

The ORCHARDIST®

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HORTICULTURE NEW ZEALAND

Young Growers Feature

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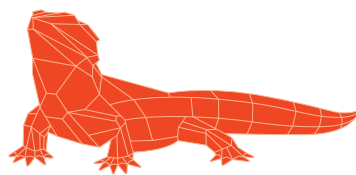


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Time to get New Zealand moving again!

As growers were struggling with drought conditions last month, I highlighted in my column the need for New Zealand to get serious about building water storage systems to enable greater resilience in horticulture. And wow, if only we had water storage schemes available most would now be full with the amount of rain that has fallen out of the sky over the last month!

Barry O'Neil : HortNZ president

About 90 percent of global water is used to produce food, fibre and beverages; and with the growing world population comes the need to also grow water security.

Currently, 98 percent of New Zealand's freshwater goes into the sea or evaporates. It does not make sense that we cannot capture it during high rainfall events. Even more ridiculous is that current consenting requirements make it nigh on impossible to get approval to do so.

Unfortunately the heavy rain and Cyclone Dovi have also created some major growing and harvesting challenges and with unbelievable humidity in many parts of the country, growers are also facing problems with fungal blight.

Building greater resilience in our production systems to manage impacts of a changing climate is unfortunately a priority need, whether that be the need for water storage, moving to covered cropping, or breeding superior plant varieties that are able to handle more extreme weather realities.

Also I wrote in my article last month that Omicron had just been identified in New Zealand. The virus is now well and truly present among New Zealand communities and with that come the realities of living and working with Omicron and ensuring the survival of our businesses. The apple and kiwifruit sectors have started their massive harvest efforts - still short of thousands of workers and facing uncertainty whether there will be enough staff to pick and pack. Businesses also have concerns as to whether they will be able to continue to operate should staff become unwell and have to go into isolation - taking the few staff they do have out of the workplace at the critical harvest time.

I think we have been sold a pup - or perhaps I should say

we have been asked to swallow a RAT! Achieving 90 percent-plus vaccination levels was never just for self-preservation in my view, rather we had the expectation it would allow our country and businesses to re-open, sooner rather than later. Just as is happening around the globe, from Denmark which has removed every single Covid-19 restriction, to Australia that is opening its borders to everyone **now** - not in six months' time.

While horticulture is grateful to have access to Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme workers, we still need thousands more workers and the only way we will get these is for them to be able to enter the country. There simply aren't enough people in New Zealand willing to fill these seasonal roles. Under phase two of the traffic light system, the isolation time for a positive case has reduced to ten days, and for close contacts, seven days, in an attempt to keep the supply chain operating. Although this is a positive shift for industry, roadblocks such as securing a sufficient supply of RAT tests still exist and will continue to pose challenges for our growers and their operations. In my opinion, we are unnecessarily handicapping our businesses and have halted any future growth opportunities in horticulture as everyone is being forced to bunker down in survival mode.

What are we really achieving by not opening our borders fully now, instead of phasing to fully open in October, other than seriously damaging our economy? We don't need to build or require anything new to happen, we have the tools, and the settings that will be used are all agreed, so what is the problem with opening now so we can start to get more international workers into our industry?

We all feel for the small business owners and workers who have been forced to close. Others have taken large



financial hits due to lockdowns and the absence of tourists. And let's not forget the \$70 billion spent on responding to Covid-19 that has to be paid back, most likely by our grandchildren - what an inheritance!

While these figures are alarming, the other very real impact is on people's wellbeing.

We don't have to look far to see the effects from this situation in our communities and our workers. People are worried sick about their future roles and incomes, dealing with the huge pressure of trying to find staff for their business to be able to survive, while also being exasperated whether shipping logistics will allow their products to get to market. And while I don't agree with some of the weird antivaxxer claims, I don't like that we have such outraged debate and division in our community, which we are all feeling. I do feel for the people who have lost their jobs due to their passionate beliefs.

After the initial vaccination roll-out debacle, I think most of us were happy enough to be restricted when we finally got serious about reaching the 90 percent plus vaccination target. In doing so, we have given those that are most vulnerable to the virus valuable time to get the protection they needed. It also gave the health system time to prepare for handling cases of Covid.

But we haven't given our businesses, including most in horticulture, the certainty they need to successfully operate.

It seems our policy makers and government are being spooked by poor advice, such as modelling which predicted 50,000 cases by Waitangi weekend! They have become too risk adverse as a result, when they should be learning what others internationally are doing or have done. Don't get me wrong, I think much of the response has been handled well, but what is being done now to the hand that feeds all of us - our economy - is wrong.

So to those policy makers in the Beehive - it is time to take stock of what's at stake. Our businesses are already struggling enough with finding staff, huge, inflationary-driven cost increases, including labour costs, and the copious amount of red tape and compliance costs - let alone Covid restrictions. As a country with high levels of vaccination and a nation that had more time to prepare for Omicron than any other country in the world, why do we have to suffer the indignity of not being able to operate due to poor policy decisions unnecessarily keeping workers out of New Zealand, and not at times allowing healthy staff to come to work?

Let's not become the laughing stock of the world by thinking we are achieving something better for our people and our country by these policies, when every other country has experienced to their detriment that they are pointless.

It's time to get New Zealand moving again!

Kia kaha. ●



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The burden of legacy

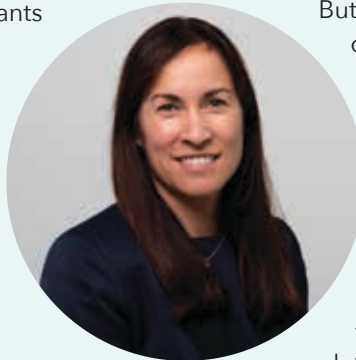
To say it has been a gruelling return to work post-Christmas would be an understatement. We knew we would be racing the clock with the arrival of Omicron and the peak in our horticulture season.

Nadine Tunley : HortNZ chief executive

Our industry has done an amazing job since March 2020 when Covid-19 put New Zealand into its first lockdown. All of you have stepped up and responded to all the protocols and requirements necessary to keep fresh produce getting to consumers, domestically and across the world.

In the 30-plus years that I have been directly involved in New Zealand agriculture, one of the constants I have observed, admired and been drawn too, is growers' and farmers' passion for and deep connectivity to their roles. What you do is not just your job, but the very essence of your being. I remember in 2012 making the mistake of telling one of the apple industry patriarchs that "you don't always put a value on your lifestyle choice."

For the record, that statement landed like a cup of cold sick and I think it took every ounce of restraint for him not to literally throw me out of his office. At the time, I was referring to the essence I touched on above. That you don't grow and farm just as a job. For many, it is intergenerational: a practice, skill and legacy



passed down and with that, a sense of responsibility, which without even realising it, adds a dynamic that other jobs do not carry.

In 2012, the apple industry was in a bad shape and Stephen Joyce, a National government Minister at the time, publicly stated we were a sunset industry! So, what a difference a decade makes.

But ten years on, we are again in a very difficult place. Added to that, the world has completely changed. We live in an over-stimulated environment where information is literally at our fingertips, and it is often uncensored because the whole world has a voice through social media.

Over-communication

The problem with communication now is that by the time we get it to you, it is out of date. Information around Omicron has changed daily and sometimes hourly, which unfortunately has led to considerable confusion. I am hopeful that by the time you read this article, we will be well into Phase 3 of the Omicron response and the government is being more pragmatic.



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Without a doubt, we can criticise and tear holes in the flat-footed approach from the government to importing sufficient rapid antigen tests. This shortage has been a major issue and as I write, still is. However, I can also say that it often seems simple when looking at a problem from one or two perspectives.

Making decisions is never easy, yet all of us do it 100 times a day. We often do not notice our decision making due to the low consequence level of many of those decisions. But imagine just for a second, making a decision that affects five million people.

I can tell you, that making a decision for even 5,000 people – in this case, growers – is near on impossible, especially when there are polar-opposite views on the topic. Here at Horticulture New Zealand, we have that situation now in the environmental area. We will never make a decision that will keep everyone happy, and the government has been forced to do the same lately.

Chief concern

My chief concern for the next few months is that with all the challenges you as growers are facing, clarity of thought becomes difficult and even impossible on occasion.

I am acutely aware that you are completely over what feels like more bureaucracy around the environment and emissions, labour and wage increases, and freshwater, when you are literally trying to survive, get through the season and have a business to salvage at the end of it. Understanding business and industry are areas in which this government is lacking considerable experience and judgement.

The product groups and HortNZ are working together as much as possible to deflect some of the government's pressure for you. We are all here to support you as best we can, so do call us when enough is enough. If you are feeling frustrated and at the end of your tether, I would prefer you call any of us and download, than carry it all yourselves.

If you need help or support, please do reach out as we have options that will assist. The responsibility that many of you are shouldering is beyond normal parameters and making simple, rational and non-emotional decisions can be too much.

We have had a lot go against us so far this season, and there are more challenges on the horizon, so don't let asking for help be one of them.

'A problem shared is a problem solved'. Also consider reaching out to:

Farmstrong: <https://farmstrong.co.nz/wellbeing-topics/getting-help>

Need to talk? <https://1737.org.nz>

Rural Support Trusts: <https://www.rural-support.org.nz> ●



2022 Horticulture New Zealand Director Elections

Calling for Nominations for Two Directors

The Horticulture New Zealand constitution provides for a term of three years for elected directors with one third of directors retiring by rotation each year.

The following Directors retire by rotation this year.

Barry O'Neil is offering himself for re-election.

Kathryn de Bruin is offering herself for re-election.

In accordance with Clause 12 (e) of the Horticulture New Zealand Constitution nominations are now being sought from individual grower members, affiliated Product Groups and affiliated Grower Associations.

Candidates must be nominated by at least two grower members or affiliated organisations.

The election is based on electing the best people for the job with no allocated seats for product, sector or regional representatives.

Candidate criteria

Nominated candidates must be:

- a person who is an active grower member of HortNZ; or
- a director, shareholder, partner or trustee of an active grower member who is appointed by that member as the principal representative of the entity in their dealings with HortNZ; or
- an employee of an active grower member who is appointed by that member as the principal representative of the entity in their dealings with HortNZ.

If more than two (2) candidates are nominated, an election will be held where individual grower members will vote for their preferred candidates. A profile for each candidate will be included with the voting papers distributed to growers.

The nomination form and position description is available on HortNZ's website www.hortnz.co.nz or can be requested from the Board Secretary via email Kerry.Norman@hortnz.co.nz or by phone 0508 467 869.

**Nominations close at 5.00pm
on Friday 8 April 2022**

YOUR LEVY AT WORK

INDUSTRY WIDE ISSUES FOR INDUSTRY GOOD

Natural resources and environment

Michelle Sands : HortNZ strategy and policy manager

Resource Management Reform

The government has provided more details and timeframes for the Resource Management Act Reform.

The Resource Management Act will be replaced by three new Acts:

- Natural Built Environment
- Strategic Planning
- Climate Change Response.

Horticulture New Zealand submitted on the exposure draft of the Natural and Built Environment Bill in 2021. In the third quarter of 2022, the government intends to introduce the full Natural and Built Environment Bill as well as the Strategic Planning Bill to Parliament. Both Acts are expected to be passed into law in 2023.

Consultation on the Climate Change Response Act will begin in 2022.

The Natural and Built Environment Act and the Strategic Planning Act include the following key elements:

- A national planning framework that sets national environmental limits and targets.
- Regional spatial strategies that identify the big issues and opportunities facing each region. These strategies will be used to plan infrastructure to direct development.
- Natural and Built Plans, which will be single regional plans that will replace regional and district plans.

They will cover use, allocation and land use management.

- A consenting framework that is proposed to be more directive and reduce council discretion.
- A compliance monitoring and enforcement framework, which will look to strengthen cost recovery, financial penalties and other sanctions.

HortNZ has provided feedback through targeted engagement. The key issue raised by HortNZ is ensuring the national planning framework adequately provides for the rural environment and rural communities. We seek a framework that recognises the values associated with horticulture, including economic contribution, food security and low emission food production. We want these values to be considered when natural resource allocation policies are set.

“

Consultation on the Climate Change Response Act will begin in 2022

We also seek that provisions that support housing and municipal water supplies are planned for in a manner that also supports the use of highly productive land for food production.

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National Environmental Standard for Drinking Water

The government is proposing a new National Environmental Standard for Drinking Water. HortNZ has consulted with product groups and district associations to gain feedback on the proposal.

The National Environmental Standard for Drinking Water will build on the new definition of a drinking water supply, which was introduced in the Water Services Act in 2021. The new definition captures many more water supplies. It includes many growers' bores where water is used for drinking and supplies more than one dwelling. For example, a supply that provides water to a grower's home as well as workers' accommodation.

