

Nervous wait for spring

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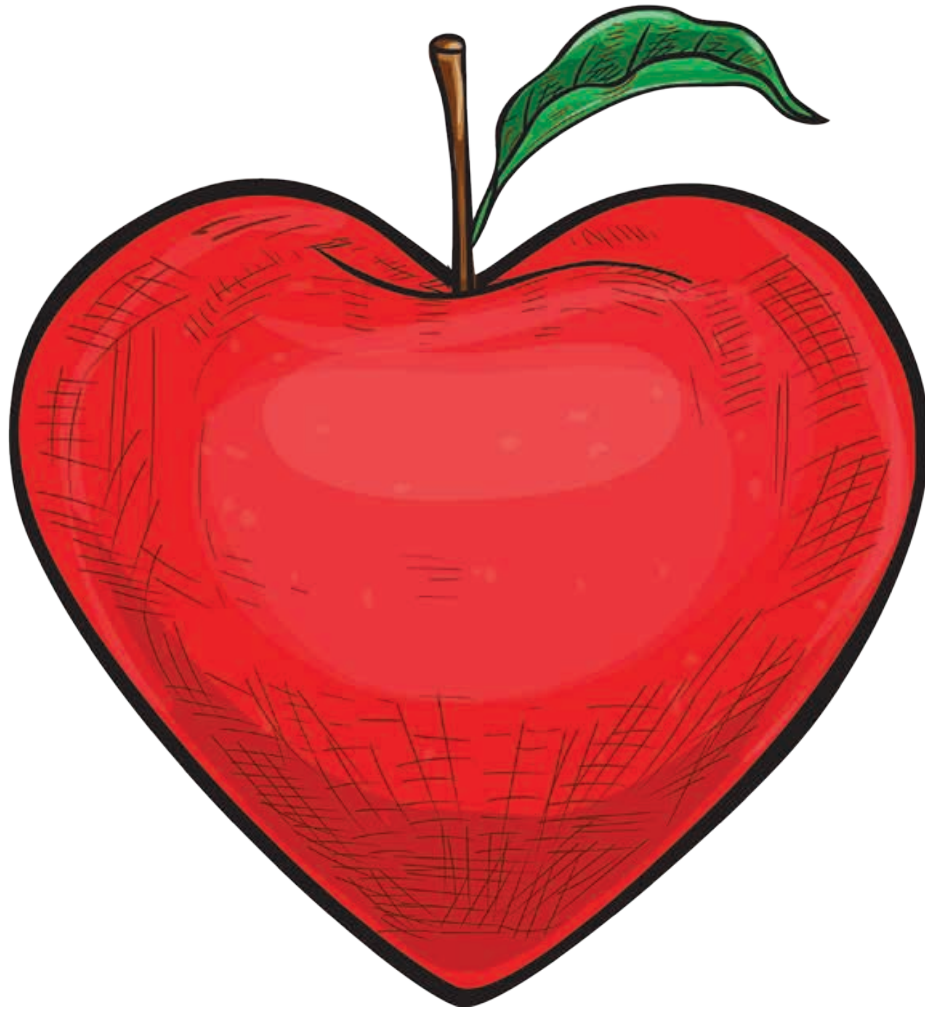


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What a great combined conference we just had!

Nearly 1000 of us had the opportunity to attend the Horticulture, Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE), New Zealand Apples and Pears, and the Vegetable groups conferences in Te Pae, Christchurch recently – combined for the first time in the Horticulture Conference Week. What an awesome event – from the really amazing venue, the programme and speakers, to the fantastic networking, right down to the food.

Barry O'Neil : HortNZ president

A special thanks to chief executive Nadine Tunley and the HortNZ team for the huge amount of excellent organisation in bringing the week of events together, no doubt herding a few cats along the way, but in delivering what to me was the best conference we have put together.

And while it's been an awful year for horticulture, it's also nice to be able to come together and to celebrate some of the great leaders in our sector who have done some really amazing work over their careers. Our gala dinner was the largest ever, with nearly 700 people attending; including Ministers Andrew Little and Damien O'Connor who were present to witness how the industry values and respects our RSE scheme families from the Pacific. What an amazing evening of celebration.

And congratulations to all the award winners recognised at the gala dinner and Annual General Meetings, especially to Max Lilley who received the Bledisloe Cup, and Colin Jenkins the President's award. All were very worthy recipients, and it was fantastic to hear their experiences and reflections on receiving the awards.

We also had our AGM at the conference, as did a number of product groups, and I would like to thank all our members for the ongoing support, including feedback on how we can do even better. AGMs are funny old things – by law we have to progress through a number of resolutions that might be seen as boring or going through the motions, but in reality this is an important part of an organisation's accountability and transparency to its members. It also gives members the opportunity to raise issues for clarification or improvement.



The conference to me was also better because of one thing, and that one thing was that we were together as a combined horticulture whānau. It was the inaugural conference in bringing together a horticulture collective. It was much better for being a combined conference without doubt, and I hope that the experience we all had will result in even bigger collectives combining for years to come.

We had great support from sponsors and exhibitors, who are critical to make an event like this happen. A big thanks also to all the speakers who spent time putting presentations together. Good conferences don't happen without really good MCs and we were blessed also with the wonderful Caren Rangī, and Alaisdair colourful shoes MacLeod; well done both, amazing efforts and much appreciated.

Many of the presenters during the week emphasised the same thing – that working together we benefit from the collaboration and the strength of voice that happens when we are one.

“

It was much better for being a combined conference without doubt

I raised at our AGM the encouraging efforts that I am seeing across horticulture where we are looking at how we can better collaborate. Collaboration ensures we are delivering greater value to our levy payers, avoiding duplication, and achieving stronger advocacy to government.

We need to commit to landing this, and not fall into the trap of just talking for the next 12 months about what this could be.

A number of the product groups including HortNZ are about to enter into consultation and then early next year will vote to determine whether growers and our members agree to another six years of commodity levies, which form the basis of our advocacy work for growers.

I encourage growers to engage in this process to ensure we understand what we need to do more of and better, and also what we need to do less of or differently. In today's very complex operating environment, it is impossible for every group to do everything, and in my opinion one of the problems we absolutely have to stop is everyone is trying to do everything. Instead we should be collaborating and in the process being very clear about who is going to be doing what.

“

One of the problems we absolutely have to stop is everyone is trying to do everything

During the AGM we said goodbye to Tony Howey, a long-standing board member of HortNZ and Chair of the NZGAP (Good Agriculture Practice) committee. In his last email to the board Tony as gracious as always, said "I've been very fortunate in my governance roles where directors and management have put the interests of the organisation above their personal ambitions and maintained this unity of purpose - something that has been very evident in the HortNZ boardroom. So much more can be achieved when unity and respect for others with different points of view are part of the modus operandi."

Thank you Tony and I very much share your sentiment, and we wish you all the very best for your business and governance roles into the future.

Finally, one of the most powerful speakers at the conference to me was Matt Chisholm, who gave a humorous but very honest account of his struggle with his demons during his earlier career. It was an inspirational presentation, from the heart and with a strong message to us all about the need to look after ourselves and each other, and to get help when we need it, rather than continuing to battle something that we are unlikely to cure on our own.

It's still tough at the moment in horticulture, so look after yourself and each other. And if you can, try to get to the conference next year. For me it was a very uplifting event.

Kia kaha. ●



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GST is not the issue keeping fruit and vegetable growers awake at night

The Labour party has announced that if re-elected, it will remove GST from fresh fruit and vegetables. They made this policy announcement just two months out from the General Election, which is scheduled for 14 October 2023. The announcement came as Parliament began its final three weeks of sitting and passing legislation, before adjourning on 31 August 2023.

Nadine Tunley : HortNZ chief executive

While Horticulture New Zealand is on record as not supporting the removal of GST ("It's time we talked about GST" by HortNZ president Barry O'Neil in the June 2022 issue of *The Orchardist* and *NZGrower*), we are on record as supporting moves to increase competition. For example, our stance on the Commerce Commission's review of supermarkets, the outcome of which was unfortunately watered down.

As Barry outlined in his column, "Large, populated countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom have much more competitive food markets with more players at wholesale and retail levels, easier serviceability and the ability to source year-round fresh produce from countries and counties that are close by, keeping prices down. [They have] enormous competitive



entities, arising from more favourable business models and huge numbers of customers."

Barry then went on to say, "What I think we can be fairly confident about is that our growers, who are struggling to get a reasonable price when supplying New Zealand's supermarket duopoly, won't end up with any more coin in their pockets if GST is removed from fresh fruit and vegetables. And after supermarkets have covered their costs of administering a more complex system, would there actually be any cost savings passed onto their customers?"

This sentiment has been echoed by Vegetables NZ chair, John Murphy, in his interviews on GST and food prices. John has welcomed the debate on GST, saying that Vegetables NZ "applauds any attempt by regulators to increase fresh



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vegetable consumption because of the health benefits.” However, Vegetables NZ is more supportive of “fit for purpose regulations that allow vegetable operations to thrive, by encouraging investment in vegetable production and eliminating hurdles that limit productivity.”

The need to remove unnecessary red tape and form filling came up time and time again at last month’s Horticulture Conference Week. While opposition Members of Parliament promised a lot and got great grower support, as we all know, reducing regulation is easier said than done, particularly when in New Zealand, central government regulation is overlaid by regional and local. Plus, reform takes decades and not years - for example, reform of the Resource Management Act is expected to take up to ten years to complete.

“
Policies that are only about attracting votes are not going to ‘cut the mustard’

The aim of the Aotearoa Horticulture Action Plan is to double the value of horticulture to \$12 billion by 2035. As the plan outlines, this can only be achieved through “policy settings that align and enable growers to do what they do best: invest into, develop, grow and market healthy nutritious food in a sustainable manner.”

HortNZ and the wider horticulture sector supports any move that would see an increase in the consumption of fresh vegetables and fruit. However, there are other complex issues that need to be addressed at the same time, which is why a more targeted approach is likely to be what is ultimately needed.

In the lead-up to the General Election, HortNZ will be redoubling its efforts to increase candidates’ understanding of commercial fruit and vegetable growing in New Zealand, and what must happen if we are to achieve our goals by 2035. Policies that are only about attracting votes and not about addressing the fundamentals holding industries like ours back are not going to ‘cut the mustard.’ ●

OUR MANIFESTO FOR THE INCOMING GOVERNMENT



HortNZ has developed a manifesto outlining what the commercial fruit and vegetable growing sector needs from government in terms of policy and practices for the sector to double farm gate returns to \$12 billion by 2035.

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www.hortnz.co.nz/about-us

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Inaugural Horticulture Conference Week hailed a success

Our industry's inaugural Horticulture Conference Week (31 July to 4 August) was a rich smorgasbord of content, relevant to the entire industry in the context of the wider food and fibre sector and its dynamic nature.

*The Orchardist staff
Photos by Smoke Photography*

Held at Te Pae Christchurch Convention Centre, the three conference programmes - the Horticulture Conference, the New Zealand Apples and Pears Conference and the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) Conference - merged into one week of industry-centric presentations, speakers and content.

The rationale was to combine the three programmes for more impact. While themes were familiar - the environment, workforce, regulation, rising costs, competition and uncertainty - there were many fresh and thought-provoking perspectives, says Horticulture New Zealand chief executive Nadine Tunley.

"While no one was denying the challenges, the tone of the week was forward looking and positive. Engagement was often at its highest when politicians - present, aspiring and past - shared their perspectives and ideas with the audience. The message was our industry's future is bright if we take a joined-up approach, informed by strategy, connection and two-way communication."

Nadine also thanked the speakers, sponsors, exhibitors and other participants, "especially the growers who invested their time and money by attending and supporting the industry."

“

Our industry's future is bright if we take a joined-up approach, informed by strategy, connection and two-way communication

HortNZ chief executive Nadine Tunley, "While no one was denying the challenges, the tone of the week was forward looking and positive."



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HORTICULTURE AWARDS



Bernadine Guilleux, HortNZ board director (left), Bledisloe Cup winner Max Lilley and Barry O'Neil, HortNZ chair (right)

Bledisloe Cup 2023

Winner - Max Lilley

The horticulture Bledisloe Cup is awarded annually in recognition of an outstanding contribution to commercial growing in New Zealand over decades. Max Lilley first served at a national level in 1979, when he represented the Process Vegetables sector. He went on to hold several governance roles through the 1980s and 1990's with the Horticulture Canterbury Growers' Society and Vegetable and Potato Growers' Federation. Max was VegFed President when the Commodity Levies Act was introduced and led the organisation through a successful process. Today Max chairs the Growers' Trading Company Trust. When the company was sold to Farmlands, the proceeds were used to set up in a trust for the advancement of horticulture in Canterbury. Max also continues to be an active member of the Canterbury Growers' Association.



The President's Trophy 2023 winner Colin Jenkins addressed the sold-out gala dinner crowd

President's Trophy 2023

Winner - Colin Jenkins

The President's Trophy is awarded in recognition of passion for working on behalf of the horticulture industry, as well as a commitment to developing as a business leader and successful grower. Colin Jenkins has dedicated his life to the horticulture industry. He started his career as a market gardener.

