees plus around the same again during the season, and to keep it working, that season is getting longer and longer," says Bruce.

"In the first week of December we'll be processing beetroot and boysenberries, and from the end of January we see the real peak with all of our fresh produce coming through at the same time.

"Off-season we focus on our simple recipes (baked beans, spaghetti and the like), more complicated meal products, labelling, frozen and chilled meals, jams, dressings and pet foods.

"So we're able to get peak efficiency by operating 24/5 or 24/7 for 12 months of the year, and that makes the best of what is a critical facility."

To do that they need product, and in the wake of the cyclone, as Bruce and his team have worked to support growers, the procurement arm of the company was sourcing shortfalls.

"We were able to get things like tomatoes and frozen sweetcorn, but for the rest, we're making do and accepting

that we're facing depleted inventory," he says.

"As for the future, next season will be a new one for annual crops, but we're not entirely sure how things will pan out on the orchards. As the trees become dormant for winter they may look alright, but with those that have been in standing water or suffocated by silt, we're yet to see what happens."

At the time *The Orchardist* spoke to Bruce Mackay\*, growers were still waiting to hear what support they would see from central government in the wake of Cyclone Gabrielle, and he was disappointed in that.

"It would have been much easier for growers if there had been early and timely indication of the support that might be available," he says.

"Nobody expects government to give growers back the profit they have lost ... just to help them get back on their feet. Supporting primary producers is not a hand-out, it's an investment in our future."

In the meantime, Bruce says Wattie's will continue doing what it does best in an increasingly tough environment.

"Primary production is a difficult business but I absolutely love it, and along with putting out our other products, I think it's something we do particularly well.

"It's a fantastic brand with a powerful reputation and we nurture, protect and cherish that by keeping the quality really, really good.

"And that is what we are going to keep on doing, because that is the values we aspire to." ●





*\*EDITOR'S NOTE: Following Bruce Mackay's comments in this article and just before The Orchardist went to print, the government announced a recovery package to support businesses affected by the North Island weather events. See the details on page 35.*

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GrowHub is a purpose-built horticultural education facility for Katikati College and community students

## Katikati's GrowHub, new centre for educational excellence

*Katikati College, a relatively small rural school, is poised to become a national centre for excellence in horticultural education, with the opening in May of GrowHub, a purpose-built facility for college and community students.*

Elaine Fisher

**The 240 square metre building constructed on the school grounds, and largely funded by community and business donations, is owned and administered by the Katikati Innovative Horticulture Trust (KIHT).**

"The building stands as a testament to our collective commitment to a shared cause and serves as a reminder of the power of collective action," says Hilary Johnson, manager of KIHT and college head of Innovative Horticulture.

Katikati College has 800 students and is centred in the small Bay of Plenty town with a population of around 6000. It's a community known for its financial support for local initiatives which have included in the past, the construction

of a St John Ambulance Centre.

Local businesses, community organisations, individuals and some national funders together raised the more than \$640,000 needed to construct GrowHub in just five years.

Although the building is on Ministry of Education land, funding from central government for capital expenditure was not available. Chairman of KIHT, Dave Freeman, says it was up to the community to raise the money - which it did.

"GrowHub represents solutions to at least two problems," he says. "The industry has struggled to find enough skilled and keen employees for a long time and the school was seeking ways to give students pathways to a local career,

so that as adults, they could continue the rural lifestyle they enjoyed as children.

“Many people have been involved in making this project a reality, but without the drive and determination of Hilary, it would not have happened. Hilary can be justifiably proud that the milestone of opening GrowHub has been achieved.”

Clad and roofed in dark grey Colorsteel, the building features a three-metre-wide concrete verandah overlooking raised gardens. Polished concrete floors for practicality pave the large open plan area, two break-out rooms, two resource rooms for practical work, and externally accessed toilets and shower.

A fitted kitchen will be used by students for ‘paddock to plate’ learning, and also for catering for community and industry group meetings. There is a minimum of fixed furnishings, allowing for furniture and resources to easily change according to teaching and learning needs.

Even before the building was begun, the Katikati College Innovative Horticulture Programme was leading in curriculum innovation, creating a distinctive student experience, embedding industry connectedness.

“Student enrolment is strong and increasing. Around a third of senior students now study horticulture and they are very enthusiastic about their wonderful new facility.



*Katikati College principal Louise Buckley with Hilary Johnson, manager of Katikati Innovative Horticulture Trust, and chairman of KIHT Dave Freeman, at the opening of GrowHub*

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Past and present students who have studied horticulture at Katikati College with Hilary Johnson at the opening of the GrowHub facility

“  
Around a third of senior students now study horticulture and they are very enthusiastic about their wonderful new facility

“The Trust and the College are in discussion with third party training providers and community groups and look forward to having them working in the new centre too,” says Hilary.

The idea of a dedicated horticultural facility at the college was first mooted in 2014 by then principal Neil Harry and orchardist Sean Carnachan. It wasn't until 2018 that the college board decided to fund a part-time role for Hilary to spearhead the project.

“That's what made the difference. There was support for the concept, but it needed someone to drive it.” Hilary was the 'right someone'.

She has been teaching for 18 years but had a previous career in the private sector in marketing management and strategic planning. Hilary knows how to run projects and understands the curriculum and needs of students.

Teaching horticulture has also become Hilary's passion, although it was something she knew little about before taking on the role. “The students and I learn together.”

Her enthusiasm has rubbed off. From just 15 students five years ago, the college has close to 100 seniors actively engaged in the subject, many through to year 13.

Now the building is complete, students are learning in the multi-purpose space in which hardly any furniture is fixed.

“The aim is to create a flexible and therefore inclusive environment. Inclusive environments are responsive to our varying need to work together or alone, in silence or with noise, standing or sitting, passively or actively, with technology and without it, indoors and outdoors.

“Students can adjust the environment to meet their needs and the demands of the task. The layout of the environment also creates opportunities for connection and collaboration.”

GrowHub has a modular, flexible cross-curricular programme where students personalise their learning and their career pathways by picking their own combination of subjects.

“These subjects include not just horticulture and science, but also agribusiness, marketing, sustainability, robotics and all the real-world disciplines that the industry needs.

“Local industry and growers have played a big part in providing fantastic learning experiences. We have not pursued the academy model, rather choosing to offer opportunities to everyone, whether via vocational or academic pathways.”

Hilary says careers in horticulture require a broad range of technical, practical skills, and knowledge across a range of disciplines including science, business management and innovation.

“This necessitates an innovative and contextualised approach to learning in order to create viable employment pathways that meet the needs of industry and employees.

“A lot of time was spent talking with tertiary providers and various stakeholders in the industry to make sure our programme would optimally meet their needs and therefore potential career pathways for students.”

GrowHub is also a community facility, with plans for horticultural groups and organisations to use it for meetings, forums and field days and for the training of adult students. ●



# Cherry ‘game changer’ boosts production

Aimee Wilson

*Washington State University horticulturist Matt Whiting was quite surprised when he first stepped onto Suncrest Orchard near Cromwell to look at different cherry growing systems.*

“When I first drove in I thought, ‘what’s going on here?’ he told the Summerfruit NZ Conference ‘Kick The Dirt’ growers’ day in early June.

The Jones family has been growing summerfruit for 35 years, and four years ago started trialling a new shoot renewal system (SRP).

Designed for intensive plantings of cherries, the concept appealed to Suncrest because it meant they were constantly renewing the budwood.

Involving the manipulation of branches so they are more exposed to the light, co-owner Michael Jones admitted when they first started using the new system, the neighbours said it looked like a tornado had gone through their property.

“But it has worked and we had some good products out of it.”

Different blocks of SRP are now being progressed onto the pergola system which has resulted in 14 tonnes of cherries per hectare for both Fulfar and Lani™ varieties, first planted in 2017.

This compares to just 8 tonnes of cherries per hectare for traditional growing systems.

His trees were only one year old when they changed over to the new system, “we tried to do it to a block of five-year-old trees but it’s too difficult to manage when they are older.”

Matt was impressed with what he saw – and the proof was in the vigorous rootstock.

“You have taken the genetics available to you and made it fit to your situation. Every system has to take advantage of the rootstock and variety,” he said.

The tour of Suncrest looked at different blocks of cherries including new pergola plantings of Black Pearl®, which are grown onsite in conjunction with Genesis Nurseries – that



*Suncrest Orchard co-owner Michael Jones explains the new SRP system with growers at the Summerfruit NZ conference*

provided the stock budwood and grafters.

“We aim to have full production within three years,” Michael said.

With his pergola block of Starletta™ cherries that were planted in 2020 (4000 per ha), he aims to be in full production this summer.

“We were surprised by the vigour. It has been a bit of a game changer,” Michael said.

The system is being used overseas in Chile as well, “and they are starting to get some good results.”

Michael explained that the pergola plantings are more intensive but it doesn’t necessarily mean there is less pruning involved.

“

**The bud density is extraordinary**

It also makes picking much easier so workers can hang their buckets on the wires rather than having to wear them, and the fruit is at an easy height to reach.

“The bud density is extraordinary,” Matt said.

Suncrest has a total of 1.5ha of pergola plantings currently in production and will eventually have 4.5ha.

After two hours on the orchard in 3 degrees Celsius temperatures and no sun, Suncrest treated growers to some of its homegrown fruit port to conclude the tour. ●



*Luke and Rozmeri know they have something quite special*

## Capturing the flavours of heritage apples

*Little Shaggery Farm near Motueka has a staggering 150 different varieties of heritage apples which are being juiced and bottled as vinegars and juices or dehydrated into dried fruit slices.*

*ANNE HARDIE visits the farm.*

Luke Marsden and Rozmeri Leatham are living their dream with their young family on the organic orchard tucked up a shingle road with the same name as the farm. When they bought the orchard six years ago, they wanted the slower-paced lifestyle and Luke had organic farming qualifications, but they had to find a way of turning the vast array of produce into a thriving business.