“

HortNZ seeks an approach aligned with the National Policy Statement for Freshwater, where values and limits are set at a catchment level, to account for a range of values

A large area of productive land will be captured by drinking water source protection areas. HortNZ seeks an approach aligned with the National Policy Statement for Freshwater, where values and limits are set at a catchment level, to account for a range of values. This is so that the safety of drinking water is planned for at a strategic level, rather than by imposing conditions on activities through source water protection zones at the consent level.

He Waka Eke Noa – Primary Sector Climate Action Partnership

He Waka Eke Noa is a partnership between government, the primary sector and iwi/Māori to build a framework for pricing and reporting agricultural emissions. The aim of the partnership is to build a framework that will encourage emissions reductions, support integrated sequestration, and improve the ability of farmers and growers to adapt to a changing climate.

There are milestones within the Climate Change Response Act that will measure the influence the partnership is having on how many farmers and growers understand their emissions and their options to reduce emissions. To date approximately 20 percent of growers know how much greenhouse gas emissions their farm generates and nearly 70 percent have an approved Good Agriculture Practice (GAP) plan that provides a framework to manage their greenhouse emissions sources.

HortNZ has asked growers for their thoughts on the pricing options that have been developed by the He Waka Eke Noa Partnership. There are two options, as well as the Emissions Trading Scheme backstop:

- Farm Level, where pricing, rebates and reporting all occur at the farm or farm collective level.
- Processor Level Hybrid, where the emissions price would be included in the price of milk, meat and fertiliser, and rebates and reporting are via a voluntary contract at the farm or farm collective level.

Grower feedback has emphasised the importance of a system that is clear, simple and has efficient administrative costs so that revenue generated by the horticulture sector can be recycled to benefit low emissions horticultural farming.

The He Waka Eke Noa Partnership is open to feedback until 27 March.

Go here to have your say: <https://hewakaekenoa.nz/your-say/>

Growers can also find out more by visiting the HortNZ website: <https://www.hortnz.co.nz/environment/he-waka-eke-noa/> ●



YOUR INDUSTRY

ACROSS THE SECTOR — ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Young Growers
Feature

Pages 9-23





Jordan Carroll, a cherry orchard manager at CentralPac, has entered the Young Grower competition on multiple occasions and says it was a great opportunity to meet other likeminded young growers

Central Otago growers share how competition success has shaped their paths



Orcharding is by nature an isolating job, but involvement in the Young Grower of the Year competition has expanded the horizons for many young people looking to carve out a future in the horticulture industry. BONNIE FLAWS speaks to Central Otago competitors, old and new, about their experiences and where they are today.

Fourth generation Central Otago fruit grower, Simon Webb, says growers from the region are very hands-on and still probably a bit “old school”.

His business, Webb’s Fruit, has been in the family since 1914 and has 50-hectares planted out in peaches, nectarines, plums and apples, including some original trees planted by his forefathers.

Family-owned businesses continue to dominate Central Otago when

compared to other fruit growing regions, and this is part of what makes its produce special, Simon says.

In Hawke’s Bay, contract gangs are brought in far more for harvest and pruning, for example, but at Webb’s Fruit, Simon and his team are doing all the work.

“I spent all morning in the packing shed and then I’ve got a couple of shops to take care of,” he says. “The younger people come through and

it’s hard to teach them if you are not beside them doing it yourself.”

Perhaps this is the secret sauce that gives Central Otago its reputation for consistently having high quality competitors participating in the regional and final Young Grower of Year competitions.

“The soils here are all over the place and you have really got to know the area yourself. The soil can change within 100 metres and you have to



Cromwell

know your locations and do your research before you plant a piece of dirt out, or you'll get yourself in trouble real quick," he adds.

Simon Webb was the winner of the first Central Otago regional competition back in 2006 when it was called the 'Young Horticulturalist of the Year'. Being involved got him out of his comfort zone, he says.

“

It made me think about how we might do things differently because that was the kind of questions they asked

"It made me think about how we might do things differently because that was the kind of questions they asked."

Back then the competition was more theory than practical but it led to Simon making many connections in the wider sector that he could tap

into on his journey to keep the family business thriving.

Webb's Fruit is still a successful operation after it went through family succession, with two fruit shops selling produce directly to customers and a mail order business. It supplies fruit directly to some local supermarkets too, and distributes fruit nationally through MG Marketing. There are also apples grown for export - mostly Jazz™, Gala and the Pacific series, he says.

"I enjoy growing peaches and nectarines the most because we make the most money out of them. You need to get a balance of volume and quality, you can't miss out on either or you're in trouble."

Kris Robb

Kris Robb, general manager at Clyde Orchards, was the winner of the Central Otago Young Grower of the Year competition back in 2007 - the year after Simon Webb. He was working at Sunbury Park Orchard at the time.

"It was 15 years ago, the last year I

could enter it," Kris says. "I had been in horticulture ever since school. I came up to Central Otago for an eight-week summer job and never left really."

Winning the regional competition came with an ego boost for having achieved something and acquiring a certain level of industry recognition.

"Coming from Central and summerfruit, it's easy to feel like a big fish in a small pond," he says. "Going up to the national competition and being nurtured by those industry leaders certainly opened up the fact that the horticulture sector is huge and summerfruit growers are only a very small part of it."

Kris recalls how well the programme had been put together. Getting to have breakfast with the industry heads and touring other operations were highlights, he says.

"It was a good way to get networking. At that time I was getting into a company partnership and the competition gave me enough notoriety for my partner to have some confidence in me and that my boss

wasn't just talking me up."

And he is still doing exciting stuff. Now working for Clyde Orchards, Kris is growing Flatto™ peaches exclusively and manages six hectares of cherries as an early crop, in large houses with retractable roofing. This means the business can control the temperature and humidity and protect the trees from wind and rain.

When the weather is good, they open the roofing right up, and it closes automatically when it starts raining.

"We're finding that the returns are far greater and are from more than just being early," Kris explains. "Our cropping is more consistent because we can manipulate the environment through pollination time. And they don't get a drop of rain on them, so every fruit that we grow goes into a box."

“

The competition is a really good opportunity to bring all these young people together and give them a voice in the industry

Another bonus is that the early season means they can secure their workforce earlier and then hold on to them.

More recent winners are well on their way to established careers too.

Last year's regional winner, Jordan Carroll, is a cherry orchard manager at CentralPac, which owns ten hectares of orchards and manages 35ha more.

The 26-year-old decided after completing a degree in industrial design, that sitting behind a desk all day was not for him, which resulted in a bit of a crisis about what he was going to do with his life.

After finishing university, Jordan took on a summer job on an orchard, during which his boss suggested he stay on and give orcharding a try.

Competitors add value to the wider food sector

Even though his job title of operations manager gives a different impression to what one might typically associate with horticulture, Hamish Darling has been involved in horticulture his whole life through his parents' orchards, and he has plans to buy land and continue the family tradition.

Hamish won the regional competition in 2018 and went on to place third in the national finals. He now works for Sumfood in Cromwell – his parents' business – as operations manager.

Before taking up his current role two years ago, he worked for six years managing his uncle's orchards.

He says winning the regional competition allowed him to see the breadth of the horticultural sector in New Zealand and realise just how small his family operations were.

"One of the more memorable experiences was going to the T&G glasshouses in Pukekohe to see the industrial level production," Hamish says. "I hadn't seen that before. My father and uncle produce a lot of really good fruit, very impressively, but it's small."

His work now involves food safety monitoring using algorithms. By gathering data about food that is causing illness, or is of poor quality, they can work out what is behind it.

"We developed an algorithm that

collects data across a number of sites and social media looking for any analogous food issues, geographical patterns or supply chain patterns," he says. "From that you can work out patterns of food illness occurring."

Sumfood services businesses with complex supply chains like fast food restaurants, and provides early warning about food if there is a problem, alerting clients within hours, rather than days, so the offending product can be removed from the shelves faster and at less cost.



Hamish's experience in orchards and packhouses and his trip to Pukekohe gave him insights he has found useful in his current role, he says.

"Food safety is in every food supply chain and this is just an extension of that. [In Pukekohe] you could see how as things get bigger and more complex how much wider the effects are. "If my parents have a box of fruit leave our shop with bruises or some bird poo on it, it's really easy to work out what day it was picked, where it was from and replace it. It's a lot more tricky for bigger operations sending stuff to supermarkets all over the country."

Image: Hamish Darling won the Central Otago Young Grower of the Year competition in 2018 and went on to place third in the national finals. He now works for Sumfood in Cromwell



Jordan Carroll in the orchard

"I really loved it," Jordan says. "I started my apprenticeship two years ago, a certificate in horticulture. I think I just really like the challenge. The company I work for now, which is the same company I worked for during the competition, is an orchard management business and we have just started doing cherries."

He started his career out on the tractors and later fell into a role running the irrigation for two summers. Later he moved into supervision and managing blocks on the off-season.

"I've been in the sector full-time for five years now. I entered the competition in 2018 also, but didn't place ... it was a reality check that I was still quite new to the industry and had a lot to learn, so I worked a cherry season in Canada. The scale is so much bigger and the company that I worked for produced the same amount of cherries as the whole of New Zealand does."

Winning the regional competition in 2021 was a great experience, he says, giving him a chance to meet other

young growers.

"We had this event where there were 50 to 60 people under 30 years of age in horticulture. That was amazing. Down in Otago it's definitely an older demographic."

The connections he made are still going strong. He particularly likes talking to other young growers about other crops like kiwifruit and avocados. While he is keen to continue with cherries to learn the "nitty gritty" of the crop, he doesn't want to put all his eggs in one basket.

"At some point I would like to try something else," he says. "Down here we have quite a lot of apricots which are seeing a resurgence with some new varieties coming out. If I did want to move to another sector, the competition has given me a really good in-road to be able to stay in horticulture."

Cherry growing has had its ups and downs. Last year's big rain event in January wiped out 40 percent of the crop, and this year the biggest

challenge has been getting air freight space for exports, he says.

Finding labour and seasonal staff has been difficult too.

For now, Jordan is enjoying cherries and capitalising on the fact he can ski during his down time in the winter months.

“

I worked my way up and started [my career] as a junior doing pruning and learning the ropes

"I quite like the seasonality of horticulture, being able to ride the waves of a season, I enjoy that. So I see myself here for a long time. I've just bought a house."

Another Otago native, Jonathan Bates, turned out to be a regional winner last year, but on this occasion representing the Nelson region. He has competed twice before in Otago, coming second in

2016, and second equal again in 2017.

“Last time [competing] in Otago was a good way to reach apple growers and assess where you sit in your age group,” Jonathan says.

He has been in the Tasman region for two years now, working as block manager for Birdhurst where he grows apples.

“As a block supervisor I’m looking after staff, I run a crew during picking and thinning and pruning. We have a minimum of 16 blocks. I worked my way up and started [my career] as a junior doing pruning and learning the ropes.”

“

The big benefit of being involved in the Young Grower competition was the social connection

The big benefit of being involved in the Young Grower competition was the social connection, he says. Horticulture is an industry in which it’s easy to get stuck in your own little bubble.

“It’s easy to sit on your farm and not talk to you neighbour, but he might be doing something completely different on the exact same variety and have amazing results,” Jonathan says. “But unless you are having that conversation, you are never going to realise. So for me, it was definitely building connections and creating an awareness that I am keen and interested in the industry.”

After moving to Motueka for a change of scene, Jonathan realised the competition would be a great way to introduce himself to other local growers.

“It was a bit of a shock to win,” he says. “I wanted to place but didn’t expect to be going to the national Young Grower finals.”

His win in the Nelson regional competition last year resulted in a couple of career opportunities, he says.

The experience of being recognised for his achievements in the industry had a big impact on his self-confidence and made him realise what he was doing was “really valuable”.

“We are a progressive industry that is leading the world. New Zealand apples have been voted the best in the world for the last four to five years.”

The challenge of competing in the regionals was overtaken by his experience at the nationals, which he says was “a huge step up” and had a lot more to do with health and safety and compliance, making it technically harder.

He ended up coming first in tractor driving, but says that wasn’t a surprise given he had been driving them since he was five.

“I have absolutely enjoyed the move to Nelson and the national competition really just opened a lot of doors to people in the industry. It was amazing the conversations we could have just between the events. I’ve got contacts all over the country now that I talk to about horticulture once or twice a month.”

He says he’ll always be an “apple man” though. He grows Envy™, Jazz™, Brookfields™ and Cox’s Orange, among others.

Encouraging the next generation

Simon Webb’s early interest in the industry as a whole led him to capitalise on the networking opportunities the competition had brought when he competed and he is now a big believer in encouraging more young people to get involved.

“When I came into it, I focussed on industry, but others want to drive a tractor or supervise,” he says. “If you listen hard enough and keep listening you can push them in that direction. Encourage them to do these events and not be afraid to lose some good staff members if they are stepping up into a more senior role somewhere else.”