He went on to build an industry leader from a small, fledging trust, successfully navigating several challenges - like Psa and adverse weather events - over almost four decades. He is respected by his iwi as well as by his RSE (Recognised Seasonal Employer) whānau in the Pacific.



Euan White accepted an Environmental Award on behalf of Forest Lodge Orchard from Agriculture Minister Damien O'Connor and Barry O'Neil, HortNZ chair



Environmental Awards

The Environmental Award is presented in recognition of a person or organisation that has developed and implemented a sustainable environmental project, with identifiable benefits. This year's winners are Rebecca and Mike Casey and Rachel and Euan White of Forest Lodge Orchard and Jesse and Matthew Malcolm of Southern Produce (So Sweet).

“

The Forest Lodge Orchard team have worked with the catchment group over several years to reduce the environmental impact of their operation through the use of information

The Forest Lodge Orchard team have worked hard over the past four years to achieve climate excellence in food production. They run a 6ha high density cherry orchard in Central Otago that operates without burning any fossil fuels. Everything from irrigation to frost fighting, vehicles and tools are powered through New Zealand's renewable grid and through the power they generate and store using extensive solar and battery array.

Representing Southern Produce (So Sweet), Jesse and Matthew have been part of a catchment project driving change across different farming types in Southland. They have worked with the catchment group over several years to reduce the environmental impact of their operation through the use of information, in particular, about soil types.



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Immigration Minister Andrew Little (left) and Philip Gregan of New Zealand Winegrowers (right) presented the RSE Manaaki Award to Afioiga Tofilau Talalelei Taufale (centre) and his team, accepting on behalf of all the dedicated groups that helped RSE people during Cyclone Gabrielle

Industry Service

Industry Service awards are presented to individuals who have gone beyond the call of duty by providing significant service to the New Zealand horticulture industry over many years. The 2023 winners are Grant McKay, John Jackson, Dr Jim Walker and Peter and Regina Bumseng.



Grant McKay has encouraged many young people to take up a career in horticulture. He revived the Central Otago Young Grower of the Year regional final and has turned it into a high calibre event that attracts contestants and sponsors alike. Even though he has now stepped back, Grant is still mentoring young people in the industry.



John Jackson has been in the horticulture industry for nearly 50 years. He has been instrumental in improving seed quality and combating pests and diseases. John has concentrated his efforts in the process vegetables and potato industries, and today, still plays a governance role within the potato industry.



Dr Jim Walker has had a 45-year career participating in and leading scientific innovation in New Zealand. Although primarily associated with the apple sector, Jim has made significant contributions to the avocado, summerfruit, citrus and onion industries. Jim has used his scientific expertise to develop innovative tools and techniques around pest and disease management, enabling New Zealand to maintain its status as a competitive exporter.



Peter and Regina Bumseng received an industry service award in recognition for their work in supporting RSE workers and their families through the Strengthening Seasonal Workers Family Programme. ●



Barry O'Neil, HortNZ Board chair, addressing the HortNZ Annual General Meeting

HORTNZ LIFE MEMBERSHIP

HortNZ's Life Membership award recognise growers with long and dedicated service as office holders of HortNZ, an affiliated product group or grower association. This year's recipients are Murray Stephens, Mike Arnold and Andre de Bruin.

Murray is based in Canterbury and has held a succession of governance positions in the vegetable, potato, process vegetable, grain and blackcurrant industries. Murray has a long association with the blackcurrant sector, as a founding member and chair of Blackcurrant NZ Cooperative Marketing. Today, Murray is an active member of the Canterbury Growers' Association.

Andre has been involved in vegetable industry governance for more than 25 years, at both regional and national levels. Andre's work over this time has had a massive impact on the kumara and wider vegetable industry. Andre has a strong philosophy of making sure the next generation of growers and industry leaders are successful through mentorship.

Mike continues to be a strong advocate for the training and development of people in the vegetable sector. Mike is a past director of HortNZ and chair of the Canterbury Growers' Association. Mike is currently on the Brassica Crop Advisory Group for Vegetables NZ.



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Afsaneh and Tony Howey grow organic blackcurrants near Pleasant Point, for their own business ViBERi

Horticulture the future for sustainable food

Horticulture is the future for sustainable food production in New Zealand and the next few decades will see exciting growth and development within the industry, believes Tony Howey, blackcurrant grower and retiring Horticulture New Zealand board member.

Elaine Fisher

“Horticulture is at a similar point to that of the dairy industry in New Zealand 30 to 40 years ago. There is a lot of land on which horticulture could sustainably grow food for even more people both domestically and internationally,” says Tony who is stepping down from the HortNZ board after nine years of service.

“Now is an exciting time to be part of the horticulture industry. I’m looking forward to seeing what it looks like in 10 to 20 years’ time.”

Tony acknowledges that not all growers may share that optimism right now. “It can be difficult to stay positive, especially for the many growers who have suffered through recent floods. But time does heal. It is important to look forward through the windscreen rather than in the rear vision mirror. Doing so helps you take small steps forward.”

Optimism and a belief that they can turn their tough situation around and that next season will be better is an important characteristic among growers, he says.

As well as natural disasters there are other significant challenges for the industry. “Gaining consents and continuing to grow fruit and vegetables is becoming more and more complex, and the challenges have increased exponentially during my time on the board.

“HortNZ plays a vital role in the industry and if it’s doing its job well, is often almost invisible to growers. The role of HortNZ is to enable growers to get on with the job they do best; which is growing food.”

Behind the scenes, HortNZ works on the issues impacting growers’ businesses including increasing regulation and

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“It is important to look forward through the windscreen rather than in the rear vision mirror. Doing so helps you take small steps forward.”



compliance costs, consumer demands for sustainably produced food, biosecurity threats, attracting people into the industry and climate change.

During recent natural disasters, including those caused by Cyclone Gabrielle, HortNZ played a vital role in co-ordinating relief efforts and advocating on behalf of growers for government support packages.

“

Healthy food for all forever is the ‘why’ for the New Zealand horticultural industry

“The industry highlight for me was before my time on the board when the fruit and vegetable sectors came together to form HortNZ,” says Tony.

In 2005 HortNZ was formed out of the merger of the New Zealand Vegetable and Potato Growers’ Federation (Vegfed) and the New Zealand Fruitgrowers’ Federation (NZFF).

“That merger was important because the major issues affecting the industry are common to us all. It is really important we came together to have a collective voice and work out solutions together. It’s also important that we are still united and continue to advocate and support growers, providing value for the industry.”

Growing food was always going to be the career of choice for Tony, who grew up on a mixed arable, sheep and beef farm in Canterbury with three brothers and a sister.

“The family farm was on heavy clay soils, not suitable for horticulture, but I was brought up with machinery and livestock and that’s where my love of agriculture started.

“There’s something almost primeval about growing food, and after raising children, providing food for others is the most important career in the world. Horticulture is a good industry to be in. It might not be the best from a financial point of view but it’s about growing great food, serving others and feeling good about what you do.”

HortNZ’s new strategy and vision “Healthy food for all forever” aligns exactly with the vision Tony and his wife Afsaneh have for their own business ViBERi organic blackcurrants, which are grown on a certified-organic family orchard just out of Pleasant Point, two hours south of Christchurch.

“Healthy food for all forever is the ‘why’ for the New Zealand horticultural industry and the ‘why’ for our own business too which is growing nutritious, sustainable and affordable food in an act of service to the domestic and international markets.”

“

It’s about growing great food, serving others and feeling good about what you do

The couple grew peas, potatoes, onions and carrots on fertile, irrigated soils before buying a blackcurrant farm in 2004. “The operations became too big and too spread out, so we made the decision to sell the arable and vegetable business and concentrate on blackcurrants as a semi-retirement project.

“Another reason was that Afsaneh was looking for a change to what she was doing. Afsaneh is a born saleswoman and in ViBERi we were able to combine our skills to develop



Tony Howey, retiring HortNZ board member, with the range of ViBERi products produced from blackcurrants grown on the family farm

what we had always wanted; a branded food business which is integrated from paddock to plate, from the grower through to the consumer."

Service is at the heart of Tony's philosophy and is the reason he has dedicated so much of his time and energy to many community and primary industry related boards and committees.

"Financially our business would probably be better off if I hadn't been involved in so many organisations, but it's not always about the money. I'm a 'developer' by nature and like to see development happen and leave something better than when I started."

While studying at Lincoln University, Tony was named its farmer of the year. Later he was awarded Nuffield and AGMARDT scholarships, which he says helped develop his personal and business skills.



"I would encourage young people to apply for these types of awards while they have the energy to put into them and the opportunities to benefit from the experience. It makes you reflect on your business and what drives it and your continuous striving for improvement. The experience also widens your horizons and opens your mind to new possibilities and opportunities and the chance to see how things are done in other parts of the world."

Once he retires from the HortNZ Board Tony is looking forward to spending more time with his four grandchildren, enjoying tandem biking with Afsaneh, working in the family business and continuing his involvement in community organisations, including Venture Timaru's board of directors. ●

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Under the new legislation, the national planning framework must enable the supply of fresh fruit and vegetables

Importance of fruit and vegetables recognised after years of advocacy work

The passing of the new Natural and Built Environment Bill (NBA) legislation which protects and enhances the growing of fresh fruit and vegetables and increases food security in New Zealand has been greeted with relief by horticulturists throughout the country. ELAINE FISHER reports.

“The general public would be shocked to know how difficult it has become to be allowed to produce fresh healthy fruit and vegetables in this country,” says Jay Clarke of Woodhaven Gardens in Horowhenua.

“The passing of this bill is a fantastic outcome for all fruit and vegetable growers in New Zealand.”

Jay applauds the work of Horticulture New Zealand, Vegetables NZ and individual growers and orchardists who, for three years, have advocated for changes to the former Resource Management Act (RMA) to enable the continued growing of fruit and vegetables in this country.

Under the former legislation some growers faced

prosecution if they grew vegetable crops in certain areas, but they could grow maize to feed cows on that land, he says. “That is some of the madness growers have been dealing with, and among the reasons for an exodus of growers from the industry.”

Jay says the new NBA legislation is now aligned with community sentiment. “The public is supportive of New Zealand growers who are leading the world in growing fruit and vegetables in the most sustainable way possible to provide reasonably priced fresh food for consumers.

“What happened during Covid-19, Cyclone Gabrielle and the Auckland floods really shone a light on what the

industry has been saying for a long time - that we need a sustainable geographically diverse growing network across this country to be able to provide food for New Zealanders. If we don't have that, there will be shortages of fruit and vegetables on shelves."

“

This is a great decision for our industry

Restricting the productivity of growers and prohibiting the use of parts of the country in which growing can happen makes no sense, but has been the position of some regional councils for far too long, Jay says.

"This new legislation is a step forward in saying that it's really important mahi that growers in New Zealand are doing to provide products which make people healthier the more of them they consume."

Jay says that while the National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land recognises the significance and importance of soils, if you can't get permission to cultivate those soils and provide water and nutrients to your crops you can't grow food. "The soil itself is only one part of the equation."

"Across the country, many growers require resource consent, however they were often, under the current framework, unable to achieve that even if they were operating at the recognised best practice standards."

Currently the 'environmental lens' applied to legislation has a large focus on nitrates at the expense of the broader picture, Jay says. "We know growing fresh fruit and vegetables is the most environmentally efficient form of food production, as the growing systems are extremely



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The general public would be shocked to know how difficult it has become to be allowed to produce fresh healthy fruit and vegetables in this country

Jay Clarke of Woodhaven Gardens in Horowhenua

efficient in converting nutrient and water into food, and do so on far smaller areas of land than other farming systems.

"When the freshwater legislation was written it didn't take into account efficiency of food production systems but just looked at the total impact per hectare, and that has been leading us down the road of promoting the least environmentally efficient food production at the expense of the most efficient.

"The NBA will force regional and district councils to have specific rule frameworks which work for fruit and vegetable growers and promote excellent practices."

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“

This is a great decision for our industry, Growers are hugely passionate about what they do

Trudi Webb, Webb's Fruit, Cromwell

That, says Jay, is in line with what growers want. “I have yet to meet a fruit or vegetable grower who doesn’t want to do their best to produce healthy food with the lowest overall impact on the environment.”

Some credit for the NBA’s provision around fruit and vegetable growing must also go to the Environment Minister David Parker, says Jay. “I would like to personally thank Minister Parker who picked up the baton on this for us and did something about it. Over the years there has been a lot of talk about change but not much action. Minister Parker saw the importance of ensuring New Zealanders retained access to healthy New Zealand grown fresh fruit and vegetables, and helped our industry gain a positive outcome with this legislation.”

Trudi Webb of Webb’s Fruit, Cromwell agrees the provisions of the new legislation are good news for growers.

"This is a great decision for our industry," she says. "Growers are hugely passionate about what they do; growing fresh fruit and vegetables for all New Zealanders. [For] fresh fruit and vegetable supply to be recognised in the NBA is a great result. We greatly appreciate the work that Michelle Sands of HortNZ and her team have put into this."