The 150 different varieties of apples were originally selected from 700 varieties by the orchard's previous owner, Dieter Probst, who followed biodynamic



principles for about 30 years, retaining those that were disease-resistant and had the best health benefits.

Among the varieties that made the final selection are Court Pendu Plat which is thought to have been grown as early as Roman times, and Flower of Kent which is the apple Isaac Newton saw falling to the ground from a tree and inspired his laws on gravity. The past few years have been educational and challenging as Luke and Rozmeri learn not only the names such as Freiherr von Berlepsch and Glockenapfel, but also the



The stall at the beginning of the road is stocked with their products and fresh fruit

characteristics of each variety and its management.

To make it even more challenging - but also providing more opportunities - the apples are just one of 34 different fruits and nuts on the orchard, including 19 different types of plums and 29 varieties of prunes. Everything is grown randomly, so several Berlepsch apple trees are distributed around the orchard.

"We have what we call the bible, which gives us a map of the orchard and what tree it is and the rootstock it comes from," Rozmeri says.

They knew they had something special, with very different flavours and a good story. In the orchard, they have moved from most of the biodynamic methods to organic, and are now BioGro certified. They use seaweed sprays and fish oil - "all those stinky things are great" - and can use Madex for codling moth. The sward under the trees encourages beneficial insects. And if fruit do not have perfect shape or looks, that is perfectly natural.

“

People want to know the story behind it



"We should be teaching our kids about how (the fruit) grow and not what they look like."

With only the two of them working in the orchard business, apart from the occasional WWOOFer, and three young children to add into the daily routine - Cooper (9), Tillie (7), and Baxter (5) - they had to come up with something achievable that was healthy and fitted their values. That led them to vinegar.

"We decided we had this amazing fruit, and each vinegar is 100 percent of that fruit," Luke says. "The health benefits of vinegar are immense, and the different types of heritage apples make amazing blends."

He says varieties such as Monty's Surprise and Hetlina have high antioxidants and scientifically proven cancer-fighting

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The orchard is BioGro certified

enzymes, and they use older, slower techniques in the fermentation process to get the best results. Several varieties of apples are used to make cider vinegar through slow fermentation in oak barrels, which takes 24 months.

“But it is part of our values - our ethos - and we wanted to follow that technique because it produces better benefits and flavour.”

The diversity of fruit in the orchard led to further vinegars and they now produce pear, feijoa, plum and quince vinegars as well as apple cider vinegar. Their latest trial is pinot noir vinegar from grapes brought in from an organic vineyard. Down the track they will work on balsamic vinegar, which will take years to really mature. It is a sign they are in it for the long-term.

A new building has been purpose-built to make their vinegar and juices, and so far they have 70 oak barrels brewing batches of vinegar. Five different flavours of juices are now produced including nashi and ginger.



Court Pendu Plat harks back to Roman times



Just one of 150 heritage varieties on the orchard

Organic ginger and blackcurrant are the only ingredients they buy in for the juices, and though they have only been producing them for a couple of years, Rozmeri says they are selling well.

Nothing goes into the bottles of juice other than fresh fruit straight off the tree. Everything is done on site, from sorting fruit to the fruit mill and then rackpress where it is cold pressed. The resulting juice is bottled and pasteurised to extend its shelf life, before heading out the door on the truck.

Dried fruit follows the same approach - natural and organic; simple and plain - to sort, slice and dehydrate the fruit before packaging in brown paper bags.

Their range is sold through local outlets, Common Sense Organics further south and an organic cooperative in Riverton, plus Huckleberry stores in the North Island. They stock a stall at the start of the road, and Rozmeri loves taking their products to the local markets. It reminds her of the local farm shop in the

Yorkshire village where she grew up, and everyone knew where the produce was grown. Markets are a good way to show customers the diversity and flavour of their fruit.

"I'm finding people want that flavour in the apples, even the tartness. Laxton has the most amazing flavour and we have about four different varieties of Laxton. While Merton Russet is an apple that people think is a nashi because of its rusty colour and as soon as they taste it, they love it. I could talk about the flavours of the apples all day - I like the oomph of flavour and tartness."

All their apples are tree ripened, with the first-grade fruit sold fresh at markets, the stall or wholesalers. The rest of the fruit is made into vinegars and juices, though they do not use 100 percent of the fruit on the trees yet and that gives them opportunity to expand the business.

Establishing their business has not been without its challenges. When they purchased the orchard, they took over management in the middle of harvest and had to learn on their feet. Then they had Cyclone Gita which spilled silt and logs through the lower section of the property and took fences with it. Their youngest, Baxter, came along two years later and then Covid-19 brought its disruptions.

"We were doing a big push with the vinegars when Covid hit, which put it all on the backburner a bit," Rozmeri says. "Now they're talking about a recession, so we'll just have to keep going. It's our time to show our products and what they can do."

“

**It's hard work but we love it - where we live and what we do**

A volunteer business mentor provides more ideas and they have used a government-funded course, Digital Boost, to learn about growing the digital space around the business. That has led them to developing a social media strategy to grow their market.

"People want to know the story behind it and want to know how you came to be where you are."

Both their juices and vinegars have won awards, and Rozmeri says that is confirmation they are on the right path.

"It's hard work but we love it - where we live and what we do," Rozmeri says. "We have our core values and everything strives towards that. And our children get to live in this amazing place. Baxter is our little taste tester and loves tasting everything."

Luke's parents live on the orchard and that multi-generational aspect fits their values as well. ●



## VITAL HELP FOR GROWERS IN GOVERNMENT PACKAGE

Shortly before *The Orchardist* went to print, the government announced a new package to support growers affected by the North Island weather events earlier this year. Horticulture New Zealand chief executive Nadine Tunley welcomed the package, which is the result of cross-sector involvement. She joined officials in Hawke's Bay and Tairāwhiti to meet with growers and talk them through what's on offer and how to go about applying.

"This package will hopefully provide vital help to businesses across the areas affected by the weather events in the North Island, including horticulture businesses. We know many businesses are still grappling with funding repairs and rebuild efforts. We hope this package and announcement will help relieve the pressure and stress people are facing, so they can get on with the recovery and provide jobs for people in regional New Zealand."

The package includes:

- 💰 a bank loan guarantee scheme for loans of up to \$10 million
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Hawke's Bay orchardist Brydon Nisbet spent about \$400,000 to remove silt

## Growers fork out for silt removal

*An early decision to act on removing silt from his orchard to save his apple trees has paid off for grower Brydon Nisbet. As the government makes some funds available for reimbursing clean-up costs, affected growers are looking at tough decisions to keep the future of their businesses alive.*

Bonnie Flaws

**Three months after Cyclone Gabrielle hit, Brydon Nisbet has grass growing between the rows of his orchard. The block, on Moteo Pa Road sits just 400 metres away from where the breach in the stopbank of the Tutaekuri River occurred during Cyclone Gabrielle.**

The orchard and the house were flooded, and the house was later yellow stickered. Once the water receded, a huge amount of silt remained, estimated at about 30,000 cubic metres. The deposits ranged from a height of 300mm to one metre high in the lowest lying parts of the block, Brydon says.



"We made the call seven days after the flood to do what we could to save the trees and save the orchard. Most of the trees and infrastructure were still standing. We finished getting all the silt out of the rows in early April. It then took another three weeks to remove the remaining silt from the headlands.

"I've had to put in another irrigation system underground and there will be extensive post and wire rework to complete. Between seven and eight percent of the trees were badly damaged and have been removed. Tree replacement will begin in September."



**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Following Brydon Nisbet's comments in this article and just before *The Orchardist* went to print, the government announced a recovery package to support businesses affected by the North Island weather events. See the details on page 35.



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The orchard has since been power-harrowed and replanted in grass. Much of this work was done with help from the local community and volunteers who came from around the country, which he says has been "amazing".

Silt was removed from around the trees where diggers weren't able to get access. After that was the enormous task of removing silt and all kinds of debris left by the floods from in and around the orchard.

“

**We made the call seven days after the flood**



"This was a huge job to complete. We were fortunate enough to get Taskforce Green for four days helping to remove this debris. It's extremely satisfying to have the orchard looking like it is now after all the work we have had to do over the last few months," Brydon says.

His early decision to move quickly has really paid off, but he spent about \$400,000 to do it, and there is more remedial work to be done.

"I have ordered my replacement trees, as the variety I grow had trees available and offered to the affected growers first. I have ordered 6000, but that number may change."

However, many growers have not even begun to remove the silt from their orchards because they weren't sure if they would receive any financial assistance if they forked out up front, he explains.



After the cyclone hit, apple trees were buried in huge volumes of silt and debris



Silt removed from around the trees, ready to be taken out



The orchard has since been power-harrowed and replanted in grass

In June the government opened its \$70 million silt removal fund for applications. Growers can apply for up to \$210,000, available as reimbursements in a 50:50 cost share arrangement. For this pot, growers can't have applied for any other Crown funding.

“  
All growers are different and facing their own challenges



Up to \$40,000 is available as a grant, but previous support via the Cyclone Gabrielle Farmer and Grower Recovery Grant or the Business Recovery Grant will impact any calculations.

Brydon says he is feeling optimistic for the future and looking forward to more government announcements around funding for reinstatement and redevelopment, which was promised in early June. At the time of writing in mid-June, no announcement has been made.

“All growers are different and are facing their own different challenges so one glove doesn't fit all, Brydon says.

Hawke's Bay orchardist Jonty Moffett says he has probably spent near to \$1 million on silt clean-up so far, and while he will receive the \$210,000 available, he isn't holding out much hope of a sector rescue package.