“If it’s more suited for them to be moving on, then you encourage them to do that and you talk to your orcharding mates to find good roles.”

He took on three new young workers last year and one has indicated he wants to work his way up to management, while others are interested in supervisory roles.

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Simon says it's important to be sympathetic to that and know their needs and wants.

"They want to be part of your business and have a role in it ... part of that is encouraging them to extend themselves and do the Young Grower [competitions].

"I had a young girl do it last year, Megan Asher. She got second down here. She completely surprised herself and was ecstatic with how well she performed."

“

It's great for the guys to take themselves out of their comfort zone, challenge themselves and meet a whole heap of new people

The biggest thing for her was the exposure to a whole lot of other young people in the same situation. They now regularly communicate through group chats to help each other solve problems on the orchard, Simon says.

Kris feels the same way, saying that the competition is getting better and better.

"It's great for the guys to take themselves out of their comfort zone, challenge themselves and meet a whole heap of new people. The prizes and the kudos are substantial. There are financial prizes and internships and leadership courses, overseas travel – a lot of really cool stuff."

Kris has four staff currently completing industry training that he thinks have the potential to do well in the competition. To encourage them, he took them on a field trip to watch last year so they could get a feel for what it was like.

"I'll be pushing them to enter this year," he says. ●

You don't have to be a winner to succeed

Not every competitor walks away with a winning title, but that doesn't mean they can't build on the experience.

Christie Kirk, an orchard foreman at Hortinvest, didn't place in last year's Otago regional competition, but she was still very new to orcharding at the time.

The 24-year-old from Tarras comes from a horticultural family – growers from Gisborne, who later moved to Central Otago to grow cherries. Her parents, Sharon and Ross, then started up Hortinvest, managing orchards for investors.

Working there certainly gave her a foot in the door, but Christie's experience had been mostly in post-harvest operations doing quality control in the packhouse.

"It wasn't until the end of 2019 I got into an orchard," Christie says. "I was chucked in the deep end a bit."

She says she joined the competition to meet other young people involved in horticulture.

"Around central Otago it's more young farmers and so I wanted to meet other young growers and just be a part of it. It was really good, definitely improved my confidence, especially the speech part.

"The competition is a really good opportunity to bring all these young people together and give them a voice in the industry."

Since the competition, Christie says she has stepped up at work.

"I'm an orchard foreman but I'm achieving and doing a lot more and I have a lot more knowledge.

Doing the Young Grower really opened my eyes to where I could potentially go, all of the things that I need to learn so I could be where I wanted to be."

She has her sights set on management, already overseeing a team of two, and says they are close-knit and working hard towards their vision for the orchard.

"Basically I hassle my boss a lot less."





Erin Atkinson, pictured here in 2017, was the first woman to win the national title of Young Grower of the Year

Opportunities abound for youth in horticulture

As the next Young Grower of the Year competition draws closer, we revisit the first woman to win the national title. HELENA O'NEILL talks to 2017 Young Grower of the Year, Erin Atkinson, about why the horticulture industry is a great place to be.

Reflecting on her national title win more than four years ago, Erin still feels a sense of achievement both for herself and the industry, as she witnesses other women taking out the top prize.

"It was amazing, totally unexpected, I guess. I know I worked hard and there was a really great group of competitors," Erin says. "Danni [van der Heijden] went on to win it after me and then Melissa [Van den Heuvel] won it last year. Both from the Bay of Plenty, both repping [sic]."

Erin says the Young Grower of the Year



competition gave her the ability to continue to do the job she loves – horticultural promotion. Since winning, she has become the chair of the Bay of Plenty Young Fruit Grower Upskilling Committee that organises the regional Young Grower competition but also runs educational events.

"We do a 'Cultivate Your Career' event, which unfortunately we haven't been able to run due to Covid-19, but we're still trying to do all of that stuff to bring in those high school students."

She is also a member of the Women in Kiwifruit



Erin Atkinson during the competition

Network committee which reformed last March, replacing the Zespri-led group, on which she currently serves as chair.

Organising events during a pandemic is not an easy task, but Erin is happy with how both committees have met the challenges created by the uncertainty.

More people have attended the Women in Kiwifruit Network events since moving online, which offers great opportunities, she says.

“

...I have seen so many great women in their early-to-mid 20s who are absolutely smashing it at the moment. Watching them go from strength to strength is wonderful

“We’re becoming more agile and adapting to it quite well. We’ve changed a lot of our events to being online and what’s been really cool is that we can target a wider audience out of our region. Kiwifruit isn’t just in the Bay of Plenty, we can get into Gisborne, Nelson, Northland, Auckland and beyond. We can also tap into other groups to share our messages too.”

Erin has seen an increase in the number of women working with kiwifruit over the years and hopes to see that trend continue across the wider industry.

“In the last five years in the kiwifruit industry, I have seen so many great women in their early-to-mid 20s who are absolutely smashing it at the moment. Watching them go from strength to strength is wonderful.”

Erin works as the Apata GROW manager for Apata Group Ltd. Apata GROW offers orchard management for kiwifruit growers specialising in providing on-orchard and technical services to maximise crop performance. The role offers plenty of opportunities to develop Erin’s skills and career.

“We’ve got an amazing culture here and they’ve been really great in terms of pathways. We’re just going from strength to strength developing those career pathways for people. It’s been fantastic. I’ve had three job titles in the seven years that I’ve worked here. Each time I’m working up to a different role.

“It’s been really helpful for us recruiting because if you can see people that are staying here and have moved through the company then I think it’s a good sign that the company is doing well.

“It’s the longest job that I’ve had to be honest - and I’m still not finished. There’s heaps of stuff I want to do within the company.”

This year Erin was also selected for the Kiwifruit Vine Health (KVH) associate director role which is a two-year

internship offering a chance for professional development. Run since 2014, the programme offers an opportunity for a kiwifruit industry future leader to join the KVH board and gain experience in governance, leadership and strategy while bringing his or her own industry knowledge and experience to the board table. The associate director also has the opportunity to be mentored by an industry leader and receive governance training.

“

For me, it's about that really great opportunity to give back to an industry that has given so much to me

“I get to sit and have active involvement in what's happening in the KVH space at board level and learn about governance and mentoring. For me, it's about that really great opportunity to give back to an industry that has given so much to me.

“I had my first board meeting in February and I went out of there thinking that's a lot to take on, but it was also exciting.”

Thinking back on her experience with the Young Grower competition, Erin says it gave her an opportunity to brush up on her existing skillset while developing new ones.

“It really helped me tap back into things I hadn't done for a while. I found it really cool that I got to recap the soil science and nutrient management knowledge. The business aspect was great as well because you got some insight into the business world, things you wouldn't normally cover in your day-to-day jobs.

“It's helped me with my current role in running a division as I have to look at balance sheets, look at profit and loss, budgets and actuals as well.”

Erin entered the regional competition twice, before taking out the title the second time around. If a young horticulturalist is considering taking part in the event but isn't quite sure, she urges them to give it a go.

“It's an amazing opportunity to meet like-minded people. It's a great way to learn new skills that you otherwise wouldn't have. The professional development that you get attached to these competitions as well, through to the sponsors and what they have to offer.

“It gave me a really good insight into what a great industry we are part of. This industry is really big on helping young people through it.” ●

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Melissa Bennett (née van den Heuvel) won the 2021 Young Grower of the Year national title

Continuing the legacy of winning women

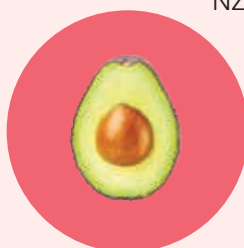
Working with the inherent variabilities of the natural environment to produce high quality, fresh food for the world is among the reasons the horticultural industry is the career of choice for Melissa Bennett. ELAINE FISHER speaks to the 26-year-old about life after winning the 2021 Young Grower of the Year competition and her future endeavours.

“There are so many moving parts in horticulture, including the impacts of weather which plays such a big role in the success of what we grow,” says Melissa, an avocado grower services representative at Apata Group Limited, based in the Bay of Plenty.

Known as Melissa van den Heuvel when she won the national young grower title, Melissa married her fiancé, Oscar Bennett, in February.

Horticulture was not part of Melissa’s career plans when she graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Environment Planning at the University of Waikato.

“It’s a bit of a joke among my friends that avocados became an accidental career for me because I didn’t study horticulture at uni.”



Two days after finishing her final exam, she became NZ Avocado’s industry systems associate, with a focus on quality systems, looking at the changes which could be implemented across the supply chain.

“Over the past few years, I have come to realise how many opportunities avocados and the wider horticultural industry offers, which extend far beyond picking, packing and the supply chain,” she says.

It was while working at NZ Avocado that Melissa was encouraged to enter the 2020 Bay of Plenty Young Grower of the Year competition, subsequently taking out the regional title.



Avocado grower services representative at Apata Group, Melissa Bennett, chats with grower Jill Austin on a Hydralada

When she competed in the Young Grower of the Year national finals in October 2021, she had taken up the role as avocado grower services representative at Apata Group Limited.

In winning the national title, Melissa continued the legacy of women in the Bay of Plenty horticulture industry, which began in 2017 when Te Puke fruit grower Erin Atkinson became the first woman to win the Young Grower of the Year title in its 11-year history. The next year, AVOCO technical advisor, Danni van der Heijden – also from the Bay of Plenty – won the title.

“Both Erin and Danni have been among my mentors and I am sure the coaching they gave helped me win, as did the guidance and support from both NZ Avocado and Apata,” says Melissa.

Taking part in the Young Grower competitions has helped expand not only her industry knowledge, but her personal development and commitment to an industry she has become passionate about.

In her grower services role at Apata, Melissa works closely alongside orchard owners in the western Bay of Plenty.

“I also have one grower at Hot Water Beach in the Coromandel. Our team is responsible for making sure our exporter AVOCO has enough fruit each week to meet its orders and that the fruit standards are compliant for the different markets. This includes scheduling the harvests on each orchard.”

Despite her youth, growers respect Melissa’s scientific and industry knowledge and her fresh perspective on growing.

“Many of my growers wouldn’t want to admit it but they have been orcharding probably longer than I’ve been alive. I learn a lot from them,” she says. “I’m a firm believer that we don’t know how to grow avocados perfectly and that we are constantly learning and looking closely at growing, picking and packing, thinking about how to do better and where to improve the supply chain so the consumer gets even better fruit.”

Owning an orchard is one of Melissa’s long-term goals and with that in mind she has invested some of her winnings from the awards.

“The sponsors were very generous and the prize packages were wonderful. I did splurge and buy a mountain bike, but I did ‘the grown-up thing’ and spent money on renovations to our home in Matamata and in investments,” says Melissa, who each day commutes from the Waikato to Tauranga for work.

“

I have come to realise how many opportunities avocados and the wider horticultural industry offers

Keen to see others benefit from the regional and national competition experience, Melissa is encouraging all young growers to consider entering, including some of her Apata work colleagues whom she is happy to help mentor, as she was mentored herself. ●



Anthony Taueki at the Clearwater Power Station intake in Canterbury

Growing opportunities for rangatahi

Anthony Taueki is “shaking the tree” and opening people’s minds up about the horticulture industry, from education through to careers. ANNE HARDIE reports.

Father of four and of Ngāti Kahungunu descent, Anthony is passionate about helping rangatahi find pathways to careers in horticulture. He is doing that on multiple levels, from teaching those in the workforce through to working with government officials.

Anthony is Fruition Horticulture’s regional coordinator for the Hawke’s Bay Tū Te Wana programme, run for rangatahi aged between 15 and 19. The programme follows a holistic model that takes students through to National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) level 2, but also addresses health and wellbeing, whakapapa, industry and fitness.

Anthony wishes the programme had been available when he first joined the industry. After leaving school at 15, he worked in a sawmill until he found his feet in horticulture at the age of 19. Starting out as a seasonal worker in a packhouse and doing general jobs around the orchard

didn’t necessarily lead to a career path though. It was only by clawing his way up through the ranks and working with a mentor, that he found his way.

“

Anthony wishes the programme had been available when he first joined the industry

Now Anthony is doing his part to remove the stigma around horticulture and other primary industries, and changing the way the industry trains its young workforce. Today’s horticulture scene is vastly different to what it was back in the 1980s or ‘90s, he says, when a job in horticulture was seen as labour intensive. Technology and efficiencies in growing systems have changed the industry

dramatically and the workforce with it. Instead of photos of fruit, he wants to see more pictures of the careers and jobs now connected to horticulture such as human resources and marketing.

“With our Tū Te Wana programme, we go and explore what people in the horticulture industry are doing. I encourage more employers to open their doors to what they do. If we really, truly want to attract talent, we have to open all those doors.”

In a time of change in education, Anthony says vocational education providers are in a good position to revamp vocational pathways. He doesn't think those pathways have kept pace with industry and says they need to be updated regularly.