“

The NBA will force regional and district councils to have specific rule frameworks which work for fruit and vegetable growers and promote excellent practices

Rod Gibson, managing director, T&G Fresh, also acknowledges the importance of the new act.

"We welcome changes which make it easier to access fertile land and water to grow nutritious fresh fruit and vegetables for our fellow Kiwis and our consumers and customers in export markets," he says.

"Our ability to continue to meet the demand for New Zealand grown fresh produce relies on having the right



“

We welcome changes which make it easier to access fertile land and water

*Rod Gibson,
managing director,
T&G Fresh*

framework and conditions to provide optimum results, and location plays a big part in this equation."

Blenheim garlic and shallot grower and Vegetables NZ chair John Murphy says vegetable growers welcome any change in regulation that makes it easier for them to grow fresh, healthy vegetables because of their health and wellbeing benefits.

"The debate on removing GST on fresh vegetables and fruit has highlighted the challenges that an increasing number of New Zealanders face when trying to eat healthy, fresh food," says John.



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“Increasing growers’ ability to grow and expand by improving access to land and water would improve food security and help increase supply and therefore the availability of fresh vegetables across New Zealand.”

“

This legislation will influence resource decisions across New Zealand for years to come

Though its footprint is small compared to pastoral farming, horticulture is a highly productive use of land and it requires slightly different rules under which to operate. Under the former Resource Management Act, some decisions by regional and district councils have sometimes had unintended consequences. In many cases rules restricted crop rotation. The way water was allocated has not been reliable enough for the production of horticultural crops, says HortNZ general manager strategy and policy, Michelle Sands.

“It is important that the planning environment provide flexibility and options for farmers and growers,” she says. “We need to look to the future, not just the past when deciding how to manage natural resources.”

As the world transitions to a lower emission economy, it will create more demand for plant-based food and New Zealand has a favourable climate and productive land able to meet some of that demand.

“Fresh fruit and vegetables are fundamental to human health and wellbeing. It’s great to see this fact of life reflected in planning legislation that will influence resource decisions across New Zealand for years to come.” ●

For more information about the Natural and Built Environment Bill, visit:
<https://environment.govt.nz/publications/resource-management-reform-the-natural-and-built-environment-act>



HOW ADVOCACY HELPED SECURE NEW ZEALAND'S FRUIT AND VEGETABLE SUPPLY

The Natural and Built Environment Bill specifies that the national planning framework must enable the supply of fresh fruit and vegetables - an explicit recognition of the importance of food security, says Horticulture New Zealand general manager strategy and policy Michelle Sands.

"This recognition will ensure that the growing of fruit and vegetables is a key focus in planning decisions across New Zealand."

Since 2020, HortNZ has advocated to achieve this outcome, seeking grower feedback and support, putting forward submissions on the early versions of the new legislation and speaking to select committees. By identifying how aspects of the legislation could pan out, HortNZ communicated with decision-makers to suggest ways to avoid unintended consequences.

"New Zealand is a geographically isolated country, which can make the importation of some fresh fruit and vegetables difficult. While we will continue to grow foods for export, we also need to make sure New Zealand is resilient in the quantity and variety of fresh fruit and vegetables we produce for ourselves.

"That may seem like common sense, but it has not been part of planning decisions to date. It has been taken for granted that New Zealand would always have enough fruit and vegetables to deliver to New Zealand consumers without having to plan for that."

Covid-19 and this year's ongoing adverse weather events have led to the country's consumers being faced with supermarket shelves empty of fresh produce.

"To ensure resilience during such events, we have to have growing areas in the north, south, east and west and we need infrastructure and transport routes to enable movement of fresh fruit and vegetables to consumers."

“

To ensure resilience we have to have growing areas in the north, south, east and west



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Event for
Hawke's Bay
fruit growers

Page 23





Above: Jan Buter with his wife Grace after his win. Main image: In his speech, Jan said the cyclone felt like we were caught in a big wave and getting thrown about. "Now with an opportunity for a new board (new orchard) and new wax (climate resilient), we can take on the next big wave. However, this time we will be in control and riding the wave"

Young grower is a family man who sees opportunity in Hawke's Bay

Jan Buter surprised himself on the day of the Hawke's Bay Young Fruit Grower of the Year competition. His wife was in the wings watching, proud as punch, and perhaps that was the secret ingredient that made him take out the irrigation and Kaimahi challenges, neither of which he expected to win – and the ultimate prize.

Bonnie Flaws

Photos by John Cowpland, Alphapix

"You go through about eight stations and you've got about 25 minutes at each station and they range from frost bands to pests and disease, setting up irrigation stations, building a little apple bin, doing some stuff on a digger, health and safety, and sustainability."

So how did it feel to win?

"Stoked! There was quite a lot of expectation put on me [by my employer and colleagues] so it was nice to be able to meet those expectations. It was a real enjoyable evening. We have two young kids who wake up at 5.30 to 6:00am

and we got home about 1am and got some sleep in. We are going to use one of the vouchers that we won to take the family out this week for a flash dinner. That will be our celebration."

Despite winning the prestigious prize, Jan says he is in a phase of life where he is more family focused. Any career progression opportunities will have to take back seat, he says.

"I am a real family guy, I've got two young children under two. I do wish to be a manager at some point.



The dinner event was a welcome moment for the Hawke's Bay industry to catch up and relax

I am interested in the strategic side of business and the commercial side of business, so ultimately that is where I will be heading.

“But it would be fair to say at the moment I am playing down a few opportunities because it’s the time and season of my life where I want to be at home and support my wife, especially because we are in a region where we don’t have any family.”

Jan emigrated from The Netherlands as a child, and grew up in Canterbury where his parents run a seed multiplying business that supplies a lot of market gardeners. But he didn’t necessarily know he would go into the horticultural sector, he says.

“
Hawke’s Bay is going to be revitalised in terms of the standards of the orchards

A real people person, he just knew he wanted to work in an area in which he would have a lot of interaction with others. When he was deciding what to study in the primary sector, an advisor asked if he was good at maths. Jan said no, and

so was advised that he should pursue agricultural sciences at Lincoln University.

“That was four years of study and I really really enjoyed it, and discovered there are lot more people involved in horticulture than in dairy or sheep and beef. I deliberately applied for a job in that because I knew there were more people involved, and I wanted a foot in the door. The rest is history.”

Jan kept his studies purposefully broad and chose not to specialise, and as a result he has a really wide knowledge base. He started at T&G in the graduate programme and later moved into the labour team, supervising Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme workers. From there he became a technician. He’s now been there five years.

After the cyclone in February, Jan supported T&G on the insurance side, assisting office staff with damage stocktakes and safety assessments and generally getting staff back onto orchards, and helping managers with decision making.

“I think we’ve all been surprised at how much silt there was. We’ve moved a lot of dirt, and many businesses have successfully redistributed their staff, and everyone’s got a home again and have their feet on the ground.



Jan emigrated from The Netherlands as a child, and grew up in Canterbury where his parents run a seed multiplying business that supplies a lot of market gardeners



Jan Buter during the Hawke's Bay Young Fruit Grower of the Year competition

"So in terms of our people it has gone really well and we've moved on, and we've got a plan and structure in place about how we are going to recover these orchards. There is a bit of disappointment about how much we have achieved, in terms of scale, as it is creeping bigger and bigger. Things we didn't think were going to be an issue have turned out to be. There was some 'scope correction,'" he says.

So are young people in the industry feeling good about the sector given the scale of devastation and so much hard graft ahead?

“

Things we didn't think were going to be an issue have turned out to be

Jan says people will always be needed, and there are no limits to the opportunities out there for young people. In fact, he says, building back better relies on them.

"I don't see any limitations for young people. I think young people as a generalisation are more adaptable and prepared for change. The risk is that some of the older people in the industry are wiped out and might not have the energy to invest in upskilling [young people]. We're not in positions of decision making yet in our lives, and we don't have a lot of the stresses that business owners do."

He says the industry desperately needs cashflow and investment, which is a major challenge at the moment. That, or a couple of years' worth of good returns to allow people to generate some money to reinvest back

into their businesses. The cyclone came on the back of a couple of tough years, and income has been wiped out.

However, investors are still sitting back and waiting and watching. Jan says it will take some time before they have the confidence to dive back in. The last six months have been the response phase, and soon the sector will enter into the planning and strategy phase for the future. It's then the investment would be more likely to come, he says.

It's not all bad news though. The sector in Hawke's Bay is going through a reset as a result of the floods.

"There are huge learnings to be had and there is going to be a lot of modernisation of the orchards, which comes with more learning opportunities as well with new equipment coming on board. In some ways Hawke's Bay is going to be revitalised in terms of the standards of the orchards, they get a reset button, a new opportunity." ●



Hawke's Bay orchardist Stu Kilmister says his family lost five hectares completely and eight hectares were covered in silt

Hawke's Bay growers on the edge

Six months after the storm, it feels like yesterday for affected growers. While government relief packages for silt and refinancing were welcomed, the 'too little too late' approach is likely to see a retraction of horticulture in Hawke's Bay as some growers exit and others consolidate. BONNIE FLAWS reports.

Stu Kilmister has a couple of blocks in Hawke's Bay's Korokipo and Ōmarunui, affected differently by Cyclone Gabrielle. On 40ha of orchard, the family lost 5ha completely and 8ha were covered in silt.

Remediation is at different stages - in some of the orchards they were able to dig around the trees so they could breathe, and dig some of the silt back into the ground. In those orchards some reseeding has been able to take place and Stu now has something to drive on that doesn't just turn to mud when it rains. Many growers are not yet in that position, he says.

But considering his family orchards used to run about 6000 bins of apples and some pears, next year all will be going well if they can achieve 4000 bins.

"We have tried to do our forecast but we just don't know how our trees are going to perform. Will we get a good flowering, will the fruit set, will the fruit size if the roots are damaged? It's all uncertain. Trees like magnolias are coming out now, but most of my magnolias are dead. I think apples are more tolerant than the specimen trees in the garden, but you just don't know."

Across Hawke's Bay growers are on tenterhooks waiting to see if the trees that survived can perform, and that won't be clear until bud burst and flowering takes place. If the shocked trees do yield a reasonable crop, the fruit could still come out smaller, affecting market access.

"Different varieties have different sizes and target different markets. So you have your strategy but after that it's up to



Stu Kilmister has cleaned up the fields of trash on his blocks - now it's about how he's going to pay for it

the tree function. So if it's stressed and half the roots are dead you aren't going to size your apple. You could end up giving them away at less than the cost of production. That's the unknown," Stu says.

“

Everything is a risk but the risks are getting greater

Danielle Adsett, market access manager at New Zealand Apples and Pears says the flood created a lot of stress both on the tree and the root systems, which heading into spring then has to expend a lot of energy to bud burst, bloom and set fruit.

“The other concern is around root rot and how prominent that will be. We are waiting and watching to support growers through that.”

Estimates from New Zealand Apples and Pears were that about 400ha of orchards had been wiped off the face of the earth, and another 1600ha of affected orchards were standing and should still survive. After the annual registration now currently underway, they will have a better idea of what the remaining Hawke's Bay and Tairāwhiti hectareage will be.

“Of our affected growers, 80 percent were mum and dad family type operations that had less than 100ha, and every single grower was impacted differently. There will be growers who don't have it in them to replant



Orchardists are waiting and watching, says Danielle Adsett, market access manager at New Zealand Apples and Pears

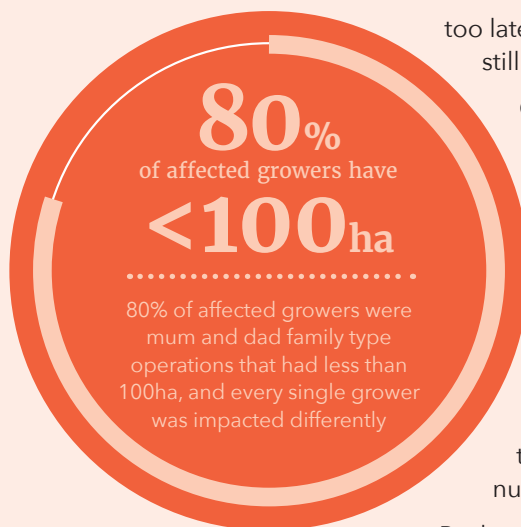
and restart again. We are waiting and watching how it works out with the government finance scheme. I don't know quite what to expect," Danielle says.

Psychologically, the Kānoa refinancing scheme announced by the government recently has drawn a line in the sand about what growers can expect going forward, as they can now start making decisions about their future. However, it is probably too soon to start using words like 'hope', or 'opportunity', she says.

Hawke's Bay Fruitgrowers' Association president Brydon Nisbet says while growers are grateful for all the assistance they have received, it has largely been a case of too little, too late in terms of government assistance.