“There are plenty of things to spend money on, but there's just no cash flow and no money coming out of the government. We still feel very much in the dark. I just think we are old news and they've forgotten about us.”

The reestablishment of 50 hectares of crops is too much to think about yet, but he estimates it would cost about \$200,000 a hectare, and for his 50ha that could mean \$10 million.

“  
There are plenty of things to spend money on

That is on hold until he can afford it, as replacing infrastructure on that scale is probably going to take place over perhaps five years. In the meantime, he will likely do more annual cropping such as melons. ●





Kelli and Marty Cooke on their York Road block which was flooded

**EDITOR'S NOTE:**  
 At the end of June just before *The Orchardist* went to print, the government announced a recovery package, which we hope will help nurseries ramp up their production. See the details on page 35.

# Nurseries in crisis: Will there be enough trees to support recovery?

*Without some long overdue decision making from the government, the horticultural sector could be left ailing for much longer than necessary.*

Bonnie Flaws

**It's often said that certainty is everything in business, without it, decisions can't be taken, or not well at any rate. That's what is happening now for the country's nurseries supplying commercial orchardists.**

Growers have been devastated by Cyclone Gabrielle, but four months on there is no announcement about a sector funding package for reinstatement and redevelopment. Growers are broke - they can't front up with the money to order new trees, and so nurseries are left unsure of how much to plant and harvest.

In fact, instead of ramping up to support the replanting of Hawke's Bay's fruit blocks, things are slowing down and

labour is coming under pressure.

Genesis Nurseries chief executive, Hayden Green says nurseries are experiencing a significant drop in orders for fruit trees since the cyclone.

"We are now at a critical point where production decisions need to be made in the next couple of months that will ultimately determine the availability of trees in future years to support the recovery. We need confirmed orders from growers to plan for 2025-26.

"Tree production is a multi-year process, producing a base level of rootstocks over the next one-to-three years



THE 18-MONTH  
PROCESS TO  
PRODUCE A TREE  
HAS BEEN DISRUPTED  
AND BUDDING HAS  
STOPPED



Damaged trees being pulled up for burning

is imperative to minimise production delays and give confidence to growers in the continued availability of trees.”

However, based on the current market, nurseries are likely to scale back rootstock production this winter, making it particularly hard to ramp back up for a later recovery. Genesis Nurseries has managed to maintain normal staffing levels for now.

Kelli and Marty Cooke, owners of LE Cooke Nurseryman Ltd in Hastings, were also affected by flooding and wind damage to some of their blocks.

“  
**We need to make our move very shortly on our stocks**

One block flooded up to the fence line, destroying 4000 cherry saplings and around 2000 peaches and nectarines, most of which were destined for garden centres. Wind destroyed many of their apples. Sadly, many of those trees were on order for orchards in Pakowhai

and Dartmoor – two of the most severely hit areas of Hawke’s Bay.

In many cases, orchards in these places are still working on the clean-up and are nowhere near being able to fork out for trees.

“That’s trees that were going out this year. We were just about to bud 30,000 trees for a grower next year and he came in and said ‘can’t do it’. He had lost three of his blocks in Pakowhai,” Marty says.

“A lot of our orders for this year and next year were for growers in Pakowhai Road and Dartmoor.”

The nursery has beds it was ready to harvest, but without orders, they wonder if it’s a good use of their time to be grading and trimming. With a government funding package they would feel a lot more confident getting rootstocks off to the coldstore.

The 18-month process to produce a tree has been disrupted and budding has stopped. Marty and Kelli now have 50,000 trees in the ground that they didn’t bud – they could be spring budded but they don’t have orders.



Genesis Nurseries chief executive, Hayden Green says nurseries are experiencing a significant drop in orders

Then there's the next stock cycle to consider.

"We need to make our move very shortly on our stocks that we need to be putting in the ground. Within the next three weeks we need an answer, otherwise it's going to roll into 2025," he says.

Labour has been affected too. Kelli and Marty normally have 35 staff at the height of the season but are down to about 17 and a few contractors. The ones that are still with them aren't getting the overtime they would normally get, including Saturday work. The couple have taken a massive hit to their income this year, but say next year is set to be worse.

In order to be able to do their best to replenish accurate levels of stocks for growers, nurseries need more information.

Genesis Nurseries is keen to hear from customers about their recovery plans, so they can stay abreast of how much capacity will be needed at their end. The nursery has enough trees to meet demand for this year and next year, but orders for 2025 suggest production will be reduced.

"However, when recovery does start through the placement of orders with fruit tree nurseries there will be cost pressures with ramping up again. As a nursery, the preference is for the industry to support nurseries now by placing orders for 2025, such that we don't have to scale down our workforce and production thus making it harder to scale up when the recovery eventually kicks in," Hayden explains.

“

### We are now at a critical point where production decisions need to be made

Murray Linnell, business development manager for RD8 says he's observed a massive retraction in development. In fact, there is a real risk that reinstatement of what was taken out in the floods won't happen, let alone new development. He thinks there is likely to be a massive dip in production next year, with the real potential for no trees.

"The nurseries keep financing the industry on the hope that they are going to grow some trees and one day someone is going to pay for them. They'll absolutely be doing what they can to replenish stocks, but at some stage they have to call it."

But Hayden says this could turn around very quickly with central government support and the industry working together to replant parts of Hawke's Bay and Gisborne. But orders must be confirmed by the end of July for tree delivery in 2025, as with uncertain market conditions they

will likely only plant for contracted orders. Rootstocks need to be planted this winter.

Murray says timing is critical now.

"If the government comes out in October and says 'here's some money for the horticulture industry', well it's too late. There is a lack of understanding of a product lifecycle and when decisions need to be made."

Hayden urged flood-affected orchardists to reach out to Genesis Nurseries to communicate their situation. "We understand that re-development is a stressful and expensive time, and we're keen to work with you to get trees in the ground and your livelihood restored." ●

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Women in Horticulture chair Paula Dudley and secretary Carmel Ireland

## Fresh initiative for Women in Horticulture

*The organisation Women in Horticulture (WiH) is poised for the next step in its evolution now that United Fresh is leading the four-year-old industry collective.*

Elaine Fisher

**“United Fresh and its members have been working for many years to raise the profile of the vital role that women play in New Zealand’s \$6 billion horticulture sector. We’re proud to be taking this next step towards that goal by leading Women in Horticulture,” Paula Dudley, general manager of United Fresh and chair of WiH says.**

Paula says United Fresh New Zealand Incorporated, as New Zealand’s only pan-produce industry organisation with a vision to help support a sustainable fresh fruit and vegetable industry for New Zealand, is ideally placed to take WiH to the next level.

“Our diverse membership of more than 90 organisations representing the entire value chain from seed and grower through to producer associations and retailers, means we have a strong network to draw on.

“Management of Women in Horticulture is an exciting opportunity for us to champion women and diversity to promote the best possible productivity through inclusive practices.”

Paula says wide support for the networking group from women at all levels of the industry and throughout the country means it is now time to progress it further.

Founded in 2019 by a group of women leaders in the fresh fruit and vegetable industry, with initial support from Horticulture New Zealand, the aim of WiH is to foster an environment that empowers, values and supports all women to thrive in horticulture.

“United Fresh acknowledges the great mahi Horticulture New Zealand put in back in 2019 to get this project started, and the team has done a fantastic job. We’re honoured to be continuing this important kaupapa.”

The need for a woman-specific organisation is illustrated by the fact that women make up about 50 percent of the horticulture workforce but represent only about 20 percent of senior leadership.

“That’s a statistic that WiH and United Fresh are committed to changing, and this initiative has a critical part to play in supporting gender equity. The longer vision is to achieve a truly diverse industry. Starting with gender equity first will move us further to that bigger goal.”

Paula says many women working in horticulture face a unique set of challenges including juggling work and family commitments.

“

**We’re honoured to be continuing this important kaupapa**

“WiH provides a platform to unite and support women at all levels of the industry and to advocate for equity on their behalf.”

The future direction of WiH will be planned during a strategy meeting at the Horticulture New Zealand conference in August. In the interim, United Fresh is developing a database of interested people within the industry to enable WiH to connect to women working in the regions. Nationwide activities will also be planned.

“We’re looking forward to sharing the important work of WiH to drive innovation and collaboration amongst everyone involved in keeping healthy kai on the tables of all New Zealanders.

“The support and empowerment of women in a sector which nurtures us all through the provision of fresh produce has been emphasised by the United Nations as part of its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“United Fresh adopted the UN’s SDGs as part of our vision for a sustainable fresh fruit and vegetable industry for New Zealand. Like the UN, we recognise the wide range of horticultural activities that women are involved in throughout the country.” ●



Join Women in Horticulture or find out more. [unitedfresh.co.nz/women-in-horticulture](https://unitedfresh.co.nz/women-in-horticulture)



## NOTICE OF ELECTION & NOMINATION OF CANDIDATES

Kiwifruit New Zealand is established under the Kiwifruit Export Regulations 1999 for the purpose of authorising Zespri to export New Zealand grown kiwifruit, to determine collaborative marketing applications, and to monitor and enforce measures that mitigate the potential costs and risks of a single desk exporter.

The Kiwifruit New Zealand Board consists of six members of which three members are elected by producers for a three-year term. Due to one member’s term expiring on 30th September 2023, KNZ will be conducting an election in the coming months to fill that position.

### VOTING ELIGIBILITY:

Producers who are eligible to vote in the election are:

1. the owners of land in New Zealand on which kiwifruit is produced for export sale; or
2. such other persons determined by the Board to be producers of such kiwifruit

All producers will be receiving a Notice of Election which will be mailed early July 2023. If you believe you are eligible to vote in the election, and do not receive a Notice of Election, please contact Kiwifruit New Zealand (details below). To be eligible to vote, producers are required to provide sufficient evidence that they qualify as a producer. Based on the information provided, the Board will determine the eligibility to vote.