“Is what we are doing in our educational space fit for purpose? The industry and technology have changed,” he says. “As the industry progresses forward, the unit standards representing our apprenticeships need to reflect how the industry is now. And that we are doing what is right for this generation.”

In line with that, Anthony says: “I do what I preach and review the course twice a year to make sure we are up to

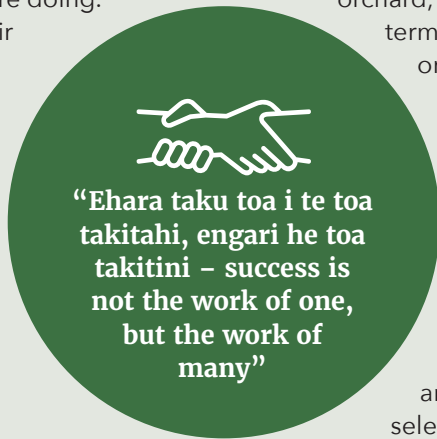
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Anthony also wants to expand the conversation around career opportunities to retain the existing workforce. He says careers in horticulture don't always have to progress upwards; they can also progress horizontally. On an orchard, managers usually stay in the job long term, so not everyone is going to become an orchard manager, but he says there are numerous other opportunities that need to be discussed to retain staff rather than focusing on negatives.

“It's staying focused so you don't lose sight of the trees when you are running through the weeds.”

Anthony's passion to help the next generation into horticulture careers and the wider primary sector led to his selection to the council for the Food and Fibre Youth Network, which provides a youth voice on environmental and industry issues. He now has a 2022 Nuffield New Zealand Farming Scholarship, where his research topic is *'growing opportunities from the roots up.'*

“Shaking the tree” is Anthony's call to action: “Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini – success is not the work of one, but the work of many.” ●



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Craig Botting - horticulture a broad but close-knit industry

Austin Singh Purewal - never miss an opportunity

Bigger and better things for joint winners

There has been plenty of change in the working lives of Craig Botting and Austin Singh Purewal – the joint winners of the 2019 Pukekohe Young Vegetable Grower of the Year Competition. GLENYS CHRISTIAN reports.

Craig's career in horticulture began upon completion of his Diploma of Agriculture at Lincoln University. After working on an arable farm, Craig spent a season abroad during the grain harvest in Canada, later applying for an ad on TradeMe for a planting supervisor and tractor operator at Scottfresh - growers of lettuce and broccoli in north Canterbury.

Successful in his application, Craig, 27 at the time, was encouraged by Scottfresh to enter the competition. He was the only South Island finalist in the competition that year.

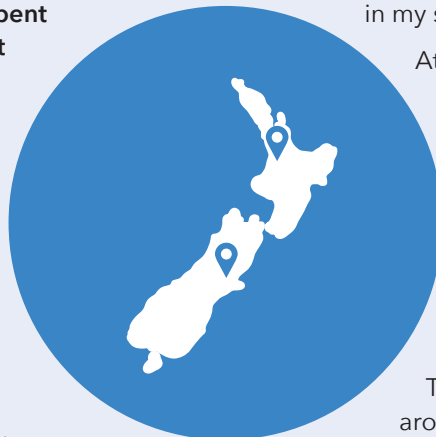
"I most enjoyed getting to know the other contestants," Craig says. "I learned a lot about

growing in different parts of the country and the leadership training built up a lot more confidence in my speaking ability."

At the end of 2020 he returned to his family's sheep and beef farm out of Balclutha. Horticulture beckoned again in August 2021, when Craig joined Southern Cross Produce based in Woodlands, Invercargill, as a tractor machinery operator.

"I was looking for a horticultural job closer to family and friends," he says.

The company's principles and values around looking after the soil attracted him most, he says.



“Good soil produces the highest value crops.”

With parsnips, carrots, potatoes, brassicas and brussels sprouts being grown, the operation felt quite different at first, but soon became more familiar.

“

I learned a lot about growing in different parts of the country and the leadership training built up a lot more confidence in my speaking ability

Craig’s time in pastoral agriculture cemented his passion for the horticultural industry.

“There are so many good things about it,” Craig says. “It’s a broad industry but quite close-knit and there are a lot of ideas out there.”

He remains determined to enter the competition again despite the arrival of Covid-19 making it more difficult. But he takes heart from Regan Judd, who won the 2021 Hawke’s Bay Young Fruitgrower of the Year competition after first taking out the title in 2019.

“Good on him for giving it another crack.”

Austin, who is now 21, was just 16 years old at the time he entered the Young Vegetable Grower of the Year competition. He obtained special permission from the organisers to enter the competition. Two years later and Austin was determined to try for the title once more. He was not only successful in being named joint winner of the 2019 Pukekohe Young Vegetable Grower of the Year alongside Craig, but also took out the national title in the Young Grower of the Year finals.

At the time, Austin was working as second in charge for his father’s company, Purewal Growers, which leases 28 hectares of land around Pukekohe to grow brassicas, spinach, parsley and herbs.

Austin says the most beneficial aspect of the competition was making new connections and extending his industry networks, which weren’t as developed because of his age.

“I found a lot of likeminded people,” he says.

Soon after the competition, Austin moved to T&G Global as a key accounts manager, which he credits for broadening his horizons. He first worked in covered crops and later in summer crops. After two years at T&G, Austin returned to Purewal Growers as part of a business expansion. He took up the role of head of sales and finance in November 2020 and has relished the opportunity to put his ideas forward to his brother, Amrik,

who is head of operations and his father, Chanjit, who is chief executive.

“There’s a lot of trust there,” he says. “We’re expanding the windows for our crops and presenting new opportunities for customers.”

He counts himself lucky to have been selected for Horticulture New Zealand’s graduate programme in 2020, valuing the leadership and wellbeing skills it taught him. He was master of ceremonies at last year’s Young Vegetable Grower of the Year Competition in Pukekohe and not long after, was nominated by local Member of Parliament, Andrew Bayly, to be part of the week-long Aspiring Leaders’ Forum in Wellington.

“It showed me how you could use your own beliefs and morals to help you be a leader,” he says.

He’s the youngest member of the Pukekohe Vegetable Growers’ Association’s (PVGA) executive committee and says the mentorship of president, Kylie Faulkner, has been an aspect he particularly appreciates.

“

It showed me how you could use your own beliefs and morals to help you be a leader

“She’s given me some different views to guide me,” Austin says.

While he’s still actively searching out more avenues for learning and personal growth, Austin makes sure he uses every chance to speak to young people who may be interested in working in horticulture.

Last year, he took part in manning the PVGA stand at the Franklin Careers Expo where local school pupils have the opportunity to explore some of the employment options available to them. Of course, he was quick to sell all that horticulture has to offer.

“I wish someone had told me to take every opportunity,” he says. “And if it’s not there you’ve got to create it.” ●



T&G is expecting they will be able to pack more than twice the volume they are now with a similar number of staff by 2030



Early concept drawings of the new Whakatu packhouse which will cover close to two rugby fields

T&G's plan for a multimillion-dollar new packhouse

T&G Global plans to build a \$100-million new packhouse at its postharvest headquarters in Whakatu, Hawke's Bay.

Rose Mannering

Sixty percent of T&G apples are grown in Hawke's Bay and its flagship variety, Envy™, is on a strong growth trajectory. T&G Global chief executive, Gareth Edgecombe, says with consumer demand increasing globally and an additional 1.9 billion Envy™ apples forecast by 2030, "there is a real need for investment now to create a future-ready, highly productive and technology-enabled premium export apple business."

The new packhouse, which will be located at T&G's Whakatu East site at 2 Anderson Road, will be a massive 200 metres by 60 metres - one of the biggest of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere. Planning is underway to complete the first stage for the 2023 harvest season,

in just one year's time. One of the company's orchards has been removed to allow for the development.

The year 2021 was busier than usual for T&G, freeing up capital by sale and lease-back arrangements to allow further new development at the Whakatu site. In November, the company announced it had sold its Whakatu West site to Property for Industry Limited (PFI). The sale of one of its packhouses, two coolstores, warehousing and 3.7 hectares of yard area brought in revenue of \$79.54 million to help with its new development plans.

T&G Global head of New Zealand postharvest, Emma George, says a phased construction approach is underway

for the development of the new packhouse. Once completed the packhouse will have capacity to pack more than 300,000 bins of apples per season.

A procurement process is currently underway to source state of the art packhouse equipment and automation technology and T&G is engaging with industry-leading suppliers to achieve this.

“A comprehensive analysis of the packhouse line design means we will be able to apply the right level of automation for various sections of the packing line, with the new packhouse allowing for a combination of fully automated, partly automated and standard packing lines,” Emma says.

The first packing line is due to be completed by the start of the 2023 season.

Emma says that with the introduction of new automation technology, T&G is expecting they will be able to pack more than twice the volume they are now with a similar number of staff by 2030.

The new facility is dedicated to packing only and will include a wet in-feed area, defect sorting, packing, palletising and strapping.

“Our two existing packhouse locations at our East and West sites will be converted to coolstores,” Emma says.

Millions for orchard redevelopment

Gareth says T&G is also committing millions of dollars to orchard redevelopment across 300 hectares in the Hawke’s Bay and Nelson regions over the next four years to support their Envy™ growth strategy. This includes 2D plantings of Envy™ to allow for future automated technology, with eight new picking platforms ordered for the 2022 harvest.

T&G is working with other large-scale investors for growth, such as iwi and the NZ Super Fund through FarmRight, who recently purchased 40 hectares of T&G’s orchards. In that relationship T&G is contracted to provide orchard services and all post-harvest, export and marketing services.

“The fact key partners such as NZ Super Fund are realising the strong investment opportunity and potential demonstrates the strength of our strategy and future direction,” he says.

Gareth is excited about the introduction of world-leading soft fruit handling technology. Other initiatives include capturing water from the new packhouse roof to use elsewhere in the business, as well as using improved water filtration and modern wastewater treatment technologies. The use of solar power is also being considered to reduce reliance on the local power network. ●

AMNESTY NOTICE



New Zealand Fruit Tree Company Limited (NZFTC) is responsible for the administration and management in New Zealand of a range of fruit tree varieties and breeding programmes.

NZFTC has become aware of a number of instances where trees of these varieties have been reworked or propagated by its licensed growers without authorisation from NZFTC.

As a result, NZFTC intends over the next few months to increase its auditing and inspection activities over the properties of its authorised growers, to ensure that those growers are complying with the licences granted to them by NZFTC for these varieties. Any grower who is found to have reworked or propagated trees of these varieties without authorisation may be subject to a range of consequences. These may include termination of the rights granted to that grower, the destruction of trees of all licensed varieties, damages, and the requirement to pay additional fees.

Before taking these steps, NZFTC is offering its authorised growers a limited opportunity to notify NZFTC of any unauthorised reworking or propagation by them of any trees of these varieties. Accordingly, if you have engaged in such unauthorised reworking or propagation, and if you:

- provide full written details of such unauthorised reworking or propagation to NZFTC before 5:00 pm on 31 March 2022;
- take such steps as NZFTC reasonably requires to enable NZFTC to verify any such written details provided by you;
- pay the applicable fees that you would have paid had your reworking or propagation been authorised, within 7 days of receipt of an invoice from NZFTC for such fees; and
- continue to comply with all your other obligations under all agreements between you and NZFTC,

then NZFTC will regard your unauthorised reworking or propagation as having been authorised at the time, and will take no enforcement steps in relation to your unauthorised working or propagation.

This amnesty offer will expire at 5:00 pm on 31 March 2022. NZFTC reserves all of its rights and remedies in relation to any unauthorised reworking or propagation notified to NZFTC or discovered by NZFTC after that time.

If you wish to take advantage of this amnesty, or if you have any questions about this amnesty, please contact NZFTC at: john@johnmortonltd.co.nz - 021 423 489 or julie@freshnz.co.nz - 021 458 590

Remote island home no barrier to horticulture hiring

From her home on a remote Pacific island, Ashlyne Kauha used the online hiring tool, PICMI, to apply for and receive instant confirmation of her appointment to a horticulture role in New Zealand – becoming the first woman to do so.

Elaine Fisher

“Ashlyne was so proud of what she had achieved, she posted photos of herself in her national costume showing the email which confirmed her seasonal role with the Reekie Family Trust in Te Puke,” says PICMI co-founder, Genevieve Griffin-George.

Ashlyne, from the remote island of Tanna in Vanuatu, previously would have had to take a three-day trip to Port Vila to apply for the job. She has since gone on to help others in her village apply for and gain work through the PICMI system.

Ashlyne’s success began with an inquiry from Michelle Reekie of the Reekie Family Trust, asking if the same PICMI technology she used to hire staff in New Zealand could also work on an island in the Pacific.

“We said yes it could and set about making it happen,” says Genevieve.