"So there are orchards that are untouched, orchards that are now getting pulled out, and other orchards are getting silt taking out of the rows—things are still in that place. It's a mammoth task and it's the financial side of it that has been the biggest decision-making factor in it. Ultimately grants would have been the best and having the government stepping up and just paying case by case to get most of [the silt] off."

Brydon says the financial package would have been more helpful if it had been announced in late April, to give growers time to make critical decisions, and it came way



too late. Now the process to get the loans is still going to take some time.

Grower Paul Paynter describes how Covid-19 and Europe's 2022 market collapse already had orchardists on their knees by the time the cyclone arrived. Gambling any remaining equity under a debt mountain would be too great a risk for many growers.

"The demographic of the growers, the age they are, a lot of them will think twice once they crunch the numbers."

Paul says the goals and aims of the government refinancing package were pretty vague, which was a red flag. Instead, there should be a specific target to work towards. For example, a return to 90 percent of pre-cyclone economic activity in five years. Something measurable. But this was absent.

"So, a cynic might say they are putting out some money to keep everyone quiet. The big flaw with what the government has done is trying to solve the debt problem with more debt. Government has allotted \$240 million for all the flood affected regions and businesses. I would have said that was wrong by a nought. The exercise needs to be to get our regional economy up and running again," he says.

Stu Kilmister is a case in point. He's made a lot of progress cleaning up the blocks—he's no longer working

in fields of trash. However, now it's about how he's going to pay for that.

He tapped into the silt fund but there is no money there to plant trees, and so it's all leading to taking on more debt.

“

Across Hawke's Bay growers are on tenterhooks waiting to see if the trees that survived can perform

“These one percent loans, the fine print is you have to get approval from the bank. So, if they think you still have equity in your property that has built up over the years, you have to take a bank loan instead of getting the one percent interest. Do I really want to take this risk and replant to the level I did, because I'll get 3.5 percent interest for three years and then it will go up. Apples aren't producing in that time, that will take five years,” he says.

Stu was going to plant another family block this year, but now they are going to consolidate. He says with economic headwinds looking ominous, and greater competition in the global marketplace, taking on more debt just means more risk.

“Everything is a risk but the risks are getting greater. I think we have to be a little bit cautious. The fundamentals are still good but like I said, we've been under so much pressure from the government. Instead of putting up roadblocks they need to enable us. Every dollar we bring in is jobs.”

And this is the nub of the matter. Hawke's Bay is the country's fruit bowl and a significant contributor to national Gross Domestic Product. As Paul Paynter notes, Hastings is more or less a farm service town and every nail salon and café in the region will suffer if the sector can't recover. Given big corporates and institutional investors aren't showing much enthusiasm, that leaves policy settings.

“

Government has allotted \$240 million for all the flood affected regions and businesses. I would have said that was wrong by a nought

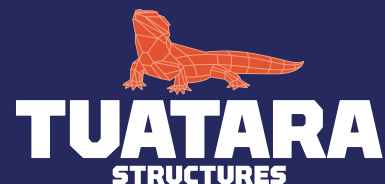
“We need to soften the landing and try to recover. The multiplier effect affects everybody. You need the money from the apples and the grapes and the sheep or it looks pretty bad.” ●



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Tony Gould, operations manager for Pye Group Ltd discusses the review of NZGAP with technical advisors Melanie Dingle and Kate McDermott at the recent Horticulture Conference in Christchurch

Have your say on the NZGAP review

Next year's update to the New Zealand Good Agricultural Practice (NZGAP) will make the system easier to use for growers of various crops, business sizes and complexities. Share your feedback with the team behind the review and help make NZGAP Version 7 clear, concise and effective.

Melanie Dingle and Kate McDermott : NZGAP technical advisors

Updating NZGAP for the future

As it marks its 25th anniversary this year, the New Zealand Good Agricultural Practice (NZGAP) has undergone a significant evolution. Originally focusing on the certification of safe fresh produce, NZGAP has developed into a comprehensive assurance framework. This framework now plays a crucial role in facilitating market access and regulatory compliance for the horticultural industry.

NZGAP serves as a valuable resource for growers, enabling them to not only access domestic and international customers but also to uphold their social licence to operate. By aligning with regulatory and community expectations, growers can access markets and maintain public trust.

NZGAP continues to expand its array of certification options

and recognitions, providing New Zealand growers and horticulture businesses with an effective tool to navigate compliance challenges.

In the ever-evolving landscape of compliance, it is important that NZGAP remains up to date and can adapt to be in a strong position to best serve New Zealand growers and operators in the horticultural industry.

To remain at the forefront of market and regulatory expectations, NZGAP is undergoing a review of its base standard. The review seeks to ensure that both market and regulatory standards can still be effectively met, maintaining a seamless approach. The goal is to establish clear and easily comprehensible requirements that ultimately contribute to good agricultural practices.

Market acceptability and certification options

Navigating market and regulatory requirements can be a complex and time-consuming process for growers. NZGAP intends to continue to minimise duplication and compliance burden whilst providing certification options that suit individual businesses. The review will result in the following certification options that will all be recognised under the Food Act, ensuring that growers with NZGAP certification can meet customer expectations and their obligations under the Food Act.

- **NZGAP-local** This certification option is designed for businesses seeking recognition within the local market. It caters to growers who predominantly supply produce within New Zealand.
- **NZGAP-GGE (GLOBALG.A.P. Equivalent)** For those who intend to supply markets beyond New Zealand's borders, this certification option aligns with the internationally recognised GLOBALG.A.P. standard.
- **NZGAP-GFSI (Global Food Safety Initiative)** This option will become available once NZGAP gains recognition to GFSI. As with the recognition of GLOBALG.A.P., this will be a testament to New Zealand growers producing safe food that meets international benchmarks.

User friendly

A cornerstone of NZGAP Version 7 is its commitment to clarity and ease of understanding. While there will be some change in requirements, the primary focus is not to set the bar higher but to enhance clarity and conciseness. NZGAP aims to offer adequate information to outline expectations whilst enabling individual businesses to determine how they meet these requirements. The objective is to allow growers to focus their efforts on the implementation of good agricultural practice rather than deciphering requirements. In many instances, as we've seen in the past, there will be more than one way to demonstrate how requirements are met.

“

The review of the NZGAP standard will set the scene for additional development work going forward

NZGAP is designed not just to meet evolving market expectations, but to embrace the diverse needs of our industry. The review of the NZGAP standard will set the scene for additional development work going forward to support New Zealand growers to meet future compliance obligations and challenges.

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		JANUARY 2024	JUNE 2024	JANUARY 2025	JANUARY 2026
NZGAP (Local)	CURRENT	CAN BE AUDITED AGAINST THIS VERSION		NO LONGER AVAILABLE FOR AUDIT	
	NZGAP V7	CAN BE AUDITED AGAINST THIS VERSION		COMPULSORY	
NZGAP (GLOBALG.A.P Equivalent)	CURRENT	CAN BE AUDITED AGAINST THIS VERSION		NO LONGER AVAILABLE FOR AUDIT	
	NZGAP V7	REVIEW BY GLOBALG.A.P	CAN BE AUDITED AGAINST THIS VERSION	COMPULSORY	
NZGAP (GFSI)	NZGAP V7	V7 IMPLEMENTED FOR 12 MONTHS BEFORE GFSI APPLICATION		GFSI REVIEW	AVAILABLE FOR AUDIT

Transition timelines for growers moving from the current version of NZGAP to version 7

Timeframes

The timeline for NZGAP Version 7 is determined by the standards under which it is seeking recognition. The GLOBALG.A.P. Equivalent NZGAP Version 7 needs to be submitted in early 2024, shaping the overall review timeframe. We intend to have the review complete by then.

Your voice matters

We are seeking feedback for the base NZGAP standard from across the horticultural sector for the development of NZGAP Version 7. The Social Practice and Environment

Management System Add Ons are not part of this review. Recently, we had a stand at the Horticulture Conference in Christchurch where we took the opportunity to get feedback from a variety of attendees.

We are establishing Technical Advisory Groups to assist in the review of the standard in addition to feedback from other stakeholders. As the NZGAP standard touches upon various crops, business sizes and complexities, feedback from growers, wholesalers, retailers, transporters, packhouses, auditors, product groups and any other stakeholders is invaluable. ●




If you can provide feedback on:

- what would make the certification process easier for you
- aspects of the checklist that are difficult to understand or not clear
- or anything else you think is relevant

please get in touch with either:
kate.mcdermott@nzgap.co.nz or
melanie.dingle@nzgap.co.nz



East Coast Rural Support Trust co-ordinator Vicki Crosswell

Rural Support Trust reaching out across the rohe

One weather event after another has had a devastating effect on many areas of the Gisborne region and, as KRISTINE WALSH reports, the strain has been building in its people, too.

Hampered by her fractured foot strapped into a moon boot, Vicki Crosswell watched from her home on the outskirts of Te Karaka as dead stock, hay bales, and even a fridge barrelled down the Waipaoa River, eventually leaving her stranded by a surrounding moat.

"There was a lot of water, a lot of damage, and one drenched alpaca who had to take a very big swim," she says of her experience during Cyclone Gabrielle.

"Being on a bit of a rise I was lucky to keep my home but it was very frightening and pretty bloody close."

It is an experience Vicki has taken into her role as co-ordinator for the East Coast Rural Support Trust.

Perhaps even more important, though, is her more than 10 years' experience working with victims of all kinds of crimes and adverse events.

It's work Vicki is passionate about even if it is not quite what she signed on for, having accepted the job in early January - before Cyclone Hale, before Gabrielle, before the months of relentless rain that has turned the region into a big, sodden bog.

"So for me it was straight out the frying pan and into the fire," she says. "It's just lucky I love a challenge!"

The 'frying pan' Vicki refers to is her 11 years working for Police Victim Support. Though her official territory was the Wairoa and Gisborne regions, it had in recent years taken her south - where she worked until the end of last year with those affected by the Christchurch mosque attack - and west, where she was part of the response to the Whakaari White Island eruption.

But trauma is trauma, says Vicki, regardless of what caused it.



Decades after experiencing Cyclone Bola on her family's orchard, the weather caught up with Vicki again at her Kaiteratahi home

"However, there is a difference with the impact of the devastating weather events we have seen in and around Gisborne," she says.

"Because there has been one thing after another, the mental strain can build without the person really being aware of it. Like a grower who has lost their crop for the third time. They may have coped the first time, and the second - that's just farming - but everyone has their limit."

The key to it is working with people face-to-face, she adds.

"There is a lot that people won't tell you on the phone that might be more apparent once you are actually with them, walking through an orchard or across a paddock. So that personal contact is my focus."

“
The mental strain can build without the person really being aware of it

The East Coast Rural Support Trust acts as a means of connection in the community and as a portal to critical services but, primarily, it is what it says on the tin.

And according to Vicki Crosswell, that 'support' can take many forms.

She describes herself as "a real people person", committed to validating and acknowledging people's experiences, while supporting them in moving forward to achieve positive outcomes.

"When I go to a property I'll sit down with the farmer and help them unpack things, think them through, and come up

with strategies to work through what they are facing.

"I make a point of showing my face at lots of meetings, too. Though attendance there can be patchy, as the moment the sun shines, everybody wants to get stuck into doing what they can on the land!"

The aim, she says, is to reach people "before they fall into a black hole".

"And that doesn't just mean farmers or growers. There is usually a partner or family who are also affected so it is our role to scoop them up and stand behind them all."

In terms of weather events, this is certainly not Vicki's first rodeo.

Aged just 17 when Cyclone Bola hit Gisborne in early 1988, she recalls sitting on a hill near her family's Ngatapa home watching the storm roll in and the persimmon orchards go under a wall of water.

"As a teenager you don't really know the complications of that, all the emotional and financial stuff, but I certainly remember how much work it took to repair... We kids were put to work from the moment the sun came up.

"My dad is very level-headed and just got stuck in, working tirelessly around the clock, but it must have taken its toll. That's something I'm very mindful of as we face these new events."

In fact, she says, that was front-of-mind during a recent chat with an older farmer who had also been hit by the blast from Bola.

"He talked about everything except his personal distress until I asked 'how are you?'," she says. "He said 'f***, Vicki,

“



Because there has been one thing after another, the mental strain can build without the person really being aware of it. Like a grower who has lost their crop for the third time. They may have coped the first time, and the second – that’s just farming – but everyone has their limit.



no one’s ever asked me that, so we’re doing the asking.”

It might not feel like it right now, but the national Rural Support Trust was not set up specifically to assist with weather related events.

It is there for rural people and their families who have experienced the impact of any adverse events, from financial issues to earthquakes or personal problems.

“

It’s still heavy going and as well as coping with ‘rain anxiety’, survivor guilt is a common response she’s seeing in the community.

Vicki Crossell would usually be in a sole charge position at the East Coast base – one of 14 around the country – but while she appears to be an isolated oasis in a sea of silt, she says she’s not been working alone.

“As well as getting fantastic support from local trustees Patrick Willock and Hamish Cave, we’ve had facilitators coming from out of town on a rotation system. That’s not just great back-up with hands on deck for me, it’s also a way of bringing fresh eyes that might have a different way of looking at things.”