### NOMINATIONS:

Nominations are invited for the election of one Director to the Board of Kiwifruit New Zealand. The election will be held in September 2023.

To request a candidate nomination form, please contact KNZ at the details below. If more than one nomination is received a vote will be held. The voting papers will be sent by email or post to all producers.

The candidate receiving the most votes will take office for a three-year term effective from 1 October 2023.

### TIMETABLE

Nominations open	24 July 2023
Nominations close	7 August 2023
Voting papers posted to producers	18 August 2023
Voting opens	25 August 2023
Voting closes	11 September 2023
Results announced	12 September 2023
Newly elected Director to take office	1 October 2023

### Contact:

Amy Te Whetu  
PO Box 4683 Mount Maunganui South, 3149  
Phone: (07) 572 3685 Email: [admin@knz.co.nz](mailto:admin@knz.co.nz)



Murray McPhail, CNZM, LeaderBrand's founder and director. Photo by Tessa Chrisp



Dr Howard Wearing, ONZM, at the 2019 release of his book *Farewell Silent Spring: The New Zealand Apple Story*



Tofilau Talalelei Taufale, MNZM, is a speaker at the upcoming Horticulture Conference Week

# Industry stalwarts recognised in honours list

*Three New Zealanders with links to the horticulture industry were recognised in the King's Birthday and Coronation Honours List.*

Helena O'Neill

## Murray McPhail, CNZM

LeaderBrand's founder and director Murray McPhail was named a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit (CNZM) for his services to horticulture.

Murray was thrust into the family business as a 17-year-old when he took over a 150-hectare sheep and cattle farm near Gisborne after his father died.

In the late 1960s, New Zealand agriculture was sheep, sheep and more sheep, a few cattle and some dairy. Murray says horticulture was exciting as it was a centre of development for mechanisation, hybridisation of seeds, and delivering higher dollar returns to established agriculture of smaller areas of land.

He could also afford to lease this ground, negating the need to have vast amounts of capital to buy land.

LeaderBrand was founded in 1975 and the company now has farms in Gisborne, Canterbury, Matamata and Pukekohe. Fast-forward nearly 50 years and horticulture remains exciting for Murray.

"It's exciting as the returns can swing wildly based on supply and demand. The potential to grow a harvest, process and market your own product as well as being able to interact directly with customers. The opportunities are endless, and you have the ability to operate without boundaries."

When asked what our horticulture industry does well, Murray praises innovation.

"This is tricky because we're constantly competing on price, which leaves no margin to promote the values of our products. However, we are innovative and Kiwi ingenuity is always at the forefront of our farming practices."

LeaderBrand's chief executive Richard Burke says that Murray's vision to create a world-class farm is what continues to drive the team today.

"Murray's success was in realising quickly which produce grew best in which soil, and committing to crops that could be grown all year round. He also had a knack for picking future consumer trends and predicting what Kiwis would want to eat in the future. This was one of the key drivers of our investment in bagged salads and our undercover greenhouses."

Richard says Murray's career has not been without its challenges.

"Cyclone Bola in 1988 destroyed the farm. Many farmers, at the time, decided to sell up, but Murray's tenacity and drive drove him to replace and rebuild. It was this pioneering spirit and the Kiwi can-do attitude that drove us once again to dig in after this year's Cyclone Hale

and Gabrielle," he says.

Murray says that his success has always been a team effort.

"To me, the success of LeaderBrand is all about its people. I started off growing plants but ended up growing people, something I'm very proud of."

Horticulture New Zealand president Barry O'Neil says Murray's honour reflects his contribution to horticulture as well as his investment in, and support of, regional New Zealand for almost 50 years.

### Dr Howard Wearing, ONZM

Plant & Food Research Honorary Fellow Dr Howard Wearing was named an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit (ONZM) for his services to entomology and the fruit and orchard industries.

Howard started his career at the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) in 1967, retiring from HortResearch in 2001. The scientific research programmes he led over those 30 years played a key role in the implementation of best-practice modern apple production in New Zealand, with Howard supporting growers to minimise damage to fruit while maintaining high yields.

His programme 'Biological Orchard Production Systems' and the associated Integrated Fruit Production programme reduced the use of insecticides by 90 percent and led to a significant increase in New Zealand's fruit exports, including organic apples. He also oversaw teams of scientists whose research made significant contributions to government-funded science nationally, including gaining pipfruit and summerfruit access to the Japanese market.

Despite retiring more than 20 years ago, Howard has continued to publish papers. His ongoing work has provided new insights that have guided the use of pest management strategies in low pesticide input and organic fruit production systems. As well as publishing more than 150 scientific papers, in 2019 he released his book *Farewell Silent Spring: The New Zealand Apple Story*, which is a rich source of information for professionals and students of horticulture, entomology and pest management around the world.

### Tofilau Talalelei Taufale, MNZM

Napier resident Tofilau Talalelei Taufale was named a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit (MNZM) for services to Pacific health. Tofilau has been a big support to Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme workers in the Hawke's Bay region.

Tofilau says he was "blown away" by the news of his nomination.

"I rang my wife straight away and I reflected about my parents and their migrant journey from Samoa to Aotearoa and the sacrifices they made for us to have a better future. They would be so proud."

Tofilau is of Samoan heritage from the villages of Iva, Luatuanu'u and Falelatai. He is the Interim RSE National Lead and Interim Commissioning Lead for the Pacific Directorate of Te Whatu Ora.

During Cyclone Gabrielle, the Pacific community rallied around to host the 850 RSE workers that were displaced. Six Pacific churches provided emergency shelter, clothes, food and connectivity to families abroad.

"It wasn't easy."

He says the response of the Pacific community during the cyclone revealed the positive role that local churches and the Pacific community can play in the support and care of RSE workers, further enhancing what is possible when communities, employers and agencies come together.

"I am heartened by the openness of industry to open up and be led by collective approaches to support the wellbeing of RSE workers.


Looking across Hawke's Bay I have seen an evolution from what it was ten years ago to a much-improved approach towards the pastoral care and wellbeing of RSE workers today. It's not perfect but through learning experiences through Covid-19 and the cyclone, we have a golden opportunity to work closer together to take the scheme forward into the future.

"It's about realising ethical approaches that will benefit all." ●

## HORTICULTURE CONFERENCE SPEAKER

Tofilau Talalelei Taufale, MNZM, is one of the speakers at the upcoming Horticulture Conference Week from 31 July to 4 August at the Te Pae Christchurch Conference Centre.

[conferences.co.nz/hort2023](https://conferences.co.nz/hort2023)




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*The theme of this year's Summerfruit NZ conference was Expanding Horizons and focused on 'looking outwards'*

## Summerfruit eyes solutions for the future

*The Hawke's Bay fruit growing industry will rise again, with new land and a clean slate, grower Jerf van Beek told the Summerfruit NZ conference in early June.*

Aimee Wilson

Photos by Clare Toia-Bailey

**Jerf is also a Hawke's Bay Regional Councillor, and many growers in the south were keen to hear at the conference in Queenstown what recovery efforts were going on up north.**

The theme of this year's Summerfruit NZ conference was Expanding Horizons, and focused on 'looking outwards' with the resumption of international travel and reopened borders.

Local and international speakers presented sessions on climate change solutions and international trade and trends.

Just as the conference was taking place, Environment Minister David Parker announced a proposed temporary rule change that would enable rural Hawke's Bay landowners dealing with masses of cyclone and flood debris to carefully burn mixed waste so they can replant

and return their land to productivity.

Jerf said he had seen apple orchards under water for two days that were now good again and holding their leaves.

"If climate change is a shark, water is its teeth," he said.

Summerfruit NZ board member Craig Hall acknowledged the Clyde Fruitgrowers Association for their part in helping to raise money for cyclone victims.

In April the group raised \$10,000 from a charity golf tournament and auction, and on 26 June held a community meal as a second fundraiser.

"Our industry is very tight and looks after each other," he said.

Forest Lodge Orchard in Cromwell was the base for the



second orchard tour of the day with Lincoln University horticulturalist Clive Kaiser.

Mike Casey from Forest Lodge Orchard gave a presentation about the energy savings and costs of being New Zealand's first 100 percent electric zero fossil fuel orchard.

The only catch to converting diesel to electric was the \$110,000 upgrade to the transformer, he told the conference.

Purchasing 9ha of bare land in 2019 and turning it into 25km of cherry trees, the orchard will produce 80 tonnes of fruit at full production.

Starting with New Zealand's first electric frost fighting fans with help from a \$44,000 grant from the Energy Efficiency & Conservation Authority, the orchard now also owns the country's first commercial electric tractor - a 100kw Monarch, imported from the United States.

The conference concluded with some thoughts for the future from guest speaker Matt Whiting from Washington State University.

Also a sweet cherry grower, he said with so many different growing systems available, the interception and distribution of light is key, and the benefit is that it's free.

Eventually more growers will adopt automated systems for their businesses, including robotics for pruning and thinning.

“

**If climate change is a shark, water is its teeth**



He also stressed the importance of compact fruiting walls "to fill the space and capture the light."

Other guest speakers included William Pike sharing lessons learnt from surviving a volcanic eruption, and Harriet Bremner on changing the conversation around health, safety and wellbeing. ●

## TIM JONES RECEIVES AWARD FOR INDUSTRY CONTRIBUTION

At the awards dinner 45 South chief executive Tim Jones, of Cromwell, was presented with a Life Membership of Summerfruit NZ for his commitment and services to the industry over the past 30 years.

The former Summerfruit NZ chair also has a Horticulture New Zealand Industry Service Award, and has made significant changes to the country's cherry exporting industry since 1994.

Building on the late Basil Goodman's vision for exporting cherries, 45 South has harnessed the best international science to develop innovative growing systems adapted to the local elements and land.