Michelle sent Ashlyne an email with a link inviting her to apply for the job. Ashlyne opened the link and then filled out the information required, reviewed the contract, and signed an agreement to work for the Reekie Family Trust. She was also able to securely share her personal details with her employer. Once the contract was digitally signed, Ashlyne received confirmation of her appointment to the role.

“We had been communicating with Ashlyne via Facebook and were so excited when she completed the process and got the job,” says Genevieve.

As contracts signed through PICMI meet all the requirements of New Zealand employment law, the Reekie Family Trust



The first woman to receive instant online employment confirmation, Ashlyne Kauha displays the email confirming her appointment

was able to use Ashlyne’s contract and those of others who accepted jobs, to start the visa application process earlier than usual. The first team of eight from Vanuatu began working at its Te Puke orchards before Christmas.

By contrast, many Vanuatu Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme (RSE) job seekers add weeks to their application process because they must travel from their islands to the capital, Port Vila, to complete forms and medical checks. Employers must also wait and constantly check progress before starting the visa application process.

Genevieve says using PICMI to confirm employment is life changing for RSE workers in the Pacific. The tool dramatically reduces the time, travel and expense previously involved in applying for work.

“Covid has been very hard for them and the time and money previously required to apply for work has added to that,” Genevieve says. “PICMI is helping speed up the process and reduce stress.”

Michelle says processing documentation through the right people in the right order is difficult and time-consuming.

“Doing it digitally skips all the unnecessary duplication that costs time and money. In our case, going direct means we don’t send documents to an agent who passes them to the Vanuatu labour services which make duplicates and then require our prospective workers to travel from outer Islands to sign the documents and then return the documents with a signature back to us.

“What’s even more important to us is that our workers feel good about themselves by being able to sign immediately and have a contract.”

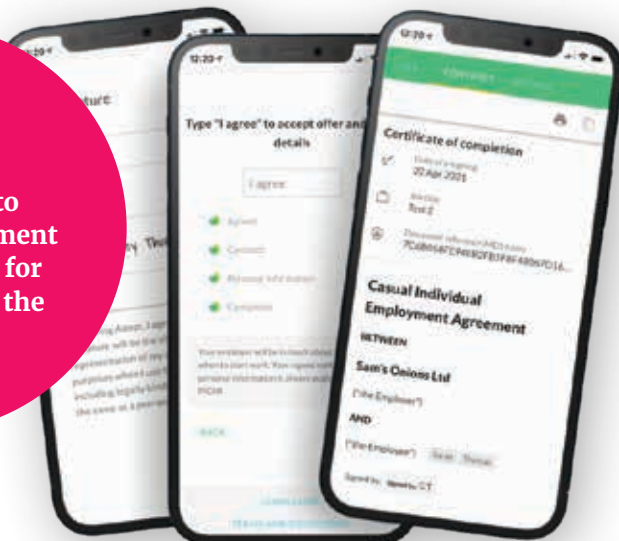
Genevieve says more New Zealanders than ever are now using PICMI to accept seasonal employment across almost the entire horticultural sector.

“We’ve got customers across New Zealand in berries, summerfruit, kumara, hops, kiwifruit and apples. They have collectively hired thousands of people through PICMI in the past six months and 60 percent of the jobseekers are New Zealanders.

“The technology also allows induction to be carried out online, so employees arrive on the job with an understanding of the business and what the work entails.

“Employers report a better calibre of employee coming through, as someone who has made the commitment to fill in the application form, share their information and complete the induction process, has shown a commitment to the job.

“Instead of hours of paperwork, employers also have more time to spend with staff on the important things, like pastoral care and training, which is what they really want to do.” ●



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Local fruit in local products

Fresh and fruity bodywash line champions local produce

Covid-19 prompted Kiwis to think more about buying locally-made products – a shift that a small Nelson manufacturing business was quick to respond to. In just over a year, Cropp's had identified a gap in the market and transformed local fruit into a range of natural body wash and lotion products for everyday consumer use. ANNE HARDIE reports.

Cropp's new range of personal care products use apple, blackcurrant, raspberry and lemon and are now sold in supermarkets around the country under the name Factory Road.

Within the first six months of launching Factory Road, the product range was placed in 80 percent of Fresh Choice supermarkets throughout the country and is now available at selected New World and Four Square supermarkets in the South Island too.

It was all about finding a gap in the market, says Matthew (Matt) Cropp, who owns the natural personal care manufacturing business with his wife, Julene. That gap was affordable, New Zealand-made natural skin care, in a market where most natural skin care comes with a high price tag or is imported.

"It took off because Kiwis wanted something local and affordable," Matt says.

The factory's team of five sits within a cluster of local manufacturers on Factory Road near Brightwater – a small loop road with a lot happening on it. Matt and Julene set the factory up several years ago, converting it from a potter's shed for mixing clay to a facility with the capability of producing premium skin care products. It enabled them to expand their honey-based skin care products, Bees Brilliance, which is sold through pharmacies nationwide and offers contract manufacturing services to other companies wanting to make their own balms, lotions or surfactants.

Matt and Julene looked at introducing other products after lockdowns presented new opportunities. It wasn't long before the business launched its first sanitiser range on the

market, later followed by a mask refresher spray – also born out of Covid times – which freshens masks with a blend that includes essential oils. At the same time, Matt and Julene sought out local ingredients they could use for new products.

“

There's that consciousness of Kiwis wanting those everyday products made here that they can trust

Tasman Bay Food Company, which also operates on Factory Road, now supply the business its apple juice, blackcurrants come from the New Zealand Blackcurrant Cooperative and the lemon concentrate and raspberry extract are sourced locally too. The resulting body wash flavours created by the team at Factory Road include Crispy Fresh Nelson apples, Currant Crush Nelson blackcurrants, Sweet As Nelson lemon and honey, plus Berrylicious Nelson raspberries.

“We're taking apple juice concentrate from across the road and creating something of higher value with it,” Matt says. “It's not just a by-product but something people need and use every day with unique New Zealand flavours that people love and enjoy. And it employs local people to mix and make those products.”

Recycled plastic bottles made by a New Zealand company are used to bottle the body wash and lotions and they contract specialists for the colourful labels. The end result for the body wash is a one-litre bottle that retails for \$10.99. Initially, the bottles were on the market for \$9.99, but a slight rise in costs meant they weren't making any profit.

Head of sales, Ariana Little, says one of the ways they have managed to keep the price competitive is by working with

individual supermarkets to get their product on the shelves and into customers' hands rather than using third parties. That has also enabled them to work with stores strategically so they are not supplying everyone, while keeping a targeted approach.

“We want to help drive sales in those stores so it's a win-win for us and the stores we partner with.”

It is more work but is a model that works for a small business. They then gave out sample sachets to each store to be dropped into customers' shopping bags. Other than the sachets and word of mouth, they have done absolutely no marketing, yet sales took off.

In an age where social media is a major marketing tool, Ariana says a bit of old-fashioned marketing in the form of word of mouth has done the job to get sales to a stage that fits well with manufacturing their other products and the contract manufacturing side of the business.

The success of Factory Road largely comes down to identifying that gap in the market of affordable, locally-made, natural personal care products for customers who were looking for it.

“New Zealanders are now more aware of where their products are coming from,” Ariana says. “There's that consciousness of Kiwis wanting those everyday products made here that they can trust.” ●



Matt and Julene Cropp are using local fruit in their body washes

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Ivan Miller picking cherries in Cromwell

Proud to be a New Zealand fruit picker

IVAN MILLER is a returning seasonal fruit picker and blogger who writes about his experiences around New Zealand orchards and the opportunities that horticulture has to offer. Not only has seasonal work provided him job security throughout the pandemic but has made him proud to be an essential worker serving his country.

In November 2020 the government announced incentive schemes for people who took on seasonal work, in order to address the labour shortages due to the Covid-19 pandemic and our border closures.

I had just completed an epic hikoi (long journey) for mental health, walking 6000 kilometres around New Zealand, from Cape Reinga to Bluff, then all the way back to the top again.

I had no money, no home and everything I owned fitted into my backpack. I had managed to pick up three weeks' work in Waipapa on an all-male kiwifruit block, picking flowers for pollen, considering what my next moves would be.

It was the government's announcement that determined my next adventure - to travel around New Zealand following the harvests and seasonal work and promoting the work

online through my new Facebook page "Ripe for the Picking - Harvest Aotearoa".

Before I knew it, I was on a plane to Queenstown, headed for the lucrative cherry season in nearby Cromwell. I bought a cheap old Honda Civic, a new tent and I was on my way. From there I went to Hastings for the apple season in March, before heading to Kerikeri to work in the packhouse for the kiwifruit season.

In May I picked Manutuke persimmons near Gisborne, and later spent the next four months working on a citrus orchard, picking mandarins, lemons and oranges, while learning how to prune.

I returned to Waipapa in November for the kiwifruit flower season, before driving all the way down to Central Otago for

another blast on the cherries over December and January. It is February now at the time of writing, and I am currently in Motueka picking blueberries. Time has gone so fast and I guess I never realised just how easy it is to fill in a whole calendar year with seasonal work in New Zealand. There are multiple jobs all over the country at any given time.

Covid-19 and the resulting labour shortages have created a lot of competition in the labour market and a seasonal worker has lots of opportunities and ever-attractive offers and incentives presented to them. It's a pickers market at the moment and I will explore new fields and orchards this year.

On my Facebook page I show my followers every aspect of my seasonal experience. I describe what the jobs entail and the difficulty levels of each. I talk about pay and conditions and the climatic challenges in every season - heat, cold, wet, windy and dry. I showcase the different regions and their attractions, because it's not all about work, but also your location and the activities you can do and places you can go on your days off. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.

But I also speak about one of the best features of being a seasonal worker and that is the people you meet and the connections you make. Enduring friendships with people from all around the world. It's a very rich and dynamic lifestyle and these people become like family and a home away from home.

When I started this journey I needed to challenge the stigmas attached to seasonal work. You know the ones - the comments in any news article about fruit picking that refer to "slave labour," squalid conditions and worker exploitation. I discovered that there is very good money to be made in the fields. In November I earned \$2300 in six days for picking flowers. In Cromwell, I made over \$600 in

just nine hours on my best day picking cherries. And there are many others who pick far better than I.

There is also this to consider: with on-site camping available in many of the jobs there are big savings to be made. I haven't had a single power bill and I saved thousands of dollars on rent last year. In Cromwell I paid \$60 a week. In Manutuke, I paid \$25 a week, and in Waipapa I paid nothing at all! My goal this year is to buy a self-contained van so I don't have to spend a third winter in my tent.

I am 53-years-old soon and some people have asked me why I do this kind of work and say that perhaps I am a little "overripe" to be picking. I was told the same thing when I was considering my walk around New Zealand.

It's a very rich and dynamic lifestyle and these people become like family and a home away from home

I tell them this: Seasonal workers (and indeed, long-walkers) come in all shapes, sizes and ages. A lot of people think that the work is 80 percent physical and 20 percent mental. I actually think that the opposite is true. Never judge a book by its cover. It is your mindset that will ultimately determine your success.

One of the best things to come out of the pandemic is to be acknowledged as essential workers. It has enabled us to work under each alert level and given us permission to travel through regional borders. The *Oxford Learner's Dictionary* defines essential as "... completely necessary, extremely important in a particular situation or for a particular activity. SYNONYM vital...".

I am an essential worker and proud to be serving my country for a second time, for this country gives me so much back in return and serves me well too! As I venture from one region to another in this spectacular country, I marvel at how lucky I am to be doing this sort of work.

I am one very happy camper. ●



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Important reminder for growers around off-label use of products

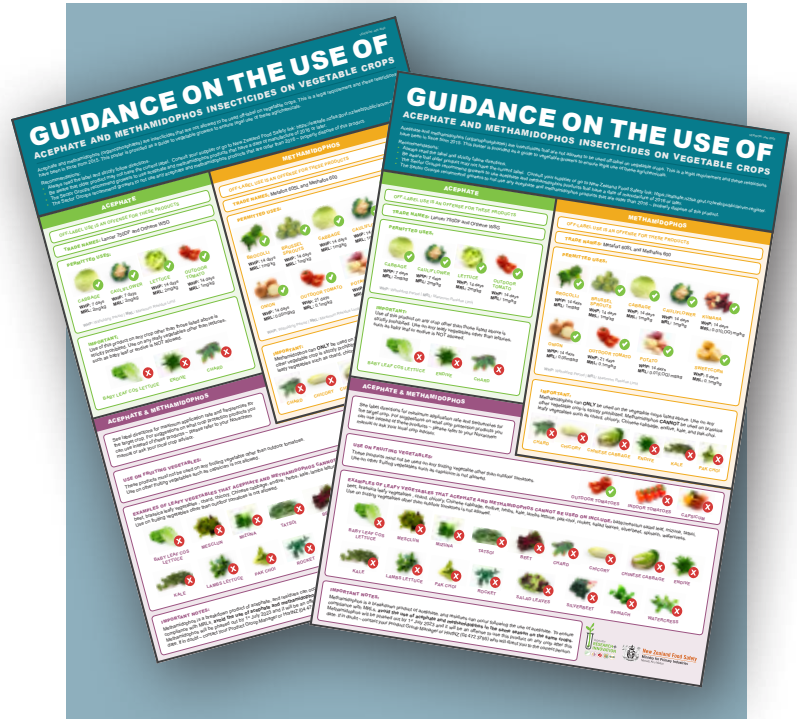
Off-label use of crop protection products is needed to manage pests, diseases and weeds in a number of minor crops.