But it’s still heavy going and as well as coping with ‘rain anxiety’, survivor guilt is a common response she’s seeing in the community.

“These aren’t words people used a lot before but they certainly are now,” she says. “So many people get fixated on those that are worse off than them, rather than acknowledging that they have been impacted, too.”

In shoring up her own mental health Vicki says she gets great support and fulfilment from friends and family especially her two adult children, their partners and “my rays of sunshine”, her two grandchildren.

She’s also a big advocate for self-care, taking time out when she needs it and doing things that she loves – like riding, hunting or going to the beach.

“Doing pretty much anything around the farm that involves getting my hands dirty is also a really happy place for me. “Not that she’s been getting her hands dirty cleaning up flood damage at home.

“We had to grade the driveway just to get out but there’s a chance it might happen again so a lot of that work is just going to have to wait,” she says.

“My approach is not to sweat the small stuff. I’m lucky enough to have the shower and toilet sorted, so any progress from here is just a bonus.”

The impacts of weather events on te Tairāwhiti have been devastating and there’s no way around that, Vicki says.

“But while I hate to drag out old cliches, sunshine does not just dry the land, it also warms the soul, and sometimes just having a laugh can make things seem even sunnier.” ●

Want to get in touch with the East Coast Rural Support Trust? Contact Vicki Crosswell on: 0800-787-254 or 021-433-524

Visit www.rural-support.org.nz or follow on Facebook





Libby and Lachie will harvest their second-ever avocado crop this year

Perseverance in avocados will pay off

A decision to move back to her hometown and plant avocados four years ago has been the start of a big growth journey for Te Puke's Libby McKenzie, and as CARLY GIBBS discovers, it's been one of hard work and lessons learned along the way.

When Libby McKenzie moved back to her home district of Pongakawa, near Te Puke, from Christchurch in 2019, she felt happy about her decision to plant avocados rather than kiwifruit.

Four years on, in what is becoming an oversaturated market with suffering export returns, she's unsure whether that was the right call but is persevering optimistically.

Libby and her husband Lachlan (Lachie) planted 669 Hass avocado trees on 3ha of bare land that they bought off Libby's parents Keith and Caroline Boyle, who live adjacent to the property on their Maniatutu Road dairy farm.

The Boyles also own a green kiwifruit orchard that they lease, and three blocks of avocados.

Newbies Libby and Lachie will harvest their second-ever avocado crop this year, which at the time of print, looked to be up on last year but 'light'.

"Certainly, our young avocados aren't looking as good as I would have liked. Last year we did about eight bins, and this year we'll do about 15," Libby predicts.

She puts the gradual increase down to poor flowering, thanks to wet, cloudy conditions. The couple has chosen not to export their crop due to high fees and compliance costs, and their low number of trays.

"It just doesn't make it economic until we can get a few more bins," Libby says.

When they bought their land, it was covered in lucerne that had been cropped for her parents' dairy stock.

They toyed with the idea of planting kiwifruit on it, but when comparing set-up costs, they opted for avocados, knowing they still needed to buy a house.



Libby McKenzie manages the avocado orchard herself

The couple has chosen not to export their crop

It took a year to get two power poles removed from the site due to a “long and difficult” process with Powerco. And during this time, they had already planted a shelter belt.

Then they partially recontoured, resowed, marked the block out, and put in irrigation and a bore.

“By the time we planted the trees, it was late in the season – December 2019,” she recalls.

They had also faced further challenges: 80 mm of rain fell shortly after the grass was sown, creating ruts, which made for “bumpy mowing” in some parts of the orchard.

And in the autumn of their first year, a storm with heavy winds arrived just after they had installed frost covers on all 669 trees.

“Unfortunately, we had lots of ripped covers, which took a bit to fix, but that’s horticulture and dealing with nature,” she says.

“
**We love the lifestyle.
 The issue is we don’t
 have the time to enjoy it**”

A year later when the trees were too big for frost covers, an autumn frost blitzed yearling trees planted in a small dip. Those trees died and had to be replanted more than once.

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The beginning of the journey: preparing the land for planting



Just after they had installed frost covers on all 669 trees in the autumn of their first year, a storm arrived and ripped a large number of the covers

They have since bought a frost fan, and staking the new plants really well has also made a significant difference to their survival.

While the couple packs with Trevelyan's, Libby manages the orchard herself and says after irrigation and planting, she chose to do regenerative planting, which she says looked "amazing" but made getting to their trees difficult as the plants and flowers were left to grow tall before they were mulched.

What's more, some irrigation lines were punctured in places while sowing the regen seeds - even though she had hired a specialist with equipment for shallow sowing, because she knew there was a risk.

"That was a learning curve," Libby says. "We had to go in amongst this massive regenerative crop and find the holes and patch the irrigation lines. Planting a regenerative crop with the grass originally would have been a smart way to go."

“

You just need to be there for all the ups and downs and enjoy the opportunities horticulture provides

However, planting regen was important, because they had contoured and wanted to improve the soil as quickly as possible.

They also chose to use vermicast (worm castings), which act as a fertiliser, and soil amendments to improve soil health and increase plant immunity, which has made a huge difference.

They applied the vermicast around the young plants and then generously heaped mulch around them.

They regularly fertilise their trees, but there has been minimal pruning.

Initially, that was because of a lack of time with a young family, and many other projects on the go, but ironically the trees have benefitted: "They've just been left to grow and I can just prune and cut out what's a bit messy later."

Libby is both practical and glass-half-full in her approach. Moving back to Pongakawa after working in Human Resources has been a positive experience, she says, despite the challenges.

Her husband Lachie, a banker who is originally from Southland, agreed the Bay of Plenty would offer a great lifestyle to raise their children Mac (7) and Kate (5) as well as being close to Libby's parents, her brother and his family, grandmother, and an aunt and uncle, all of whom are willing helpers.

"We love the lifestyle. The issue is we don't have the time to enjoy it," Libby laughs.

That's partly because one year after buying their avocado block, they also bought a 4.55ha kiwifruit orchard with a house. The orchard, a seven-minute drive from their avocado block, consists of 1.14ha of mature gold, 1.12ha of gold that was cut over from green in 2022, and 2.29ha of Hayward.

While the kiwifruit orchard is managed by EHC Orchard Management, Libby does some of the maintenance herself, learning from others as she goes: "There's been a lot of new," she says.

She supports Zespri's quality standards for picking, wherein growers can't pick unless they meet certain criteria,



Planting regen was important because they had contoured and wanted to improve the soil as quickly as possible

ensuring every fruit that hits the shelf is delicious. This also helps to 'cascade' picking within the regions and their different climates.

While the avocado industry also has picking criteria, some of the early fruit can lack flavour, she says.

"It's always a balance between providing avocados for the consumer and getting the season started versus the perfect tasting fruit. I think it's about getting our marketing right and getting the fruit as delicious as possible."

In saying that, she's still happy she and Lachie invested in avocados.

"In the long term, it worked out well for us because then we had the money to buy an already established kiwifruit block, with a house."

Their kiwifruit vines are producing "above average", with quality Kiwistart returns on the gold block since purchasing; and they are looking forward to their first crop on the gold cut-over block next March.

Lachie works off the orchards, which in this changeable economic climate, alongside spiking interest rates, has been helpful.

"Without that external income, it's a whole different ball game," Libby says.

On the back of extreme weather events and lower than usual payouts, she now has a far greater appreciation for horticulture and is realistic about the future within both industries, but is keeping positive.

"All these things are cyclical. I think you just need to be there for all the ups and downs and enjoy the opportunities horticulture provides." ●



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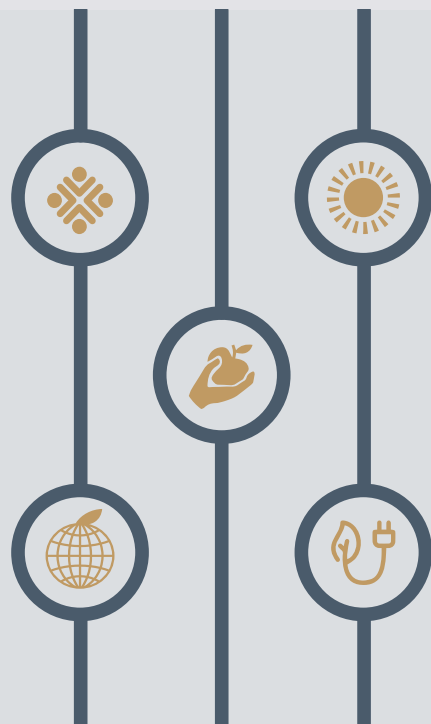
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NAVIGATING THE NOW



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Well before our sector was hit hard by Cyclone Gabrielle, we set the theme of our conference – Navigating the Now.

Jess Cranswick : New Zealand Apples and Pears Inc



Jess
Cranswick :
New Zealand
Apples and
Pears Inc

The theme was chosen because we recognise a new future is here, and as an industry, we must be ready and resilient to thrive in a new world, a new global market, and a changing climate. The theme it turned out, was more relevant than ever for an industry hit hard by recent weather events and challenging economic conditions.

This year, more than 250 apple and pear growers, suppliers, industry leaders and government officials came together in Christchurch for our annual conference, taking stock of where we are at, and looking to the future together to navigate the now.

Tristan Kitchener, a retail expert and management consultant for the grocery supply chain, kicked off session one, "global trends and opportunities." His presentation had us all thinking about how we need to seize growth opportunities and meet the evolving needs of consumers.



Kylie Horomia from Agritech New Zealand and Sandy Scarrow from Fruition Horticulture both got their hands on a Horti Boys calendar at the conference in Christchurch

Session two, “optimising the digital world” was opened by Chris Mendes, chief technology officer, The Yield, on how data can help optimise the horticulture industry. Our industry can feel removed from digital technology, but presenters in this session really showed how much we have to gain, and the fundamentals of going digital, with an example from Rachel Kilmister of New Zealand Apples and Pears of our digital strategy.

In session three we heard from the people within our industry - what attracts them, and how we can grow tomorrow’s leaders. This session featured two discussion panels made up of a great mix of experts and industry insiders covering careers, the Working Holiday Scheme and the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme.

The final session, “expecting the unexpected” - is where our recent experience of Cyclone Gabrielle tied in with the need to talk about how as an industry we must plan, pivot and grow back better. Of note was Chris Kerr from the Ministry for Primary Industries who spoke about how the sector can maximise opportunities following the cyclone response and recovery, followed by industry people talking first-hand about recovery from such weather events.

In writing this column, I have had a chance to reflect on all our presenters and panellists, revisit my notes and commend to you my key takeaways from the conference. Much like how I can’t pick a favourite variety of apples, I can’t pick a favourite session. I was incredibly impressed by the experts who presented new ideas to get us thinking, and by our industry people who matched the external knowledge with an internal lens of how things really work on the ground, in the orchard and packhouse.

If you didn’t make it to the conference, I encourage you to visit our website where all presentations are uploaded for viewing. Thank you to The Evergreen Foundation and Hawke’s Bay Fruitgrowers’ Association for supporting 44 people to attend the conference. If you did join us - thank you. Thank you for coming and joining in an important event for our community, particularly during a tough year for many. I look forward to seeing you all next year.

Ngā mihi nui.

GIVE YOURSELF A FEW GIGGLES FOR A GOOD CAUSE WITH THE 2024 HORTI BOYS CALENDAR!

The Horti Boys calendar is a light-hearted fundraiser for the serious issue of mental wellbeing. After a tough couple of years for the sector, Horticulture New Zealand together with 12 other horticulture-related businesses, are supporting the 2024 Horti Boys calendar developed by orchardists Hamish Rush and Evan Heywood. Photographer Steve Hussey captured the tasteful yet playful photos of scantily clad growers in the classic firefighter calendar style. The proceeds from the sale of these calendars will go to two organisations to support mental wellbeing: FarmStrong and The Care Foundation.

Hamish says, “Horti Boys calendar is the result of a couple of mates, a couple of beers, and an idea to raise awareness of mental health, which resulted in a lot of fun and entertainment for all those involved. The reaction so far has been fantastic, and importantly it has meant we have plenty to talk about over a beer. Thanks again to all sponsors and supporters.”

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Mr Apple NZ research and development manager Stella McLeod the first woman to receive the New Zealand Apples and Pears Outstanding Contribution to Industry award

STELLA MCLEOD RECEIVES INDUSTRY AWARD

Stella McLeod has made history in horticulture, becoming the first woman to receive the Outstanding Contribution to Industry award at the New Zealand Apples and Pears Conference in August. It's the first time in the award's ten-year history the recipient has been a woman.

"I've always considered the past winners as mentors and legends in the field. And now I'm one of them, and the first woman. It's hard to believe, but incredibly special," Stella says.

Stella is Mr Apple NZ Ltd's research and development manager and has worked in the apple industry for over 40 years. When she first started her career, she was the only woman in the laboratory, but she's inspired many women along the way.

“

Without data, it's only your opinion

"There are some wonderful women coming through and they're so very capable. It's an exciting and rewarding industry to be part of, with so many opportunities and pathways."