Pioneering the Upright Fruiting Offshoots growing system for cherries with horticulture consultant Earnscy Weaver, and then committing to that innovation, has kept the company right at the top of its game.

Growing at different altitudes and producing different cherry varieties has spread risk and enhanced economic viability.

Earnscy describes Tim as a great leader. He has a very good grasp of governance requirements and headed Summerfruit NZ through some turbulent times.

"His quest for knowledge and then implementing it has kept the 45 South operation at the forefront of industry developments be that in growing systems, packhouse technology or market development."

Tim never shied away from the issues and was always ready to front the tough ones. He maintained his calmness and always respected other opinions. He had a clear vision for Summerfruit NZ as a whole, not just the cherry side of the industry.

Earnscy said he could see the potential for the apricot industry with the new selections from the joint Summerfruit NZ and Plant & Food Research breeding programme, but also the need to underpin this with market knowledge and growing and handling systems - the same mission that he has for cherries.

"Tim is a very good horticulturalist. He has a deep interest in plant and fruit physiology and looks to science to provide the lead for any changes to his operating systems."

His thirst for knowledge means he travels widely to attend offshore symposia and workshops to keep up-to-date with both growing methods and marketing trends. ●



South CEO Tim Jones was awarded a Life Membership of Summerfruit NZ

## Regulations – Getting the balance right



Colin Bond : New Zealand Kiwifruit Growers Incorporated chief executive

**The pace of change and complexity of the regulatory environment is becoming increasingly difficult for growers. While New Zealand Kiwifruit Growers Incorporated (NZKGI) understands and supports the need for appropriate regulation to protect the environment and the communities that we operate in, we think that the time is right to consider some changes that would result in greater efficiencies that will lead to better outcomes.**

### Problem

NZKGI, in its advocacy for growers in this space, finds it concerning when regulations start to impinge on growers' ability to grow a profitable business. It is not only the evolving nature of the rules, but also the variations in the rules between district and regional plans which are increasingly challenging to understand.

In addition to the time and cost involved in actively monitoring and submitting on multiple plan change processes, there is increased uncertainty and risk for growers as they move into new areas and get tripped up by rules that they thought they understood, or didn't realise they needed to know about.



“

**It is not only the evolving nature of the rules, but also the variations in the rules between district and regional plans**

With climate change now upon us, growers are looking to establish orchards in new regions and districts, but some district plans did not foresee the change in land use from pasture to kiwifruit, so the rules are sometimes unclear and/or unworkable. It shouldn't be this hard to use rural land for rural purposes.

In addition, the rationale for the differences in regulations is at times difficult to understand. By way of example, each regional plan has different rules for agrichemical spraying, and this is creating unnecessary complexity for growers

and spray operators who operate in more than one region. In addition, there is a lack of consistency across districts regarding matters such as natural and artificial shelter. While variation between district and regional plans may be necessary and sometimes reflects local differences and community priorities, it is resulting in inconsistent environmental outcomes and making our industry a less attractive investment, ultimately impacting the people who rely on the economic prosperity of our businesses.

We appreciate the need, and often the benefit, of rules, but we also need to be pragmatic. It's one thing to ask growers to follow the rules, but it's just as important that the rules of the game are as uniform as possible, consistent and communicated clearly.

### Solution

Central and local government have different responsibilities to administer the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA). Central government provides national direction through the preparation of national policy statements and national environmental standards which can apply across district and regional council boundaries.

In contrast, regional and district councils have a more local focus, and regional and district plans can have very different rules regulating the same land use activity.

With the RMA reform taking place at present, NZKGI is of the view that now is the perfect time to consider whether the balance is right in terms of which rules should apply to the whole country and which activities should be left to regional and district councils to manage.

More consistent rules across the country for activities such as agrichemical spraying and shelter would provide more certainty for all parties. They would also significantly reduce costs to the industry and foster its growth.

Growers are facing difficult and uncertain times as well as escalating costs at present for a whole lot of reasons, and they need our support more than ever. In the current myriad of changing policy, NZKGI is of the view that it is the right time to pause and think about opportunities for efficiencies in the policy space. ●

## And it's goodbye from the avocado lady



Jen Scoular : NZ Avocado chief executive

**I have spoken to many wonderfully diverse and yet often similar growers over my twenty years in horticulture and I see resilience, positivity, and acknowledgement that change is inevitable. Growers are always looking at new and better and more efficient ways to grow great, healthy food. They seek out new information, new science and new connections. Or more radically, other crops or other roles, and sadly that might be a process many are considering now.**

I attended Hort Connections in Adelaide in June as a board member of the International Fresh Produce Association Australia-New Zealand, previously known as the Produce Marketing Association (PMA). The show was sold out, over 3,000 delegates, the highest number ever. The sold-out gala dinner seated 1,500. Many there were optimistic, a great show, lots of business, great to shake hands in person. A few said they attended because if they didn't, their customers and competitors might think they had gone under. It's not easy out there was certainly the vibe I brought home. Oh and Covid.

We heard about vegetables now being available as a powder, one tablespoon added to your smoothie or your creamy pasta sauce can give you the minerals and vitamins for a day's worth of vegetables. Is that a good thing? Will the consumer know if those vegetables were grown on well-tended soil, under clear blue skies, using natural water and sunlight? Or will the only viable option to producing such powder be that the vegetables are grown in huge factories in faraway places? A different topic but also future looking, was the excellent presentation by Melissa Clarke-Reynolds on gene editing. Natural or old-fashioned breeding but sped up. I liked that term. Plant & Food Research supported workshops and a report from Melissa, and I commend them on acting on the conversation rather than wondering if we should have the conversation. New Zealand can't allow itself to be left behind in such an important and potentially hugely valuable subject.

It was a fantastic first day at Fieldays in June, the sun was out, although the Opening Ceremony was outside when

the temperature was below zero. Good for winter chill as Dan Mathieson said at the always interesting lunchtime talk in the Zespri tent. Great to see all the political parties there, intimating the importance to any government of the primary sectors. The word on the street was that cheque books wouldn't be coming out as they often are over Fieldays, but people wanted to at least see the new innovations. More importantly, it was the hugs and warm greetings that were very prevalent - people do like people, and we need to make sure we take up these wonderful opportunities to have chats, hear talks and just mingle with others. A few words of wisdom came out of the talks I heard. As times get tough, we tend to hunker down and focus on what

has to happen right now. But we do always need to be leaving just enough room in our thinking to look to the future. There are many things we can't change, but we can look at how much fuel we use, how much nitrogen we put on, and what we can individually or collectively do to mitigate the impact of climate change. Growers are great at looking at things differently, take little things that you do every day and see if you can do that slightly differently to make it more efficient.

Talking of doing things differently, as I enjoy my final month at NZ Avocado I do want to say what an absolute pleasure it has been to lead the avocado sector for 12 years. We have

seen some amazing highs, and right now are feeling quite scary lows, but are very aware that the product we grow, pack and market is amazing - we need to leverage the opportunity for avocados to nourish us, to entertain us, and to be made into the most delicious recipes. I have loved the challenges, the successes, the people, my team and all those I have worked with. I have received such wonderful feedback, and thank-yous. It's very humbling but it warms my heart, thank you. As I waited to pick up my luggage at the airport, with its avocado bag tag, I checked my phone with its avocado cover, and looked down at my avocado socks. I have loved being the avocado lady. I'm not sure I will give that part up.

I wish everyone the very best. ●



*Jen Scoular, the face of New Zealand's avocado sector for 12 years, steps aside as chief executive next month*

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THE LATEST INNOVATIONS AND IMPROVEMENTS

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*Pollinisers*

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# Pollinisers: Selection, planting, care and maintenance

*Pollination plays an integral role in our success as fruit growers.*

Meg Becker : AgFirst Consultants Hawke's Bay

The pollination period is a key driver for productive outcomes, and the quality of each season's crop. There are numerous factors that contribute to a successful pollination period, and can also act as key limiting factors.

These include but are not limited to:

#### Seasonal factors:

- 🌸 Pollinator activity (bees and insects), including hive density, health and placement
- 🌸 Weather (conditions over winter, and then in the lead up to and over the flowering period)
- 🌸 Timing of bud break
- 🌸 Bloom density and length of flowering.

#### Management/variety factors:

- 🌸 Varietal tendencies
- 🌸 Bud and flower health
- 🌸 Cropping history - e.g. bloom limitations created through biennial bearing
- 🌸 Infrastructure and canopy design - e.g. bee disorientation or limitations to movement
- 🌸 Polliniser selection (compatibility, distribution, ratios and flowering timing).

Pollinisers increase efficiencies for pollinators (bees and insects), which supports a successful pollination of the crop. Land availability has also meant orchard developments are moving further afield into more isolated areas, increasing the risk of poor pollination. Additionally,



Figure 1 King flower

with the move to more intensive canopy systems, and orchards being planted in large blocks of a single variety, the investment in pollinisers is more important than ever.

### Pollinisers

Cross-pollination is the transfer of compatible pollen from one fruit variety to another, a practice which is known to support the trees to consistently set an optimum, quality crop.

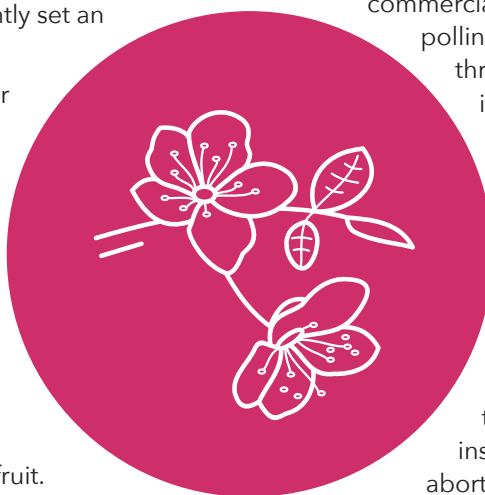
For the purpose of this article, I will refer to pipfruit pollination specifically, but the principles discussed can be applied to many other fruit crops.