Stephen Salter : Market Access Solutionz

While the practice is legal, growers are responsible for ensuring that off-label use is necessary, safe and compliant. There are important steps that growers need to follow to ensure correct products are used and that residue levels are within regulatory and customer limits.

Off-label use occurs when growers need to use a product to control a pest, disease or weed – but the label does not carry a claim for that crop or target. While the flexibility of being able to use crop protection products off-label is critical to New Zealand growers, they are unable to rely on label directions to ensure regulatory controls are complied with. Without label guidance, there is a risk that off-label use may result in exceedance of maximum residue limits (MRLs) or other compliance breaches. Results from residue testing programmes over several years show where residue levels exceeded MRLs (Maximum Residue Levels), these incidents were sometimes due to products being used off-label.

The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) conducts a Food Residue Surveillance Programme which monitors residues on a range of domestic and imported fruit and vegetables. Residue non-compliance in this project can be as a result of off-label use where no MRL is set and the New Zealand default of 0.1mg/kg applies, or where off-label use of the product is not allowed and consequently any detection of the active is a non-compliance. MRL non-compliances can have serious and negative financial implications for growers, so ensuring that all growers understand the rules



New posters

and requirements for each crop protection product used – and how to comply with all controls – is important.

To attempt to address this issue, NZGAP produces guidance on the use of off-label crop protection products. This is updated annually and growers, particularly of minor crops, are strongly encouraged to read this. All growers who use products off-label should read this document. It provides practical information to help meet regulatory requirements under the Agricultural Compounds & Veterinary Medicines (ACVM) Act, Hazardous Substances and New Organisms (HSNO) Act, Health and Safety at Work Act (HSWA) and Food Act.

The 2022 Guidance has been updated with two new appendices:

1 Off-label use poster

The Vegetable Research & Innovation (VR&I) board produced a downloadable poster designed for growers when using a product off-label on a crop or pest that is not registered on the label.

2 Acephate and Methamidophos poster

The VR&I board also produced a downloadable guidance poster for vegetable growers to ensure legal use of the two actives, acephate and methamidophos. The insecticides acephate and methamidophos (organophosphates) are not allowed to be used off-label on vegetable crops. This is a legal requirement and these restrictions have been in force since 2015.

Links to each of these posters are included in the new off-label guidance document. Hard copies can also be sent to you by contacting your business manager.

“

MRL non-compliances can have serious and negative financial implications for growers

Before the season commences, when designing or updating spray plans, growers should carefully consider what products may need to be used off-label. The document provides a decision tree for determining if a product can be used off-label as well as a checklist for ensuring compliance. It is recommended that growers' considerations and decision making around off-label use of a product are documented and lodged in their spray diary.

WorkSafe and regional plan requirements must also be met. This includes tasks such as complying with neighbour

notification, buffer zones, re-entry intervals and signage requirements.

These off-label use guidelines are not an exhaustive list of all steps growers must take to ensure regulatory compliance, particularly with regard to WorkSafe and regional council requirements which can differ from region to region. Requirements will also vary between growers because what is a “reasonably practicable” step to take to ensure the safety of your workers and bystanders will depend on many factors in each operation. Whilst some WorkSafe requirements are specific, such as thresholds over which signage is required, others are based around the principle of eliminating and minimising risks to health and safety so far as is reasonably practicable. ●



The 2022 version of the off-label guideline document is available here:

<https://www.nzgap.co.nz/guidelines>

If you have further queries, please contact NZGAP: info@nzgap.co.nz, or your product group manager.

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Anthea Raven pours a cup of Coffig (fig coffee) at one of the orchard's Figgy Morning Teas

Fig'n delicious: Mangawhai orchard gets fig growing down to an art

Striking out into horticulture was a big step for Anthea and her partner Julie Glamuzina. What began as a desire to bring fresh figs to the tables of Kiwis back in early 2008 has turned into a successful venture 14 years later. HELENA O'NEILL speaks to Anthea Raven about the growth of their orchard and the duo's commitment to bringing fresh figs to Kiwis.

On a 1.25-hectare block in Northland's rural Mangawhai, Anthea and her partner Julie Glamuzina run the orchard, Fig'n Delicious.

The idea to grow figs came from the couple's desire to expand on the experience of eating and cooking the fruit - beyond dried fruit imports - and to give Kiwi consumers the experience of fresh figs.

It was a leap into the unknown with both women only having academic backgrounds.



A free horticulture course run by NorthTec helped build some basic knowledge, further backed up by support and advice from friends with experience in horticulture and organic methods.

The couple also visited other fig growers who willingly shared their experience and ideas, Anthea says.

"We had three things going for us - we knew we were really hard workers; we were really tough



Co-owner Julie Glamuzina during the fig harvest

physically and we could learn and build knowledge," she says.

They were also of the mind that it was better to pay someone to teach them skills, like pruning, instead of getting someone else in to do the job for them.

Fig growing expert Eric Cairns of the NZ Tree Crops Association was a key resource to the duo in the beginning, propagating over 300 fig trees for their orchard.

“

We had three things going for us – we knew we were really hard workers; we were really tough physically and we could learn and build knowledge

"He's the sort of go-to person for figs," says Anthea. "He is so willing to share knowledge, he is fantastic."

In 2008, Anthea and Julie began preparing the soil before planting 150 fig trees two years later, with the remaining 150 planted in 2012.

Today, they grow three varieties of what is known as the 'common fig' – French Sugar, San Piero and Adriatic.

The French Sugar has a sweet pale amber flesh with a honeyed flavour that makes it very popular to eat fresh,

while the San Piero has a medium to large sized fruit with an oblong shaped neck that shines in dishes. The Adriatic – a medium sized fruit – has a greenish skin and a juicy strawberry flavour. However, late season Adriatic figs struggle to get enough sunlight to produce enough natural sugars.

"We thought we were being very clever," Anthea says. "We were looking at commercially making the most of the season, choosing a fig that fruits early, one that fruits in the middle and one that fruits last. We get lots of figs on



**NZ Feijoa Growers Association Inc
2022 Commodity Levy Rate**

NZ Feijoa Growers Association Inc advises that the rate for the Feijoa commodity levy in 2022 remains at 3% of the price of feijoas sold in New Zealand at the first point of sale, or 3% of the fob value for export feijoas, or 3% of the unprocessed value of feijoas if a grower processes the feijoas on their own account. All prices are exclusive of GST.

The 2021 Annual General Meeting of the Association voted to keep the levy rate at the same level as the previous year.

Ian Turk
Manager, NZ Feijoa Growers Association Inc

www.feijoa.org.nz



Workers start handpicking figs at the orchard

the Adriatic trees, but we don't have the heat in the sun to create the sugars and to ripen them."

After admitting that their planting of Adriatic trees wasn't working, they went about selecting one variety of fig that they knew did well and planted it in just one part of the orchard. They also planted the odd tree here and there so that if something went wrong, they knew whether it was a variety problem or an environmental one.

"It was a simplistic scientific method," Anthea says.

"I ripped out 50 [Adriatic] and have propagated with French Sugar [now]. I've given 30 an opportunity to regenerate and look more enthusiastic. But I will be propagating some more French Sugar because they're the ones that do really well.

"The French Sugar figs are a beautiful fruit to put on your table to eat, they're stunning. The San Piero are an interesting fruit that will take some baked methods. They almost hollow out like an avocado. They're really good for creating dishes, while the French Sugar [figs] are great with a bit of cheese and wine."

With considerably more experience and knowledge under their belts, Anthea and Julie now use organic methods on the orchards - something Anthea says is not easy and remains challenging. But the orchard rewards them for their hard work, continuing to produce beautiful fruit.

The harvest season begins mid-February and usually runs for six to eight weeks.

Figs do not ripen off the tree, so they have to be picked

They grow three varieties of what is known as the 'common fig'



each day. Once picked, they stop producing the sugars that make them so sweet and delectable to eat.

Harvesting is labour-intensive as figs have to be picked by hand. Pickers use wooden stakes with hooks on the end to pull down the higher branches, before cutting the fruit off at the stem where it connects with the branch, to protect the soft outer layer of the fig from damage.

"Fig trees are very pliant so you can do that otherwise

you would leave some beautiful figs up there unpicked," Anthea says.

Selecting a ripened fig is an art form and one that comes with experience, she says.

As a deep, rosy colour, or a sagging stem have not shown to be good indicators, it is more reliable to go by touch. The softness of the fig will tell the picker if the sugars are present. Splits on a fig may indicate maturation and that the fig is bursting with sugars, ready to eat. A spongy feel indicates ripening has yet to occur, and that fig should be left on the tree for the next day or two. Once picked, the figs need to be kept refrigerated and eaten within two to three days of harvest.

“

I don't think we have ever been able to meet demand

Like most growers around the country, Anthea and Julie have also felt the pinch of Covid-19, with restrictions forcing Anthea, Julie and a family member to complete all the fig harvesting themselves last season.

"We were down on volumes last year although we had a lot of turnover," says Anthea. "We had a lot of interest and we got rid of them all. I don't think we have ever been able to meet demand."

There was a dip in trade with restaurants, cafés and the local farmers' market too.

"Before Covid-19, I used to go to the farmers' market each Saturday. I just couldn't supply enough. We would totally sell out. Because they have such a short shelf-life, we would rely upon people coming to the orchard to buy them and would also do deliveries to Auckland. During Covid-19 restrictions, we didn't go to the market."

For now, Anthea forgoes the farmers' market, finding it easy enough to sell figs onsite at the orchard, along with orders via phone, email and Facebook.

"Each year we've got more and more traffic on the website."

A lot of the orchard's bulk buying customers are residents from the Middle East and China who want to buy in respective lots of 10-15kg and 60kg at a time. Some families like to make a trip out of it, wandering around the orchard and picking the figs themselves.

While most of the orchard's figs are sold fresh, "seconds fruit" gets vacuum sealed and frozen, while Anthea also makes a fig and ginger jam, lime and fig Indian-style chutney and poached figs. These also feature in the orchard's "Figgy Morning Teas" alongside Coffig and fig leaf tea.

The orchard's figs feature on the menu of a local restaurant too, dehydrated and dipped in chocolate by local chocolatier Bennetts, and are now being trialled in a beer at a Waikato brewery.

Anthea is a huge believer in the health benefits of figs, from the fresh fruit to tea made from both fresh and dried leaves.

"Figs really should be a superfood; they've got so much goodness in them." ●



Fig'n Delicious website

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Blueberries have a strong fit in the wellness space with their status as a superfruit

Alice Moore, general manager of BerryCo

Big opportunities for food in health and wellness

Wellness is now the biggest food opportunity of our lifetime, says Alice Moore, general manager of BerryCo.

Elaine Fisher

"The health and wellness food category has been spurred on by Covid-19 with more and more people exploring how they can eat themselves into better health," says Alice, who is also a member of Women in Horticulture and is based in the Bay of Plenty.

"Clearly established links between the types of foods we eat and nutrition, mental, emotional and physical health, mean consumers are more aware than ever of what goes into their bodies and how food can impact not just physical health but moods and emotional health too."

New Zealand farmers and growers are well placed to be part of this trend with a well-deserved reputation for the high-quality, nutrient dense foods they

produce in international markets.

"In particular, blueberries have a strong fit in the wellness space with their status as a superfruit offering the opportunity for high growth," says Alice. "The blueberry industry is ripe for innovation through both its approach to marketing and improved varieties that offer superior characteristics.

"BerryCo has a distinct advantage with rights to grow and market the highly sought-after Mountain Blue Orchard (MBO) Southern Highbush varieties.

"I was inspired to take the role of general manager by the opportunity to collaborate with and support growers to build production knowledge



and capabilities and to drive sustainable value through disciplined sales and marketing programmes.”

Alice joined BerryCo in October 2021 after five years managing the Zespri organic kiwifruit portfolio. Prior to that, she spent several years in various commercial and marketing primary sector roles including working for Ballance Agri-Nutrients, National Foods and Dairy Women’s Network.

A career in the primary industries didn’t initially appeal until Alice spent her latter school years in the hostel at Feilding Agricultural High School.

“I was surrounded by friends who lived on farms and spent a lot of weekends in farm environments which gave me a few ‘aha’ moments,” she says. “The first of these was when a good friend said she wanted to study to become a farm consultant. I couldn’t understand why, didn’t farmers already know how to farm?