Stella's scientific approach has driven innovation in the industry. She was instrumental in the development of coolchain specifications - ensuring that fruit is picked at the

right maturity then cooled as fast as possible to slow down its respiratory rate and maximise its storage life and quality.

She was also part of an industry group that created export submission profiles (ESPs) for fruit. Traditionally harvest had a fixed calendar date to start picking, but ESP uses other factors - such as variations in soil, microclimate, rootstock and crop load of individual blocks - to determine best picking dates and measure fruit quality. Stella also helped to redesign apple cartons. Data she gathered and analysed on carton performance and apple bruising after shipping led to the adoption of the current Z-Pack.

Stella, who lives in Napier, enjoys putting research into practice and is led by data. "Without data, it's only your opinion. The data speaks for itself," she says.

New Zealand Apples and Pears research and development (R&D) programme manager Rachel Kilmister says Stella's legacy of people mentoring, R&D guidance and implementation, development of coolchain specifications and supporting the success of new cultivars is impressive. "She has worked tirelessly, sharing her expansive apple physiology knowledge to provide effective and concise research data that changes the industry for its betterment."

The award recognises a person who has displayed leadership, actively promoted or raised the profile and enhanced the reputation of the New Zealand pipfruit industry, as selected by the directors of the New Zealand Apples and Pears Board. ●



Stella McLeod with her daughter Sarah and son Tom at the conference dinner and awards held at Christ's College



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Pāmu's Kapiro farm in the Bay of Islands planted with 70ha of avocados. Chief executive Mark Leslie says Pāmu is drawing on work carried out by Plant & Food Research

Pāmu's hort investments beginning to bear fruit

Pāmu chief executive, Mark Leslie, can see the day when horticulture might bring in earnings equal to dairying and sheep and beef farming to the State Owned Enterprise (SOE). And he believes that could happen as soon as 2030 with the new profit stream coming from a much smaller area of land than its traditional livestock enterprises.

Glenys Christian

"We're looking at our carbon footprint and we can lower that by using horticulture in the right areas, as well as it being a higher value land use," he says.

Pāmu (Landcorp Farming Limited) manages almost 400,000ha over more than 110 farms throughout the country, with Kapiro in the Bay of Islands first off the block for horticultural development. While Mark has only been with the organisation for 18 months, he says the view had been expressed to him that horticulture is a big part of New Zealand - why isn't it part of Pāmu?

Pāmu has already planted 70ha of avocados on the most suitable soils at its 2,500ha Kapiro farm which runs

alongside its sheep and beef cattle operation. Trees are now from one to four years old, with some of the older ones producing small commercial quantities last year and picking beginning late in August on this season's crop. "We are where we want to be with avocados," he says.

By 2030 he believes that 160ha of the property is likely to be growing more horticultural crops. With assessments already carried out on the most suitable land, work is now underway on setting up an initial 6ha block of blueberries. Pāmu has partnered with Californian company Driscoll's, which already has a presence in this country through Berry Farms NZ (BFNZ) which has incorporated its brand and genetics. Established in 2016, BFNZ grows blueberries,

raspberries, blackberries and strawberries on two Hawke's Bay properties.

Mark says Pāmu looked across the range of crops such as citrus and kiwifruit, considering consumer insights, profitability and modelling of future climate change before deciding on berries, then narrowing that down to blueberries in tunnels as the first to be planted. There were a number of attractions such as the growth opportunities in the domestic market, which Pāmu will supply rather than exporting the fruit.

"That was where we saw consumer demand," he says. "But the quality of the blueberries available isn't great all year round. Fresh produce is a growth area, but some crops are only on the shelf for a short period of time."

Helping to extend that to year-round supply to fill the present gaps and satisfy consumer demand is "pretty exciting".



We want to provide certainty of work and income

No decision has been made yet on what berry crops to perhaps plant next, with raspberries, boysenberries and strawberries all being under the microscope. Other horticultural crops such as citrus might follow in future years, with Pāmu drawing heavily on work carried out by Plant & Food Research. It leases adjoining land from the SOE to research emerging crops such as dragon fruit and red kiwifruit.

"We'll work together and look at what could come out of that," Mark says. "A mix of crops will play a clear role in our financial resilience, as they won't all have a downturn at the same time."

At present the workers involved are in single figures, with more coming on to the property during avocado picking, providing much needed local employment. But that's expected to quickly grow to a team of 50 permanent and seasonal staff, with larger numbers in the future.



Chief executive Mark Leslie is focused on getting a good operation up and running

"We want to provide certainty of work and income," he says. "Rather than seasonal peaks we would like a good consistent workflow. But our focus now is to get a good operation up and running."

While Mark says the capital cost for the avocado and blueberry crop establishment has been high, Pāmu has been very conscious of setting up its new enterprises correctly, seeing that the right genetics and orchard layouts will save labour costs in the future.

While the horticultural development will mean stock numbers reduce on Kapiro, it will still be home to the Future Sheep project, looking at breeds that shed their wool rather than needing to be shorn. And with significant Queen Elizabeth II Trust covenanted bush blocks, its ecosystem services work will continue. It has just been announced that it will lead a joint project to measure the economic benefits of native ecology. The four-year project aims to deliver tools needed for financial incentives for landowners to protect and restore native ecosystems.

When it comes to prospects for horticultural development on other Pāmu farms throughout the country, Mark says its Class 6 and 7 land obviously won't be suitable.

"But looking at what the climate might be like by 2050, we'll be able to see what makes sense in the future and what pockets of land might be suitable. That's the next phase." ●

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The project will benefit the whole of industry by uncovering opportunities for operational improvements. (File photo)

Mind the cultural gap to reduce injuries

An exciting trial is underway that is melding Pasifika cultural leadership and traditions with the latest contemporary safety thinking (Safety II) to reduce injuries to Pasifika Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) workers and workers from all ethnicities, to benefit the whole of the country's horticulture industry.

Moni Hogg : Safety II thought leader and consultant

Guided by a steering group of Pasifika cultural and safety experts, alongside myself, the two-staged project started with a trial at Aputa Group Ltd in Tauranga with the company's summer RSE crew that ran across a fortnight in April 2023. Those learnings are now informing the second phase of the project consisting of full-scale pilots at two further growers in the Bay of Plenty and Auckland.

It is hoped that learnings from this project will not only giving them a voice and a shared responsibility in making safety improvements, but also benefit the whole of industry through team collaboration to uncover opportunities for operational improvements.

The Safety II approach, based on internationally recognised safety science, seeks to reframe the pursuit of safety in our workplaces based on an understanding that safety is an emergent capacity to enable things to go right across varying conditions. This capacity is referred to as 'resilience'.

Where previously behavioural science approaches saw workers as a problem to be controlled, the new science sees workers as highly adaptable actors who balance unpredictable demands and constraints and make (almost always good) decisions to keep our systems operating.

Each year, around \$15 million is paid out in horticulture-related ACC (Accident Compensation Corporation) claims.

Lumbar sprains, cuts to hands and fingers, back or shoulder injuries and eye injuries are the most common claims. Many workers report feeling levels of stress, which represents an invisible yet important psychosocial risk. Workers in our industry are often incentivised to work longer or quicker than is safe during peak seasons.

That's obviously not an ideal situation - however you unpack it. Many workers are away from home and frequently the breadwinners for their families and communities back in the Pacific Islands - and here in Aotearoa, growers with tight timeframes and economic imperatives too, can ill afford to be short of workers to get the job done.

After Horticulture New Zealand and ACC's Grow Home Safe project flagged this as an area of concern, the idea of a cultural competency project, drawing on a Safety II approach, to problem solve the industry's injury concerns was conceived. The idea is to create cultural safety to support operational teams as they engage with the concepts to maximise the results.



Within the Apata experiment, the safety and operation teams were reviewing reports of manual handling injuries and were motivated to reduce them as a priority. The wellbeing of workers was of primary concern, and the downtime during peak season created production risks requiring attention. With approximately six shifts involved in the high-volume packing and shipping effort during harvest, a team that was safe and performing to a high standard was essential.

There's a temptation to jump to the conclusion that the injuries are simply down to language differences and the seasonal nature of the work, but in truth the reasons may be more complex and nuanced than imagined. That's where Safety II comes into its own with its focus on understanding how work is done in practice from the workers' perspective, rather than solely relying on the insights of management.

A 'Learning Team' was trialled with the Samoan workers at Apata's packhouse. As it turned out, Apata had recently upgraded its processing facilities using the latest



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technology. Being the first season using it, understandably there were teething problems to iron out. Rather than focus on why the injuries were occurring, we sought to get insights into what was helping and hindering their performance and how they were achieving success despite the demanding conditions.

There's a challenging bridge to cross to establish a high level of trust from Pasifika workers (and the wider horticulture community) - especially when they are unaccustomed to Aotearoa and our ways - to enable them to feel comfortable and culturally safe enough to share their valuable insights with us. That underlines the importance of a Pasifika steering group that can guide, lead and support this project.



Each year, around \$15 million is paid out in horticulture-related ACC claims

Hans Key is a much respected Samoan elder and safety expert with WorkSafe. He emphasises the importance of allowing the leadership of this project to have a Pacific lens. "Workers from the Islands are not just a labour force as they come in and out. They appreciate the work they do in New Zealand and pride themselves on their work ethic," he says.



There's a challenging bridge to cross to establish a high level of trust from Pasifika workers

"Through this project we want to instil in the teams awareness, but more importantly, bring forth the innovative capabilities of the teams to contribute to the workplace, give insights and suggestions, and contribute more of the skills and talents they bring with them from their home countries."

Heath Dibble, the line manager for Apata's kiwifruit packhouse, who has day-to-day involvement with the Pasifika workers says, "it's been awesome, an amazing process, and the team has been really open and helped us identify things we were not previously aware of."

He's positive about what the project has to offer the industry. "The principles of looking at the positives first really worked. The guys opened up about the great things they were doing to keep themselves and others safe. They then thought deeper around where we could improve," says Heath.

"We discovered these guys have skill sets, outside of their daily packhouse roles, that could contribute to the problem solving needed every day. Apata is keen to ramp up the Learning Teams methodology across other teams to continue to bring out the best in our teams."



That's a view backed up by Keith Bardwell, Apata's point of contact for this project and the company's health and safety advisor. Excited about carrying on with Learning Teams, and the mix of cultural and Safety II methods that provides deeper understanding of what's really going on at work, he admits to finding out information about the reasons behind the injuries that he wasn't previously aware of.

"I've been happily surprised to discover the work teams were being very proactive in responding to the challenges associated with the new upgrades to the production line. They were taking a lot of initiative, and when supervisors were tied up troubleshooting technical problems, the teams were creating flexibility by swapping workers across teams to ensure production continued to run smoothly," says Keith.

"We found out that the team weren't lifting too much because they were trying to be heroes, they simply ended up having to keep up with the production pressures resulting from the line changes, and were doing their best to adapt and do the right thing."

"On a personal note, the Learning Team process has also bridged the cultural gap between myself and the teams," says Keith. "I now find myself stopping for a chat with the guys regularly and gaining more insights into how they're working on a day-to-day basis. This kind of trust will help us make further improvements together next season." ●

For anyone keen to learn more about the project, or volunteer time and resource towards the pilot, get in touch with:
Matt Thorn, HortNZ project manager
matt.thorn@hortnz.co.nz





Susan Heal is the race manager for the historic Manuherikia Irrigation Scheme

Central Otago's precious resource

Susan Heal spends her life trying to find water. It doesn't come easily in remote Central Otago, especially in summer when periods of rainfall are few and far between.

Aimee Wilson

As the race manager for the historic Manuherikia Irrigation Scheme—a lone woman in a job for which once ten men were responsible—there is always plenty to do.

Of the 400 shareholders using the privately-owned scheme in and around Alexandra, Springvale and Chatto Creek, the majority are lifestyle block owners.

But it is significant that 15 are also orchards, with a further 17 vineyards, and during a long hot summer it becomes a complex process to spread the precious (and occasionally severely rationed) resource across livelihoods, livestock and lifestyle blocks.

All shareholders are treated equally in their holding in the scheme, however, livelihood comes before livestock and

lifestyle, so even the half a dozen farmers are often asked to wait their turn when the water needs are high, and again during frost fighting season in spring.

The season officially starts on 20 August for both orchards and vineyards to fill dams, and then on 15 September everyone on the scheme is on a water roster.

"At frost fighting I need to pre-emptively have water in the race system 24 hours prior to a frost event, in order for the water to be available for the landowner," Susan explains.

It's never straight forward, according to the scheme operations contractor Gary Kelliher who employs Susan to manage the scheme, and is also a farmer and Otago Regional Councillor.



And neither is the required reallocation of water from the previously held Deemed Permits that expired in 2021—which will soon dictate the flow regime of the Manuherikia River and how Alexandra basin landowners and the wider community are able to use it.

“Our scheme management has always had some sympathy towards horticulturalists and viticulturists because they can lose an entire crop in a night, so the scheme has always tried its best to help them,” Gary says.