Regardless of a cultivar's ability to be self-fertile, all pipfruit varieties benefit from cross-pollination. Many commercially grown apple varieties are classified as 'partially self-fertile', however, a few are considered 'incompatible', which means they have to be cross-pollinated in order to bear fruit. This is determined by the genetic make-up of the apple cultivar.

Most cultivars are diploid, meaning they have two sets of chromosomes. Although diploid cultivars can self-pollinate, most commercially grown diploid varieties produce a better quality and higher yielding crop if they are successfully cross-pollinated by another cultivar with compatible pollen. The grower can facilitate this

by planting another variety with compatible pollen throughout a block. These are the pollinisers.

Triploid apple varieties (those with three sets of chromosomes) cannot be used as a polliniser variety as they are considered infertile. Therefore, if the commercial variety being grown is triploid, the polliniser selection, ratios and distribution through the block is of even greater importance.



The king flower in a flower cluster produces a superior apple. Successful pollination of the king flower supports the production of a quality crop. There is only a short window where the king flower can be pollinated, so there must be sufficient pollen available for cross-pollination to occur at king bloom. Additionally, insufficient pollination can result in flower abortion and partially pollinated flowers. If only a few of the ovules within a flower structure are pollinated, the fruit may be misshapen - resulting in quality issues at harvest.

Polliniser selection, density, distribution and ongoing care and maintenance should be considered carefully to support the successful cross-pollination of a commercial variety. Establishing pollinisers capable of successfully supporting a commercial crop takes time, and careful

management to ensure they remain disease free and have a consistent bloom year-on-year.

### Selection

Crab apples are the most widely used pollinisers planted in New Zealand due to their copious flowering characteristics and pollen compatibility with most commercial apple varieties. However, a selection of other apple cultivars can be used for apple pollination, providing the flowering is synchronised.

### Flowering timing

Planting pollinisers with a synchronised or overlapping flowering period with the commercial variety is essential. Pollination must occur within approximately two to four days of the commercial plant's flower opening.

Ideally, two varieties would be selected as pollinisers. The first will commence flowering just ahead of the commercial variety, and the second should flower long enough to overlap the first half to two-thirds of the commercial variety's flowering period. This ensures that the bulk of the primary flower of the commercial variety has an opportunity for cross-pollination.

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**Crab apples are the most widely used pollinisers planted in New Zealand due to their copious flowering characteristics and pollen compatibility with most commercial apple varieties**

The tail end blossom on the commercial variety is not as important to cross-pollinate, as most growers aim to chemically thin this late bloom off prior to it being successfully pollinated.

Selecting the same rootstock for both your commercial variety and polliniser varieties can assist in coordinating flowering timing.

Rootstocks have an impact on a variety's bloom characteristic and either delay or advance the natural flowering of a variety, depending on the rootstock chosen.

Flowering timing of both the pollinisers and the commercial variety can be adjusted using dormancy breakers at various timings and rates if required to adapt the natural bloom patterns. This timing synchronisation should be monitored and recorded each season to allow for better decision making.

### Pollen Compatibility

Most diploid apple varieties, providing the flowering timings line up, are compatible with each other.

As mentioned earlier, triploid apple varieties are not able to be used as pollinisers as their pollen is sterile. If the commercially grown variety is a triploid, two different diploid pollinator varieties need be distributed through the orchard to support a successful pollination.

### Other Factors influencing selection

1. The flowering characteristics of the plant are important, including its ability to have a sufficient bloom year-on-year. If the polliniser variety is prone to biennial bearing, its success may be limited.
2. Compact growth or 'spur type' growth is an advantageous flowering characteristic for a polliniser variety.
3. Selection of a commercially harvestable variety as a polliniser reduces the area of land that is lost to unproductive pollinisers. If using another commercial variety, it is important it has distinct fruiting characteristics to avoid polliniser fruit ending up in the commercial harvest bin. Ideally the polliniser would be harvestable after the commercial variety for simplified harvest management.
4. Select pollinisers that are not prone to pest and disease.

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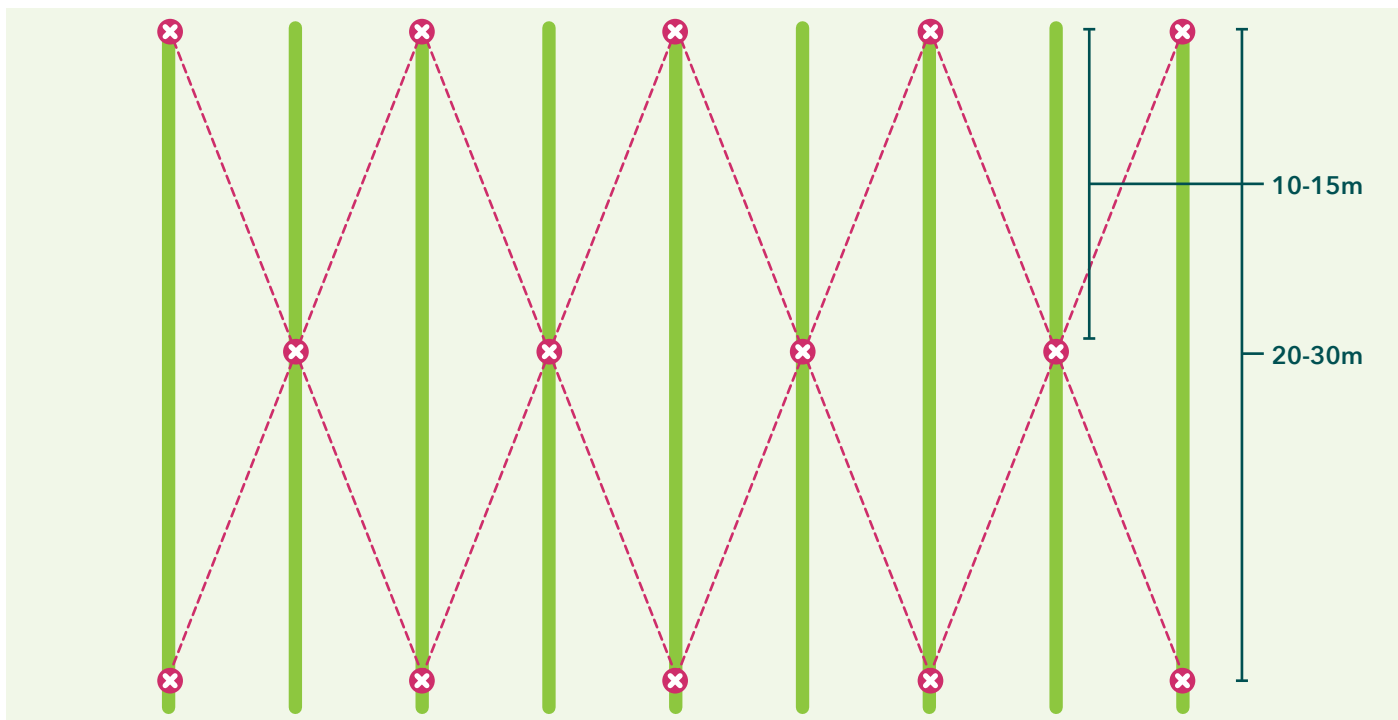


Figure 2 Polliniser distribution pattern

### Examples of pipfruit polliniser selection

Granny Smith is a great polliniser choice for optimising return on investment in your productive blocks. They are a commercial, strip pick variety that are highly distinguishable at harvest – streamlining their management during the season and providing their own commercial value.

Crab apples are often chosen as pollinators due to their compatibility with commercial apple varieties, their profuse flowering ability, and generally long flowering period. They can also spur on one-year-old wood, which means they are able to flower on last season's vegetative growth.

Sturmer is a compact spur type variety, well known for its virus free characteristics. It is low vigour and requires very little pruning once it reaches full maturity.

### Layout/Distribution

The closer the polliniser is in proximity to the commercial tree, the better the chances of successful pollen distribution through block. Determining the rate and distribution of pollinisers is a balance between optimising cross-pollination versus commercially productive land.

Bee movements (including the hive placement plan as well as ratio of hives per hectare) should be considered when determining the layout and distribution of polliniser varieties through the orchard.

In the move to more modern intensive plantings, bee activity tends to be limited to within row movements, rather than across. This could create limitations with

cross-pollination if the distribution and layout of pollinisers is not carefully considered in 2D, Slender spindle, or intensive row plantings.

Pollinisers should ideally be planted inter-block with the commercial variety being grown. For blocks with tree spacings of 1.5 metres and less, best practise is to plant the pollinator in its own tree space or site rather than interplanting, to reduce the risk of shading.

### Diamond Distribution

Pollinisers should be situated in every row at 20-30 metre intervals. This is best done in a diamond pattern which ensures the plants are staggered, so that they are not in the same position in every row. This layout also means no commercial tree will be more than 10-15 metres from a polliniser source.

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**Grafting is a great method to integrate pollinisers while optimising commercial canopy space**

### Strip pollinisers or polliniser bands

A band or a strip of polliniser trees are planted through the centre of a block. This is a great way of managing pollinisers and it allows the fruit to be picked commercially. The polliniser trees are effectively treated as an individual block or management area within the orchard.



This layout can create barriers to pollen movement in the block as it relies heavily on good (inter-row) bee activity. This can be limiting in the more modern intensive systems.

The spacing between pollinator strips should be carefully considered, taking into account:

- 🌸 Canopy density and growing system
- 🌸 Whether or not the orchard is under netting
- 🌸 The commercial variety being pollinated - including its reliance on a successful cross-pollination
- 🌸 The hive density and layout in that specific orchard at bloom.