“The second was when the same friend’s father prepared to leave the farm dressed in a business suit, briefcase in hand. I asked where he was going and he responded he had a board meeting to attend – this blew my mind – farmers have board meetings?

“I soon came to understand there were a wide range of exciting career options in the primary sectors and I am really thankful to my friends for helping me see that. I’ve stayed in the sector because I love the connection with growers and producers and feel privileged to play my part in supporting the growth of sustainable, healthy communities across New Zealand.”

Understanding consumers and what they want is vital to the success of New Zealand food producers, Alice says.

“**I’ve stayed in the sector because I love the connection with growers and producers and feel privileged to play my part in supporting the growth of sustainable, healthy communities across New Zealand**

“The consumer has all the power to either purchase our brands or not. We need to understand the drivers behind their decision making to find the best ways to encourage them to purchase.”

Building and maintaining a strong connection between the grower and the market is crucial and will become more important as consumers seek transparency and sustainability from the brands they purchase.

“New Zealand producers have great stories to share, however it is important to have a deep understanding of

consumers and their ‘why’ to help narrow down the stories they want to hear and the language used to weave your tale. Only then will you begin building a meaningful and lasting connection with consumers.”

BerryCo has more than 30 growers from the Far North to Motueka. While blueberries were first introduced in the 1950s, growing MBO varieties in New Zealand is relatively new and Alice says there remains much to learn.

“Labour costs are high as blueberries are very labour intensive to pick, which has been magnified by the current labour shortages. While New Zealand achieves acceptable yields, competing countries achieve as good or better.

“The opportunity is in working alongside growers to rapidly build and spread knowledge of how to get the most from MBO varieties in our conditions, and growing a strong consumer brand in berries that communicates a high-quality proposition to consumers in a meaningful way.” ●



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Using science to irrigate better

Five-year research programme creates water tools to benefit growers and the environment

A five-year research programme named Irrigation Insight has produced tools to help growers and farmers use water more efficiently, at less cost, for a better environmental outcome.

Anne Hardie

The research programme concluded late last year using several pilot dairy farms in Canterbury and resulted in the development of a range of online, real-time tools including two that can be used for both horticulture and agriculture irrigation.

These online tools are based on NIWA's advanced weather forecasting system and on-farm rainfall and soil moisture monitoring to understand the soil and drainage. For both growers and farmers, it means they can now use these tools to better manage irrigation on individual properties.



The programme, funded by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE), was a collaboration between the pilot farmers, NIWA, DairyNZ, Fonterra, AgResearch and Irrigation New Zealand.

At the heart of the programme are weather stations situated on each individual property which provide property-specific information. The NIWA-operated weather stations provide information to a regional weather forecasting system. Every six hours, NIWA generates high-resolution (every 1.5km) weather forecasts that are corrected for terrain and local

weather observations to provide the best estimates of rainfall, temperature and wind at the individual property scale.

NIWA principal scientist and Irrigation Insight programme leader, Dr MS Srinivasan, says the programme aims to help growers and farmers understand the economic impacts of their irrigation management choices. To do that, the pilot project has captured a range of economic information such as changes in electricity usage, changes in pasture growth due to changes in irrigation, the cost of water and the potential loss of nutrients below the root zone via drainage.

The programme focused on developing tools that could collect and interpret data for growers and farmers to make irrigation decisions. The tools take into account rainfall, irrigation, solar radiation, relative humidity, wind speed, soil moisture and temperature from the surface down to 8cm below, pasture production, river flow and water use, combined with knowledge of climatic, soil, specific on-farm irrigation practices, irrigation infrastructure, irrigation supply-demand dynamics and the high-resolution weather forecasting. That data is telemetered every hour and is available for growers and farmers 24/7, in real time. In short, a lot of information at their fingertips that is easy to understand and use.

“
The tools take into account rainfall, irrigation, solar radiation, relative humidity, wind speed, soil moisture, temperature and more

The research produced three tools: IrriMate, IrriSET and SoilMate.

IrriSET is an irrigation strategy evaluation tool that is currently pasture-specific, while IrriMate can be used across any crop. It is an operational tool that works out how much irrigation is needed on a given day, incorporating soil properties, current soil moisture, future rainfall, evapotranspiration and costs of irrigation to help growers and farmers choose when and how they irrigate. It is designed for efficient on-farm irrigation and it does that through what is termed an 'Insight Plot'. The Insight Plot visualises measured and forecast soil moisture movement, weather forecasts and potential pasture growth. It shows soil water conditions within and below the root zone, the effect of drainage and daily pasture growth linked to the available soil water within the root zone.

Dr Srinivasan says the Insight Plot enables farmers to understand complex information immediately, using real-time and localised data. IrriMate also includes long-term records that capture a grower or farmer's irrigation behaviour over time which can then be used to demonstrate best irrigation management practises to regulators.

SoilMate is a mobile soil moisture sensor that measures the

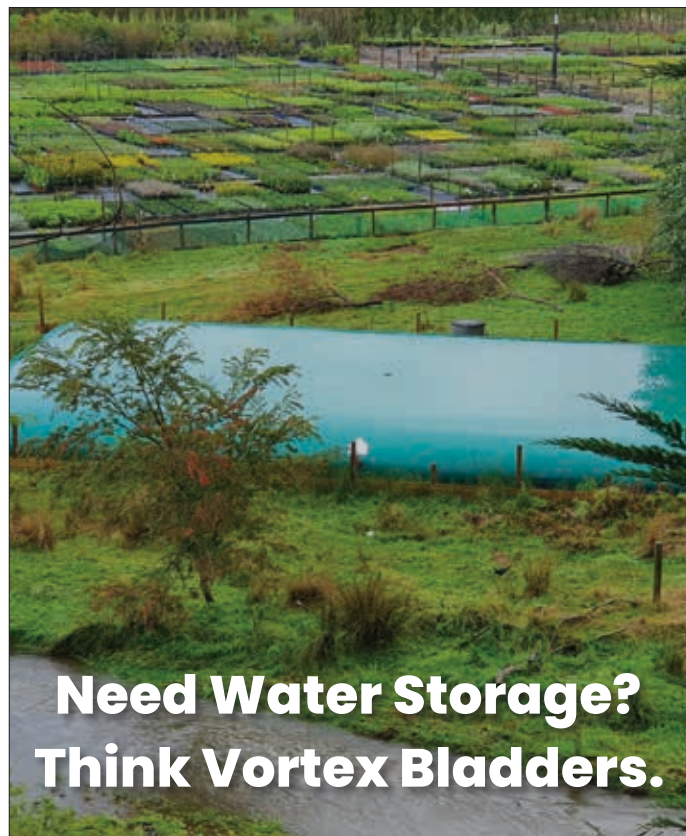
variability within an individual property. It combines soil water measurements and NIWA's high-resolution weather forecast to provide a site-specific six-day soil moisture forecast. Growers and farmers can use it around their property to fill the data gaps to give them more confidence in their decision making.

NIWA's principal scientist, Graham Elley, says the challenge now is turning Irrigation Insight into a commercial service that helps those making irrigation decisions. That may be via a subscriber service to NIWA, though it is also in discussions with other technology providers.

He says there is an acceptance the programme makes a difference and they now need to ensure its benefits are realised so it is not left on the shelf. He suggests the outcome of the programme will depend largely on demand from both irrigators and regulatory bodies.

For now, the programme continues to work with dairy farmers through irrigation schemes which he says all have their own environmental challenges.

Dr Srinivasan says the next step is working out how they take this science further and provide growers and farmers with the information to support their daily management and strategic planning of water use over the next 20 years in a changing climate. ●



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Happy pickers and packers working the season at CentralPac, Central Otago

A season of ups and downs for Central Otago summerfruit growers

Some Central Otago cherry growers couldn't harvest all their fruit and others had only just enough staff to get through the 2022 summerfruit harvest. Many adopted strategies to cope which will help with future seasons.

Elaine Fisher

Tim Hope, operations manager for Central Otago orcharding and packhouse company CentralPac, says they employed around 230 staff for picking and packing cherries this year.

"We could have done with more but because we had around 50 percent returnees, their level of experience meant we were able to run lower numbers," Tim says. "Our returnees got us through. A lot of our backpackers were still in the country and came back, which was huge.

"I think we would have had twice as many staff if the government had decided earlier to extend visas.

"Leaving it until the last minute was a big mistake."

CentralPac's efforts to attract staff back included regular social media posts and emails keeping them in touch with what was happening on the orchards.

"We also brought a crew of 16 down from Northland through an iwi group and eight stayed through the season," says Tim. "These were 17 to 18-year-olds and we hope they will come back for the grape harvest."

Fifth generation Roxburgh orchardist, Gary Bennetts, is considering removing some trees after yet another season without enough staff to pick the fruit.

"This season has been worse than the last and I'm wondering if I should bulldoze trees, graze sheep and cattle and put my feet up," says Gary, who in 2017 was awarded lifetime membership of Horticulture New Zealand for his dedication to the industry.

Not being able to harvest all his cherries comes at a significant financial loss.

"There is despair all round and uncertainty about where we are heading," Gary says.

Normally Gary would employ around 75 staff, many of them backpackers.

“

Rural communities are being destroyed by an immigration policy which is all wrong and many of our young people are finding it difficult to see a future in the rural sector

"I predicted this season would be worse than the last basically because the government never got off its arse early enough to extend the visas for backpackers already in the country," he says. "There was so much uncertainty, many left because they did not want to overstay their visa."

Family, friends, neighbours, retirees, Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme workers on loan from another orchard and long hours put in by himself and his permanent staff was how Gary managed to harvest and pack what cherries and apricots he could.

Current government policy, increasing compliance costs and lack of labour have eroded Gary's normal optimism and he is questioning his future as an orchardist.

"If people pull out of fruit growing and market gardening God knows who's going to feed our population in future," he says. "Rural communities are being destroyed by an immigration policy which is all wrong and many of our young people are finding it difficult to see a future in the rural sector."

Tracey Mansfield, seasonal labour coordinator in Central Otago, says proactive on orchard and packhouse management earlier in the season enabled them to operate with fewer workers than usual.

"One grower strip picked cherries and used a singulator – a mechanical sorting device in the conveyor system – in the packhouse which enabled it to operate with 85 instead of the usual 130 staff," Tracey says.

"Normally around 60 percent of the workforce would be backpackers but this year it was just 10 percent. Pay rates have been good and some workers decided, once they have earned enough for the week, to take a few days off, so growers didn't know each day if they would have enough staff."

Rural locations struggled the most with labour.

"The further away from Queenstown the harder it gets. This season most of the staff were university students who tend to gravitate to towns."


The industry, Central Otago District Council, local businesses and community groups have done much to attract and retain staff, Tracey says.

"Growers have offered a bonus for staff who return, and businesses and tourist attractions joined a 'HandPicked' voucher system giving discounts to workers. Operation Cromwell Harvest staged events, including a barbeque and a pool party to welcome and integrate seasonal workers into the community."

By February, Tracey was receiving enquiries from 'Grey Nomads', retired people in campervans or motorhomes looking for part-time employment. Many will be helping with the grape harvest, but Tracey says welcome as they are, many can't work the long hours younger people do.

"When holiday visas open up again this March, we hope that will alleviate the stress and pressures growers have experienced in the last two years." ●






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TECHNICAL

THE LATEST INNOVATIONS AND IMPROVEMENTS

Autumn Apples

Pages 45-47

An Envy tree showing Nitrogen deficiency, with its slightly yellowing leaves compared with neighbouring trees



Poor drainage, causing water logged, unhealthy roots. This shows up in poor fruitset the following season, as seen in this Scired block

Autumn management guided by harvest observations: Lessons from John Wilton

Many of the late John Wilton's articles were not focussed on the harvest task in the present.

Sarah de Bruin : AgFirst

At this stage of the season, heads are down and tails are up. Harvest preparation should be complete and for the next month or so, growers will be carrying out the plan that was put in place as the season progressed. Instead, John wrote about looking forward to the next orchard management phase and how to best prepare for it using the information collected during harvest.

Understanding how the harvest plan performs is important for future success.

What do you need to change or improve and what was executed well? After the crop is off



each block, firstly commend yourself for continuing to harvest through a pandemic. Then, take a moment to step back and reflect on the performance of that block throughout the season.

Look at each block as it is completed and record its harvest performance while it is fresh in your mind. In the coming months, you will then have all the information you then require to ensure post-harvest management is optimal. Take photos, take notes, and record your observations. Pay attention to details, such as harvest date, size,

maturity progression, vigour levels, variability. Look at the block as a whole and then identify any differences between rows and trees which may be performing sub-optimally.

Taking a moment now will pay off in the future. It will help to create a more targeted approach to autumn orchard management, and is important for developing strategies to improve results next season.