But if they don’t have the water backed up in their dams, then they can’t frost fight, and landowners are being constantly reminded to keep four nights of water storage for that.

“The scheme is pretty historic but it’s in good condition largely thanks to the long-standing previous contractor John Anderson of Aqua Irrigation,” the former engineer says.

The main intake is in the remote Ophir Gorge where a tunnel 470m long was once dug through the massive rocky hillside by workers, started during the First World War—otherwise known as Horseshoe Bend.

From 1917 right through until 1991 the Ministry of Works operated all of the Central Otago water schemes, which employed many staff who used to ride around on motorcycles checking the races.

Gary won the contract in August 2022 and continued working on all the infrastructure to hopefully keep the high

standards set by John—and the winter just past, he and Susan have been upgrading the tunnels and pipelines.

The allocated area covers 2500ha of private land, but the water management is always a daily challenge to solve. Learning to not only control the water and the flow of the water, but the people who rely on it every day, has been a huge lesson in diplomacy and negotiation.

“You have to be able to be nice to everyone, and be able to react immediately,” she says.

Susan was out running in the hills with a friend in 2020 near Earnscleugh when it dawned on her that she would love a job working on the water races.

Coincidentally she saw a job on Trade Me for exactly that—Aqua Irrigation was looking for an apprentice, and Susan couldn’t believe her luck.

Alex Lawrence was the race man at the time and ready to retire, so he taught her as much as he could in three months; but it takes a good five years to be able to learn everything well—and there’s so much at stake if something goes wrong.

“He got many stressed phone calls from me, but was always very good and he answered day or night.”

With her Double Diploma in Viticulture and Horticulture, and ten years’ experience working the land, followed by an eight-year stint as a council contractor looking after public gardens, Susan was looking for her ‘forever’ job.

There was also a stint on the road de-icing the highways at 4am, proving she really was born for the outdoors.

“On the second day working the races, I knew it was going to be my retirement job,” she says.

The majority of the water users are great to deal with, but a certain number consistently push her to the limit.

There are always repeat offenders—one in particular springs to mind. The lifestyle block owner who forgets to turn off his water when it’s his turn, and goes out to play golf.

“One mistake like that can affect five other landowners,” Gary explains.

“
One mistake can affect five other landowners

Then there are the regular race blockages that have to be found and cleared, and at the moment in frost fighting season it’s not uncommon for an orchardist to ring up at 7pm or 5am and plead for more water for that night.

“So I have to go back out after dinner or before breakfast and go and find that water,” Susan says.

That could mean delicately asking another landowner who is on the water roster, to give up their allocation to help their neighbour.

Gary says no one is at the bottom of the queue when a water crisis hits after weeks of no rain, including lifestyle block properties, their needs are not forgotten.

“Some of them are super intensive and I have a lot of sympathy for what is hidden away on properties.” Some people grow peonies, others have horses or just very large lawns that need watering.”

Luckily house water is no longer a part of the scheme, he adds.

Orchard consultant and Summerfruit NZ life member Earnscy Weaver has been on the scheme since 2016, as he lives on a small orchard and lifestyle block out of Springvale.

“

Gary and Susan are proud of their first year managing the ‘historic but fragile’ scheme and are looking after the infrastructure so that it will last the distance

There are several other orchardists growing cherries and apples on the scheme too, including Leaning Rock Cherries and the apple growers Central Organics.

Weaver Horticulture has been involved since 2016, and Earnscy receives his water allocation every three weeks for his small two-hectare cherry block, which he saves up for irrigation.

But he says orchardists don’t need as much for frost fighting as they did many years ago.

Too much water from overhead sprinklers can affect the tree health and fruit finish, and cherries are particularly susceptible to that.

He says the Manuherikia scheme has worked well but it hasn’t been as abundant as the Earnsclough Irrigation Company, which is linked directly to the Clyde dam and the second largest river in New Zealand.

Gary and Susan are proud of their first year managing the ‘historic but fragile’ scheme and are looking after the infrastructure so that it will last the distance.

Back in 1917 when teams of men worked the races, it was all hard labour, with nothing mechanical to help them.

Shearing gangs would eventually come in and clean out the races with hand scythes, but nowadays Susan gets a digger contractor in to clear them out.

“We’re always looking for ways to get modern technology to help us.”

A typical day working the races is never the same. It’s pretty hard going working outside in the middle of winter when the temperature starts some mornings at -6 degrees



The Chinky Gully viaduct was upgraded in 1937 and the flume is 150m long

Celsius. But as the pair discovered this winter, working 1km underground fixing tunnels, it can be surprisingly warm.

Susan says nothing beats the satisfaction of turning on the water and seeing it rolling down the ‘stairs’ (there are many of these on the scheme, including at Brandy Hill behind the Alexandra Airport).

The race is now on for regional councils to meet the 6-year deadlines for the expired 2021 water rights, that have been operating in some places for over 100 years.

“There has to be an outcome that meets all needs for the environment and the schemes—we can’t operate without long term consents and we all want a healthy river. Both are achievable”, Gary says. ●

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*Baseline of
on-orchardist
activities*

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Figure 1 Video camera and tripod in kiwifruit Hayward Orchard 2, Bay of Plenty, 21 December 2022

We don't know what we don't measure – 'time-and-motion' study of the time taken by labour for on-orchard activities

Allister Holmes : precision agriculture agronomist, Lincoln Agritech

Background – what we don't know

Labour supply is a key issue facing all New Zealand fruit industries. Fruit-growing industries have changed dramatically since their beginnings, especially in canopy architecture and crop management practices. This has been accompanied by orchard amalgamation and development, resulting in larger orchards that are often managed, operated and staffed by management consultants and labour contractors. All horticultural industries are affected by the increasing cost of labour, and also the difficulty of sourcing skilled labour. However, there have not been detailed studies on the time required to undertake individual on-orchard operations in any New Zealand

fruit industries. With increasing availability of and interest in mechanisation and automation on-orchard, a critical understanding of the time needed to undertake individual on-orchard activities is essential.

How to measure the time of on-orchard tasks

Zespri International commissioned Lincoln Agritech to assess the labour requirement of selected kiwifruit orchard tasks to provide a baseline for future work.

The objectives of this work were to measure the time it takes to achieve a certain task, and evaluate the movements it takes to achieve individual on-orchard activities. Orchard management efficiencies could be recommended based on the findings of such a study.





Figure 2 Screenshot from videos showing (left) winter pruning being undertaken in Hayward Orchard 3, Bay of Plenty, 5 October 2022; (right) tying down canes in SunGold Orchard 1, Bay of Plenty, 22 June 2022

Lincoln Agritech completed the work using the methodology of Zhang et al., 2020, who undertook a time-and-motion study to analyse apple harvest processes of workers. They recorded on-orchard activities using a video camera, which allowed them to compare picker performance using different harvest methods.

We adapted this approach of videoing on-orchard activities and later analysing the video for all relevant orchard activities. This allowed us to identify challenges to managing staff and to determine technological gaps that may improve productivity. We recorded video of the workers undertaking on-orchard activities (Figure 1), and then analysed the footage to record the duration of discrete on-orchard activities of the individual workers. We used manual and software-based analysis of the footage and recorded the time spent on individual activities per staff member in a spreadsheet. The data were summarised as the time used for each on-orchard activity per orchard and season.

Data verification

The subject orchards for this study were all located in the Western Bay of Plenty. To create a full picture of the workload on-orchard and to verify the data measured from our videos, our data were compared to additional data sources, including:

- The annual Seasonal Labour Report of the New Zealand Kiwifruit Growers Incorporated (NZKGI), 2022. Other grower organisations also collect work-related data through annual surveys of their members.
- The excellent Grower Technical Guides from EastPack, 2022. Packhouses often collect data from their suppliers and collate and report on this information.
- The orchard management companies that provide labour or even manage orchards. Their records of labour were used to complement the ‘time-and-motion’ data for most of the on-orchard operations through the season.

For this study, we explored the on-orchard activities of:



We also measured machinery operations involving crop spraying, orchard mowing, and bin movements at harvest, but this article does not present that data.

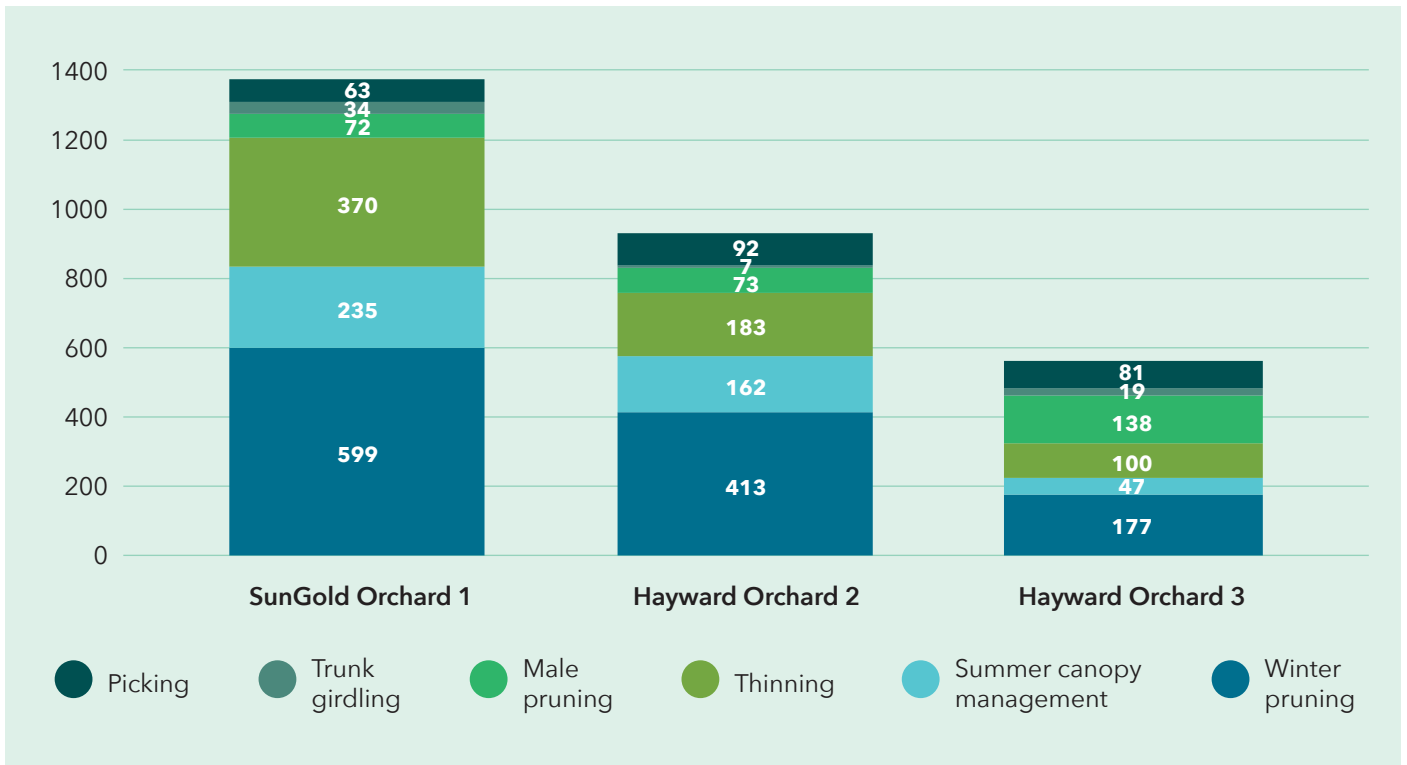


Figure 3 Cumulative on-orchard activity hours by task and orchard, 2022. Data labels give total hours by operation

Results and discussion

Figure 3 gives a summary of the data obtained from this trial, with the on-orchard operations we analysed on three orchards in 2022. The hours we recorded for the individual tasks were generally similar to the hours recorded by the grower as a sum of hours spent in the orchard, with an average variation of 8.6 percent. On average, 39.8 percent of annual on-orchard labour hours were spent on winter pruning; 14.3 percent on summer canopy management; and 21.5 percent on thinning. There was a large difference between the total hours spent per hectare between the orchards. Hayward Orchard 2 used 65.5 percent more hours of labour per hectare than Hayward Orchard 3,

and SunGold Orchard 1 used 144.3 percent more labour hours than Hayward Orchard 3.

NZKGI stated that the variation they recorded in their Annual Labour Report was ± 40 percent. This is in line with our findings, where on average, the maximum time taken to complete an on-orchard operation was 79 percent greater than the mean, and the minimum time was 44 percent less than the mean. Where the time taken was much lower than the mean, it was often because there was not full canopy cover present in that bay. Where the time spent was much greater than the mean, it was often due to the individual worker having a large ‘personal delay’ in that bay.