## Alternative Polliniser solutions

### Grafting

Grafting a compatible polliniser variety onto the commercially productive tree is a great way to increase polliniser density without impacting the footprint of the commercial variety.

To achieve this, the polliniser variety may be grafted on as a limb to the existing tree, often into the lower canopy. If the polliniser is grafted into the leader, or top half of a tree, there is a risk this could affect the synchronisation of the bloom as the top of the tree often has a slightly later flowering timing.

The polliniser could also be retrofitted into the orchard, by completely grafting over a productive tree to a polliniser variety.

Grafting is a great method to integrate pollinisers while optimising commercial canopy space, to either rectify an existing pollination issue in a block or install pollinisers at a later stage (post-development). It also means pollinators don't have to be interplanted or take the space of a commercial tree.

### Flowering branches

Flowering branches (otherwise known as brochettes) may be cut off suitable polliniser trees and placed in the orchard where pollinisers are not available, or cross-pollination has historically proven unsuccessful.

The flower quality on these tends to only last two to three days, however this is a great solution if pollinisers aren't correctly synchronised with the crop, and there are concerns about the success of cross-pollination.

Flowering branches are a great short-term solution to a time sensitive issue.

## Ongoing Care and Maintenance

Managing the vigour out of a polliniser through well timed task management, pruning and tree training, improves the flowering potential of the polliniser and supports a healthy return bloom.

The care and attention to detail that goes into the commercial variety should also be put into the pollinisers. The polliniser's bloom has a huge impact on the success and quality of a season's crop.

### Tree training

Selecting and maintaining permanent laterals that have good flowering potential is essential to ensure consistent bloom year-on-year.

Tree training helps ensure good, permanent branch selection. It guides the branch into a position that not only prevents shading onto the commercially productive trees, but also devigorates the polliniser.

### Thinning

Thinning pollinisers is essential. The crop load should be reduced post full bloom to ensure the fruit set has no impact on return bloom. Failure to do so can increase the risk of biennial bearing in polliniser trees which leads to ineffective cross-pollination.

### Pruning

Pruning out large, vigorous wood with poor bud quality is important to keep pollinisers slender (preventing shading impacting the commercial trees). It also means there is a range of wood age in the polliniser tree, which supports return bloom.

Removing the last season's fruit at leaf fall is important to reduce any carry over of diseases and relieves the stress that has been placed on the pollinator through the crop it is carrying.

### Metrics

Recording the full bloom dates of the pollinisers is just as important as assessing full bloom of the commercial variety. Managing the bloom of the pollinisers throughout a block is required to ensure the bloom period of the commercial variety is covered, especially the king bloom.

Knowing the flowering history of your blocks, and the pollinisers within them, enables you to make management decisions in advance of budbreak to refine the timing and health of the bloom.

Pollinisers play an important role in the commercial success of fruit orchard block. The decision factors around selection, ratios, distribution and management practises impact the success in effective use of pollinisers across a block. Supporting a high-value commercial cultivar using pollinisers is a small price to pay for the ongoing success of your fruit set, and quality outcomes at harvest. ●

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Crassweller. R. (2023). *PennState Extension. Orchard Pollination: pollinizers, pollinators and weather. <https://extension.psu.edu/orchard-pollination-pollinizers-pollinators-and-weather>*

<https://www.waimeanurseries.co.nz/our-products/fruit-trees/apples>

# El Niño and the likely impact for New Zealand



Georgina Griffiths : MetService meteorologist

## El Niño declared

On 8 June, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Climate Prediction Center declared that El Niño is now in place in the tropical Pacific Ocean. This marks the official start of a natural climate phenomenon that has strong influence on weather patterns in the Pacific, but also influences other regions across the globe, including Aotearoa New Zealand.

El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is the single largest climate driver for planet Earth, and it causes a significant alteration in sea temperatures, trade winds and weather patterns across the Pacific Ocean. This has a domino effect on neighbouring regions. It is such a large and powerful climate system that it can be seen from space (see Figures 1 and 2).

The majority of climate models predict that this El Niño will strengthen between now and the end of the year – this is its typical life cycle – and most climate models signal a decent chance that this El Niño will be a **strong one**.

The headlines have led with “this El Niño may push us into our hottest year ever” – because **globally**, El Niño tends to enhance the background warming of climate change, with many regions of the globe running much hotter than usual during El Niño.

This warmth is caused by the so-called El Niño ‘warm tongue’ (Figure 1) – an area of warmer than usual seas that covers a significant part of the globe. Warmer sea temperatures lead to warmer than usual air temperatures in low-lying, coastal areas.

**Importantly, El Niño impacts for New Zealand are very different to that expected globally** – we tend to run cooler under El Niño.

Also no two El Niño are identical – this is because other climate drivers are always in play concurrently. A useful way to think about El Niño is that it **changes the odds** of a certain outcome (hot, dry, wet, cold) – but we recommend you keep up with our long-range commentary (<http://metservice.com/rural/monthly-outlook>) since other climate drivers (such as the Tasman Sea or Southern Ocean) can take over the steering wheel in the Australasian region for intermittent periods.

## What does El Niño mean for New Zealand?

### Winter – not much

Because this El Niño is only just getting going, winter weather patterns in the New Zealand region are expected to be still largely driven from what comes out of the Southern Ocean and Tasman Sea. Most Kiwis won’t notice the El Niño climate pattern particularly, while we are dealing with a lot of weather through winter – pretty standard New Zealand winter fare!

This winter, temperatures across New Zealand are forecast to be closer to average than seen for a good long while – a coolish winter will probably feel cold after several years of record winter warmth...

### Odds of a cold spring increase

However, the hallmark of a decent El Niño is a **cold spring, with more frequent than normal southerly winds**.

Rainfall for the regions will depend on whether these southerlies are ‘ridgely’ (quickly followed by a High) or whether the southerly regime is due to lows sitting east of the country. The former outcome is relatively dry across the motu, while the latter is wetter than normal for eastern regions of both Islands.

### Summer westerlies... buckle in!

If this El Niño winds up to be a strong one, expect westerly winds to REALLY fire up over New Zealand this summer. This is the typical outcome of this is drier, hotter and windier weather in northern and eastern regions of both Islands (Figure 3). Cooler, wetter and often cloudier weather might be expected for western areas of the South Island, and are also possible for Taranaki to Kāpiti, as well as Southland.



As always, you should keep up to date with the MetService long-range forecast at <http://metservice.com/rural/monthly-outlook>, or ask us questions on the MetService Facebook or Twitter feeds. ●

**NOAA Coral Reef Watch Daily 5km SST Anomalies (v3.1) 10 Jun 2023**

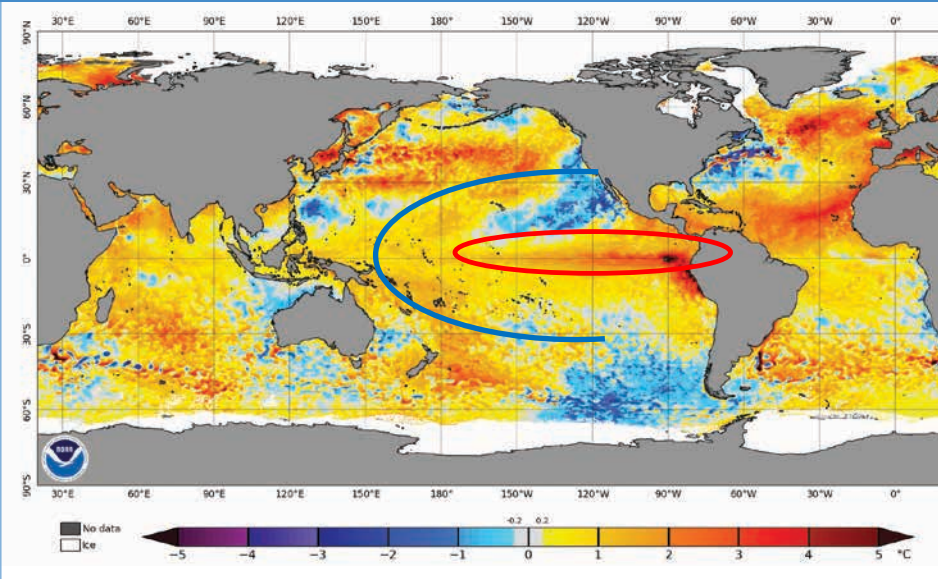


Figure 1 A snapshot of global sea surface temperature (SST) anomalies derived by satellite on 10 June 2023. Above average sea surface temperatures are shown in red colours, below average in blue colours.

The El Niño 'warm tongue' along the equatorial Pacific Ocean is circled in a red oval - this is the typical El Niño ocean response. Once the event strengthens, a 'cold horseshoe' (shown in blue) should develop around the warm tongue. (See Figure 2 for the opposite La Niña pattern.)