🍏 Harvest observations for post-harvest orchard nutrition

Post-harvest management for Gala trees starts now! We want to set the trees up well for a spring growth flush, therefore management once the crop has been removed is a key part of preparation for this stage.

Throughout the season, we push the trees to their maximum potential in order to be able to harvest optimum yield. Nutrients are then removed from the orchard system via harvested fruit. These lost nutrients need to be replaced for trees to recuperate well during dormancy, ready for their spring growth.

John saw checking fruit colour, foliage colour and health at this time of year, as an important 'harvest' task to help gain an understanding of orchard health. It helps ensure the nutritional balance of the orchard is correct and that nutrients are available in sufficient quantities to set up the trees for the following season.

Timing of leaf fall and intensity of pre-fall autumn leaf colour can be indicative of nitrogen levels. Trees which drop leaves earlier and have high autumn colour may be growing in low nitrogen areas. Trees may drop leaves later in higher nitrogen areas, with those leaves tending to have poorer autumn colour development. Variation of fruit colour development across a block can also be a good indicator of fruit nitrogen levels. Targeted leaf samples will also be beneficial to confirm these observations, or for specific micronutrient requirements.

To grow high-coloured fruit of optimal maturity for long term storage, it is necessary to run nitrogen levels down towards the lower end of optimum before harvest. Especially for heavy 'on' crops, replenishing the tree reserves is vital for adequate growth, flowering and fruit set next spring.

Post-harvest foliar nitrogen applications are twice as efficient as soil applications. This is because for root nitrogen uptake, the foliage needs to be actively

photosynthesising. Thus, not a lot of nutrient uptake will occur once the leaves begin to senesce and fall.

Urea foliar applications once the crop is off, but prior to leaf fall, can supply up to 50% of the nitrogen requirements. John suggested two applications of urea 14 days apart during the post-harvest period will go a long way to make sure there are adequate nitrogen reserves to kick off the next season's growth flush and then set up a full crop. Therefore, the sooner urea and bud builder applications can be made, the better. These applications should be done well before leaf fall to minimise any adverse effects these applications could have on European Canker control.

Nitrogen use in orchards often ends up being excessive to requirements due to applications being made at inappropriate timings. Observing the above indicators and using targeted leaf tests can help to improve nitrogen application practises and are more economically and environmentally friendly.



Pay attention to details, such as harvest date, size, maturity progression, vigour levels, variability

Soil variability often occurs across orchard sites, with differences in topsoil depth and nutrient availability. This can be visualised with tree-to-tree variability within the orchard and has a major impact on the overall orchard performance. Identifying and recording this variability in colour, vigour and crop load at harvest helps to create a more targeted winter soil and fertiliser management plan. Feeding the soil to improve tree vigour in weaker growing areas will help alleviate this variability. For example, selective applications of compost can be a beneficial boost to areas with lower organic matter.

🍏 Drainage

Autumn is the time to carry out drainage system maintenance, to ensure good root health is maintained prior to waterlogging in the winter. Continual high orchard performance requires a healthy root system. Poor drainage is often the greatest limiting factor for root health.

Root growth is very important at this stage of the season, as the trees prepare for dormancy with the correct nutrient uptake. Dry roots or flooded roots are not going to be operating at their best. Good drainage allows deep root systems to develop and access underground water reserves, so be sure your system is performing well.

🍏 Crop load

John defined regular cropping trees to have "lower vigour, large numbers of potential flower sites and 30 to 40%

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of these sites carrying fruit.”¹ This season, we have seen an increase in attention to crop load. Learnings from the previous few seasons of smaller fruit sizes have meant growers now have an increasing focus on moderating their crop loads to increase fruit size. However, although we are seeing a relatively full crop coming into harvest, thinning was often dragged out beyond Christmas. This means trees carried heavier crops well into January.

Overcropping can reduce the autumn root flush. During this period, trees are growing roots to store carbohydrates over the winter while they have no leaves. However, heavier cropped trees are less able to replenish their nutrient levels, nitrogen in particular. This can then effect bud emergence in spring. This further emphasises the importance of noting areas for targeted post-harvest nutrition.

🍏 Disease management

Insecticide application is not required post-harvest as IFP (Integrated Fruit Production) programmes mean that the predator population will remove most insect pests at this time. However, fungi and bacterial diseases still require post-harvest control.

John Wilton notes an autumn growth flush tendency, particularly in early varieties such as Gala. This new growth can be very susceptible to black spot and powdery mildew infections. Continued protection at this stage of the season is very important to prevent infection levels building up and affecting the following season’s crop.

Autumn is also a very active time for European Canker, with many infection entry points present, via leaf scar tissue and picking wounds. Conidia spore production becomes active upon the arrival of autumn rain too. A good post-harvest fungicide programme is critical to minimise infection incidence during this stage of the season.

1. John Wilton, “Improving Orchard Performance-Autumn Management”, The Orchardist, March 2012.

🍏 Pruning

On the earlier harvested varieties and while the leaves are still on the trees, note target areas within blocks which may require extra pruning attention. Although a more detailed pruning plan will be made and executed in the coming months, John saw benefit in a quick pass now to remove large and excessively vigorous branches. Pruning these shading branches out allows a better light penetration through the canopy.

John also points out that removing these branches in the post-harvest period will reduce the photosynthate load which is being translocated around the tree. This will have a devigorating effect where tree vigour is currently excessive and could have otherwise fuelled a continued vigour problem into the next season. It will have the additional benefit of allowing good light penetration in the lower canopy and lifting overall light levels. This will help to improve the quality of future fruit buds.

🍏 Plan and Organise infrastructure for new plantings

We know that in this current Omicron outbreak, supply chains are disrupted and will continue to be for some time. However, pre-Covid-19 in March 2019, John wrote about the importance of ordering posts and irrigation supplies well in advance to guarantee their arrival for winter development. What blocks are being redeveloped and what materials are required to do so successfully?

While some of these tasks may not be the immediate focus, preparation for upcoming tasks is important, especially in a time where labour and resources are in limited supply. Autumn planning helps to ensure continued success, season after season. ●

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METSERVICE UPDATE

An extreme summer for New Zealand



Georgina Griffiths : Meteorologist, MetService

Unusually humid and warm summers are nothing new for the upper North Island, during La Niña years. All those northeasterly and easterly winds typically produce a humid and warm summer, but don't always deliver the rain.

This year, with an underlying baseline of climate change and a marine heatwave, hot day records were a risk for Northland, Auckland and Waikato. In these regions, extreme heat and humidity was experienced this summer.

For Auckland, at the halfway point of February, the summer hot day count broke records. At Auckland Airport, a reliable weather station with records dating back to 1966 (55 summers), the hot day count in mid February 2022 was 51 days (Fig. 1), beating the previous record-holder, the summer of 2017/2018 (49 days).

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... extreme heat and humidity was experienced this summer

For Whangārei, at the same point in time (mid-February 2022), the summer hot day count was already 47 days, which ranks as the second highest hot day count in records that began in 1967 (54 summers ago). With two more weeks of summer to go at the time of writing, more hot days are on the cards. However, the record hot summers of 1997/1998 and 2019/2020 (both with 55 hot days) may well keep their crowns, given a cooler southerly regime mid-month.

Extreme summer rainfall for multiple regions, with TC Dovi causing impacts

The summer rainfall regime during 2021/2022 was also extreme, being characterised by long dry spells interspersed by deluge rainfall.

New Zealand experienced a record dry January in many areas - and it was also hotter and sunnier than usual in many places. The following locations recorded less than



Figure 1: Auckland hot day count for summer (December - February), taken at 14 February 2022. Even before the summer of 2021/2022 had finished, the hot day count in Auckland had broken records.

10mm of rain in January and ranked within the five lowest January totals: Auckland, Hamilton, Taumarunui, Taupō, New Plymouth, Whanganui, Westport and Hokitika.

Auckland actually experienced its second longest dry spell on record, ending 23 January - with a run of 37 days with daily rainfall totals of < 1mm of rain.

It was also unusually dry in Palmerston North, Wellington, Wairarapa and throughout Otago, with monthly totals below a quarter of normal.

In contrast, February kicked off with a RED Severe Weather Warning issued for the West Coast. Heavy and sustained rainfall was forecast for Westland and Buller, with 750mm forecast about the Westland ranges over two days. Between 500mm and 1000mm of rain was observed along the Alps and West Coast. These Red Warnings are reserved

for the most extreme and impactful weather events - and this was only the fifth Red Warning MetService has issued since the colour coded system was introduced in 2019.

Significant flooding and multiple slips were indeed observed across the West Coast, with most roads closed, and several townships cut off. A state of emergency was declared in the Buller District between 2 and 5 February. Taranaki also experienced extreme flooding when the same weather system moved onto the lower North Island, and another Red Warning was issued there.

High humidity and the approach of Tropical Cyclone Dovi towards New Zealand sparked another suite of heavy rain warnings issued for the West Coast, as well as many North Island areas. Another state of emergency was declared in Buller on 9 February, with mandatory evacuations undertaken there, with concerns around flooding while the region remained soggy and impacted by the previous heavy rain.

“

February kicked off with a RED Severe Weather Warning issued for the West Coast ... this was only the fifth Red Warning MetService has issued since the colour coded system was introduced in 2019

Tropical Cyclone Dovi then brought severe gales and heavy rainfall to many parts of the North Island on 12-13 February, making landfall just north of Taranaki with a central pressure near 986 hPa (hectoPascals) (Fig. 2). Damaging winds were experienced across Northland and Auckland, as well as around central New Zealand (especially Taranaki and Wellington).

Stations in Taupō and Masterton broke their all-time wettest day records, associated with intense rainfall in the lead-up to TC Dovi, while stations in Taumarunui and Wellington broke their February wettest day records.

Looking ahead, many growers and farmers would like to see a more 'normal' run of weather for autumn. As always, you can ask the long-range team at MetService for a seasonal forecast, or you can keep up to date with the MetService long-range forecast at: <http://metservice.com/rural/monthly-outlook> ●

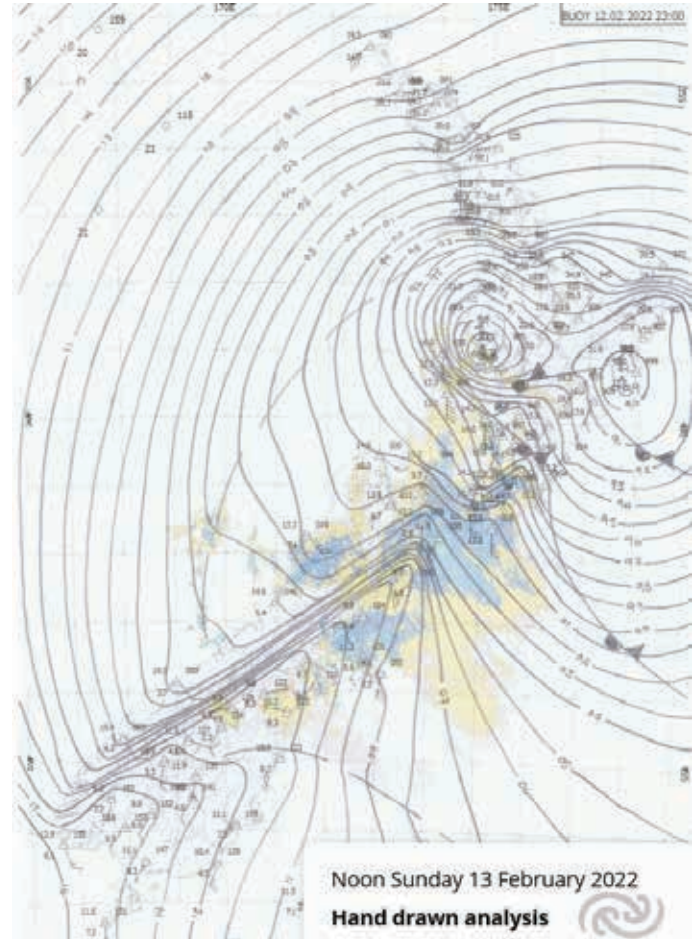
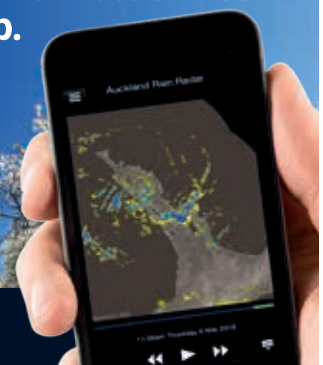


Figure 2: MetService forecasters analyse weather maps by hand, in order to understand the current state of the atmosphere, and to carefully examine weather features (fronts, troughs, lows, Highs etc) over New Zealand. This analysis enables the forecast team to assess which weather models are initialising well, and ensures that MetService selects a weather forecast model that is most likely to accurately predict up-coming weather conditions.

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