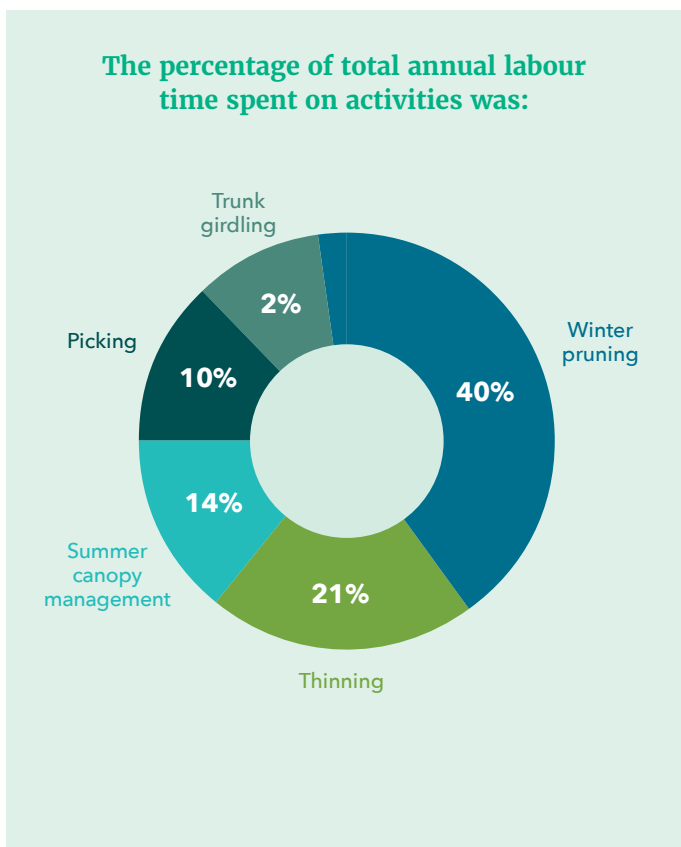
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Figure 4 Screenshot from video showing fruit picking being undertaken on SunGold Orchard 1, Bay of Plenty, 26 March 2022



Understanding on-orchard staff operations

In our study of kiwifruit production, there were three main activities: winter pruning; summer canopy management; and thinning; which accounted for more than 75 percent of the hours of labour used in 2022 on the subject orchards. Almost all of the 'personal delay' time measured in this work was workers using their phones. However, across all operations we measured, we recorded an average of 6.6 percent of the time as personal delay, which is significantly less than the 25 percent personal delay estimated as occurring on orchard by Langmo, 1962, before mobile phones were invented!.

Drawing Conclusions

Fruit-growing industries face similar challenges when measuring the time that labour resource is used for on-orchard activities. Sazo (2013) made three key points for the apple industry in Canada that are relevant for all orchards:

- The more complicated you make the tree (or vine) in terms of making decisions, the harder the system becomes for you and your workers.
- With a very simple training system, workers have to make few decisions.
- A very simple training system makes the fruitlets, branches, and fruit very accessible to workers for hand thinning, pruning or harvest.

EastPack gave two key messages to their kiwifruit growers in their Grower Technical Guide, Spring 2022: *'performing early season tasks to a high standard can save costs later and improve fruit quality; results will be optimised when tasks are completed before important deadlines'*. However, we observed during our study that this was often not the case, with operations being undertaken more than two months later than ideal in some cases.

Simplifying fruit production systems will increase the ability to streamline work on orchard. For example, undertaking traditional replacement cane pruning and training of the kiwifruit cultivar SunGold requires approximately half of the labour used when training leaders up strings in a 'teepee' system.

Outlook

This work in New Zealand kiwifruit orchards shows that accurate collection of the time it takes to undertake different on-orchard activities provides objective data on labour use, and therefore cost, in orchards. Time-and-motion studies are an easy, objective and reliable way to acquire such data. Modern video recording and inexpensive software allow some automation of the necessary data collection and analysis.

Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge and thank all the staff, contractors, managers and orchard owners who helped us achieve these results. ●

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An extreme year for many regions



Georgina Griffiths : Meteorologist, MetService

A climatological view of 2023-so-far

Long range forecasters need to 'zoom out', beyond day-to-day weather maps, in order to both review what has been happening (and why), and also to help predict the 'flavour' of the upcoming season. Doing this helps filter out our 'noisy' weather, to focus on our large-scale primary climate drivers.

If we review the first six months of 2023 (Figure 1) and look at the climate anomalies (deviations from normal), we see that high pressures favoured the area south and east of New Zealand, while frequent lows were present over the Tasman Sea and across the upper North Island. More frequent than usual northeasterly winds were experienced across the country. This pattern was caused by a combination of La Niña and a very quiet (settled) Southern Ocean.

In contrast, a major pattern change occurred in July (Figure 2), with El-Niño-like westerlies and Southern Ocean storms really firing up. Frequent, intense lows were experienced over, and east of, New Zealand, stemming from a very active Southern Ocean. July was characterised by very strong, cold, southwesterly winds across New Zealand.

Rainfall accumulation plots tell a sobering story

The frequent wet, northeasterly regime experienced over the first half of 2023 produced an extreme or record year in the north and east of the North Island (due to Cyclone Hale, the Auckland Anniversary Floods, and Cyclone Gabrielle). In most parts of Northland, Auckland, Coromandel, Bay of Plenty, Gisborne and Napier, the annual average rainfall had already been surpassed halfway through the year (before 30 June). Figure 3 shows the extremity of rainfall recorded so far this year at Auckland Airport.

El Niño still intensifying

Climate models are almost unanimous in predicting that El Niño (Figure 4) will continue to strengthen between now and Christmas - this is its typical life cycle - and most climate models signal a decent chance that this El Niño will be a **strong one**.

Because every El Niño event is different, and each one plays out in combination with our local climate drivers - the Southern Ocean and the Tasman Sea - it is important to keep up with the latest MetService long-range commentary. ●

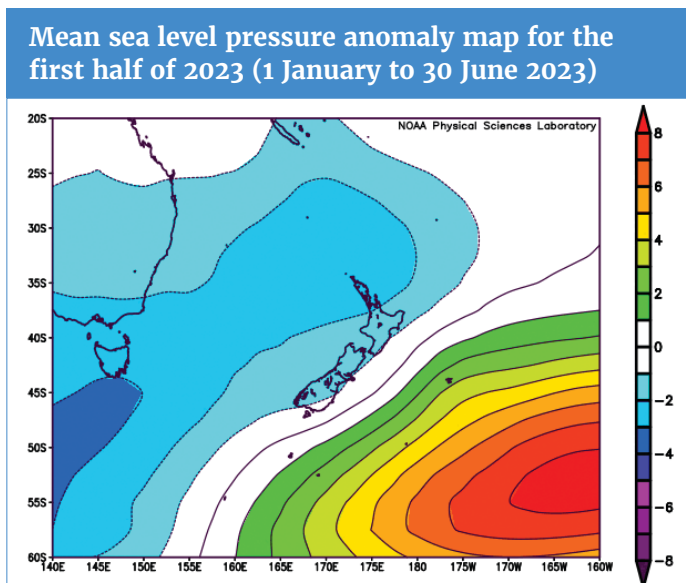


Figure 1: Higher than usual pressures are shown in red colours, lower than usual pressures are shown in purple/blue colours. This anomaly map is effectively the 'weather map deviation from normal'

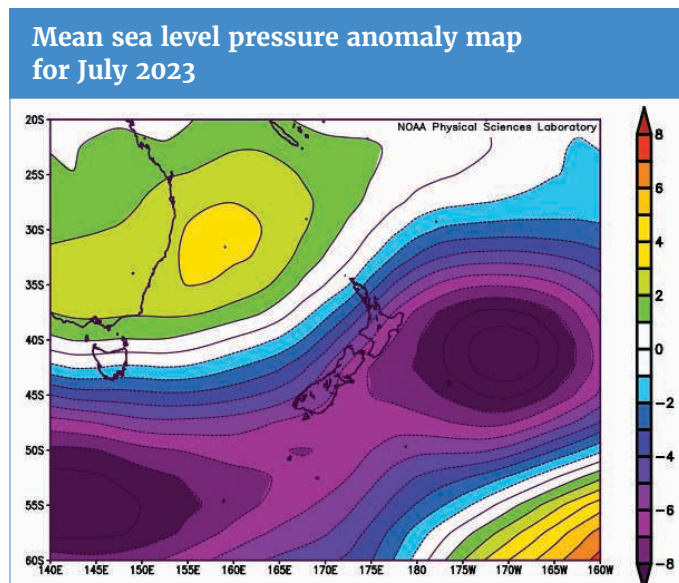


Figure 2: Lower than usual pressures are shown in purple/blue colours. This anomaly map is effectively the 'weather map deviation from normal'

Auckland Airport rainfall accumulation from 1 January to 31 December, for all years since 1963

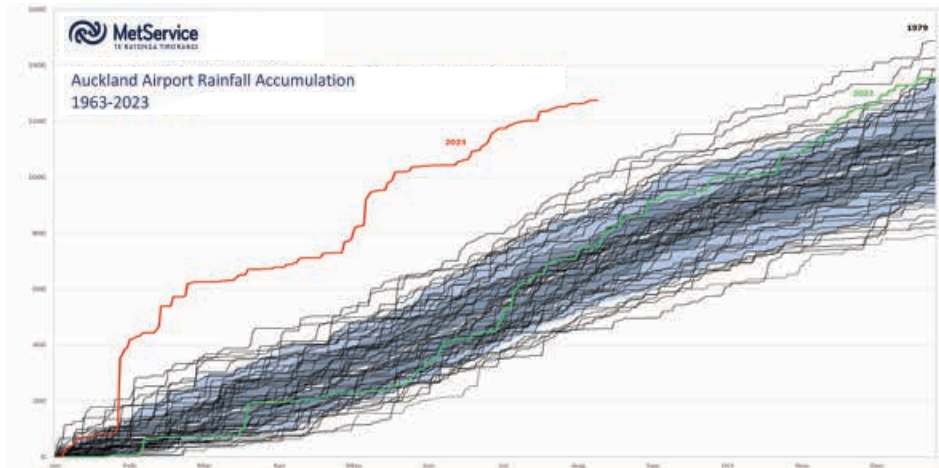


Figure 3 The red line is the 2023 rainfall accumulation up until 15 August; the green line is the 2022 rainfall total. The white line is the long-term average, with light grey band showing the 10th to 90th percentiles, and the dark grey band showing 25th to 75th percentiles

A plot of the NINO 3.4 Index since 1990

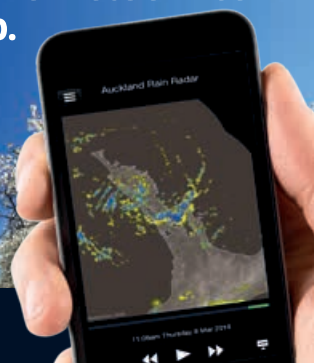


Figure 4 This index measures sea surface temperature anomalies in the central Pacific Ocean, 5S to 5N, 120 to 170W. When colder than normal waters affect this area, coupled with enhanced trade winds, La Niña is in force. When warmer than normal waters and reduced trade winds are observed, El Niño is in place



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

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Have you started your Freshwater Farm Plan?



Alisha Rayns

HortNZ project manager Growing Change

The Growing Change project is here to help growers navigate the government's Resource Management (Freshwater Farm Plans) Regulations 2023, which aim to address the decline in New Zealand's freshwater quality. We asked project manager ALISHA RAYNS, who joined Horticulture New Zealand in June, what growers need to know.



More than 30 growers attended a recent Growing Change workshop in Pukekohe



HortNZ's Alisha Rayns met with The Fresh Grower team in Pukekohe

? Should growers take action now?

"The timing varies, with staged rollouts in all regions by the end of 2025. Everyone should have plans by the end of 2025. If you have five hectares or more in horticultural use or 20 hectares in combined use, you will need a certified Freshwater Farm Plan under the regulations.

? Why is HortNZ leading the rollout of the government's regulations?

"We're not. The Ministry for the Environment (MfE) is leading the rollout of the regulations across farm land in pastoral, arable and horticultural use. It is up to MfE and regional councils to audit and certify Freshwater Farm Plans. However, the government is committed to working

with the horticulture sector to develop a pathway to comply that is specific to horticulture and builds in enduring support for growers. The result of that is the Growing Change project, which is a HortNZ and MfE partnership funded by the MfE's Essential Freshwater Fund."

? How will it work in practice and what will it cost growers?

"Your Freshwater Farm Plan shows how you are managing nutrients, soils, irrigation, biodiversity and waterways. Growing Change uses existing GAP (Good Agricultural Practice) systems and the Environmental Management System (EMS) add-on, available to all GAP certified growers, to audit and certify Freshwater Farm Plans. Through our regional extension officers, Growing Change offers you one-to-one support time to complete NZGAP-

EMS registration and mapping free of charge. You can get free support from experienced advisors, and technical workshops. We also work with product groups who are developing produce-specific support, like for kiwifruit and avocados."

? What happens after 2025?

"The Growing Change project is funded until 2025, so make use of it while you can. However, part of the project is designing a training programme which should become available from late 2025 or early 2026." ●

To find out more and contact one of our regional extension officers, visit: www.hortnz.co.nz/compliance



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