**NOAA Coral Reef Watch Daily 5km SST Anomalies (v3.1) 13 Sep 2020**

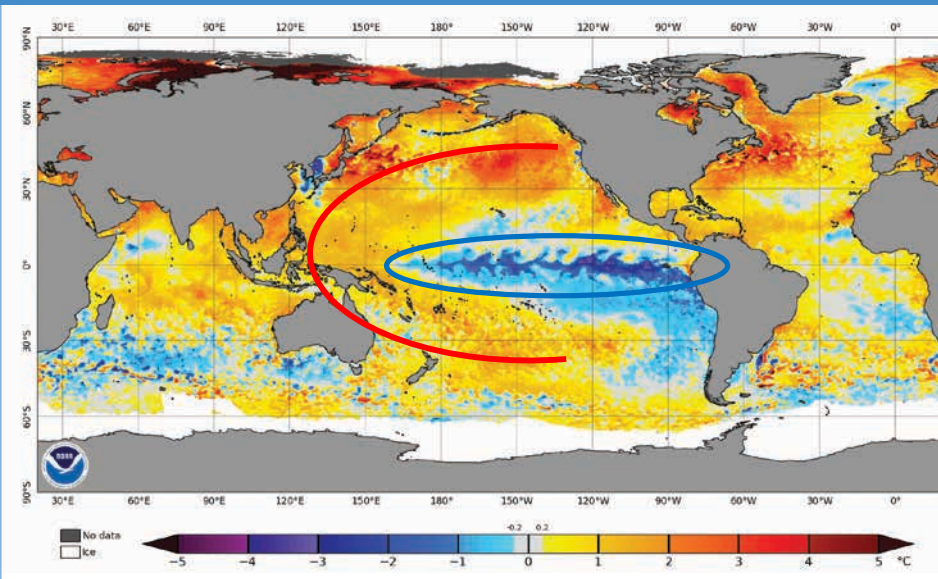


Figure 2 A snapshot of global sea surface temperature (SST) anomalies derived by satellite on 13 September 2020, when La Niña was in force. Above average sea surface temperatures are shown in red colours, below average in blue colours.

The La Niña 'cold tongue' along the equatorial Pacific Ocean is circled in a blue oval - this is the typical La Niña ocean response, helping to mitigate increased temperatures due to global warming. A 'warm horseshoe' (shown in red) is evident around the cold tongue.

**Summer (December – February)**



Increased odds of a dry summer under El Niño (shaded orange)

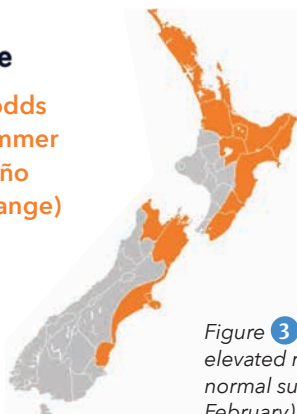
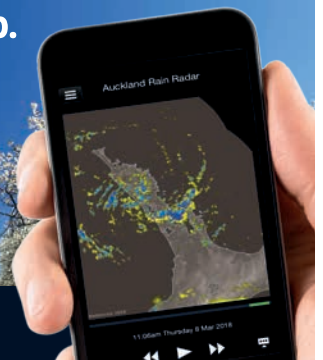


Figure 3 Regions with elevated risk of below normal summer (December – February) rainfall under El Niño

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# Weathering the storm

*The most destructive cyclone this century hasn't affected the strong root system of Genesis Nurseries – now under a new CEO.*

Having chosen horticulture as his profession from a young age, Hayden Green has had a long and varied career in the sector: from selling his veggies at the letterbox and topping the horticulture classes at school to studying floriculture, viticulture and later Horticultural Sciences at Massey, to securing the Royal Warrant for providing horticultural services to Her Majesty the Queen.

This rich rootstock, paired with his business experience with primary industry and horticultural companies across United States, the United Kingdom and New Zealand, makes bringing Hayden into the Genesis fold as chief executive an exciting progression for the company. Hayden is committed to leading the company and taking a system-wide approach by working collaboratively with customers and building strong relationships with industry stakeholders.

Hayden had only been in the role for just three months before Cyclone Gabrielle wove her path of destruction throughout Hawke's Bay. With considerable damage to Genesis assets and the stool bed nursery in Pakowhai, Hastings, "it was the quick response of the Hawke's Bay team and the heartening support from Lincoln University that meant our stool beds were successfully saved from silt asphyxiation," Hayden says.

Cyclone Gabrielle reaffirmed the importance of Genesis Nurseries' two-region growing strategy. With nurseries in Cambridge and multiple sites across Hawke's Bay, "we've come out the other side of Gabrielle with quality trees ready for immediate planting. We see a significant opportunity for Genesis Nurseries to play a critical role in the horticulture sector's growth and recovery post-Cyclone Gabrielle, having considerable inventory available this winter".

Genesis is in full swing dispatching for winter 2023 planting - including many sought-after varieties with some available stock if you get in touch now. Apple varieties include Tarzi®, Royal Honeycrisp, Premier™ Honeycrisp, Granny Smith and Roxy™. The popular cherry varieties Sweetheart® and MIDNIGHTPEARL® are also available for dispatch this year.

We are passionate about contributing positively to the industry as we position the Genesis Nurseries brand



in the market. "If you're planning to replant your flood-affected orchard, get in touch with the team", says Hayden. "We understand that re-development is a stressful and expensive time, and we're keen to work with you to get trees in the ground and your livelihood restored." ●

To place an order, please get in touch by emailing [vicky@gnl.nz](mailto:vicky@gnl.nz).



# Change in training for orchards to meet changing demands

*Demands are changing in orchards, with frost protection, water conservation and new technologies all requiring new skills, and Primary ITO | Te Pūkenga is introducing new training to help orchardists rise to these challenges.*

Primary ITO is responsible for on-the-job learning across the primary sector, including fruit production, and has been working with industry representatives to develop and launch an all-new New Zealand Certificate in Fruit Production Horticulture (Level 4).

Its Sector Manager for Production Horticulture, Hamish Gordon, says the new programme was needed to cope with new needs from industry.

"It's a changing world, with a lot of new pressures on industry around things like sustainability and water. While training can be another pressure for orchardists and business owners, it's also something that can really help.

"As new environmental rules come in, the requirements for orchards change. It adds more complexity to jobs, and we need people who understand these requirements. As an example, that means how to manage freshwater rules and still grow the business."

Hamish says the new training programme is aimed at people with at least three or four years of experience in the industry or who have already gained a Level 3 qualification. They're likely to be in roles like assistant orchard managers, orchard managers, team leaders, forepersons, or quality controllers.

There are several elective topics in the programme, enabling businesses to focus on the skills important to them.

"Somebody working up north might never expect to see a frost on the orchard but be very interested in organic and biodynamic practices. The new programme means they can choose to learn about what they need to know," says Hamish.

A key benefit of learning with Primary ITO is the network of training advisers up and down the country. With fruit production having very different needs depending on the type of fruit, having specialist training advisers is critical to ensuring training works for the learner and the business.

New elements in the training programme include an enhanced focus on the pruning work critical for orchards. In terms of implementing and monitoring a crop protection plan, optional topics of learning include frosts and frost protection methods, organic and biodynamic practices and certification, and water conservation.

To optimise fruit production, options include plant biology and implementing and monitoring plant management techniques.



Hamish says the industry's been impacted in the past few years by things like Covid-19 as well as weather events. "The general skills might not have changed, but events have added up to mean there's a shortage of skilled people in the industry, and a lack of people stepping up into prominent leadership roles.

"Investing in training people will help address those immediate skills needs and also bring in the future pipeline of the leaders required in businesses and across the industry."

Primary ITO can work with individual staff and businesses to develop a programme that is suitable to support career progression, aligns with seasonal activities and the needs of the business. ●

To learn more visit [www.primaryito.ac.nz/fruitproduction](http://www.primaryito.ac.nz/fruitproduction)



# Meeting places and shared spaces



**Kate Longman**  
HortNZ general manager engagement

Across this winter, the Horticulture New Zealand team is providing growers with the opportunity to connect and share what is top of mind. At Fielddays and the Horticulture Conference Week in Christchurch, HortNZ is raising the profile of fruit and vegetable growers and of grower success. We asked Kate Longman, HortNZ general manager engagement, about the highlights.



## ? How was it to be back at Fielddays with the full format event?

It's definitely an important date on the calendar for us in networking with government officials and Ministers. Horticulture hasn't always had a stand, the other exhibitors are mainly pastoral focused. The Zespri stand is an exception and makes sense because of the event's location near a significant kiwifruit growing region. In the past HortNZ has partnered with product groups to attract talent to the sector. This was our first year providing a place to meet with our growers and partners, as well as a separate stand in the Fielddays Opportunity Grows Here Careers Hub.

## ? Why is it important for HortNZ to front up at Fielddays?

Horticulture is a major contributor to New Zealand's economy and we should be present and get noticed.

The politicians were out in force. So were the officials and the civil servants who are responsible for the primary sector. The horticulture stand acts as a flagship for growers. We were there to make sure we were part of the conversation. We had HortNZ staff from our projects and programmes to talk to growers and answer their questions.

## ? Is horticulture appealing to young people as a career option?

We had a stand at the new Opportunity Grows Here Careers Hub and we certainly saw interest in horticulture. We celebrated the opportunities throughout our supply chain, from production and technology to science and business. For many young people we're a great match for their own thinking about social and environmental issues, plant-based

and low emission food security for example. We're sharing these stories and helping people with their next step.

## ? What can growers expect at this year's Horticulture Conference Week?

Conference Week is the biggest event on the calendar. We will be in Christchurch from 31 July to 4 August along with New Zealand Apples & Pears and the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) conference. This year's theme is *Sharing Successes to Strengthen Our Future*. I hope that growers will leave the conference upbeat. There's no doubt about the hardship many growers have faced, so I for one am looking forward to getting together to share perspectives, celebrate successes, and connect and energise each other. ●



## HORTICULTURE NEW ZEALAND

HortNZ advocates for and represents the interests of New Zealand's 4200 commercial fruit and vegetable growers. HortNZ's purpose is creating an enduring environment where growers thrive. HortNZ has 20 affiliated product groups and more than 30 affiliated local and regional grower associations. Find out more on [www.hortnz.co.nz](http://www.hortnz.co.nz).



Horticulture  
Conference  
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# Sharing Successes to strengthen our future

2 – 4 Aug | Te Pae Christchurch Convention Centre

This year the Horticulture Conference is part of the inaugural Horticulture Conference Week. Don't miss this opportunity to join with the whole horticulture industry in Christchurch this August.

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