

# Backing horticulture's success and growing out of COVID

New Zealand's horticulture industry contributes more than \$6 billion to the economy, is the country's third largest export industry, and employs approximately 60,000 people. The industry is well respected by the public – the latest UMR survey shows that 65% of New Zealanders are positive about horticulture, which is the highest figure for the primary industries.

What horticulture needs in order to continue its success in producing fresh and healthy food for New Zealand and export markets is quite simple. Successive governments need to ensure that horticulture can develop within a supportive framework that enables sustainable growth.

Covid has challenged and changed horticulture just as it has other industries. But with the right framework, horticulture is confident that it can grow its way out of Covid and play a critical role in New Zealand's economic and social recovery, while continuing to respond to climate change and improve freshwater quality.



## Three key areas for action

### 1 Climate change adaption and infrastructure

#### WATER STORAGE

The whole of New Zealand urgently needs significant investment in commercially viable water storage schemes, for urban supply, growing fruit and vegetables, and improving freshwater quality by enhancing river and stream flows.

These schemes cannot be modest and need to accommodate previously unknown drought conditions across the country. The streamlining of Resource Management Act processes and removal of red tape are critical to getting these major schemes underway now, as well as the availability of capital to build the schemes.

We ask for a nationwide assessment of water infrastructure to see if it is adequate to support horticultural expansion, followed by construction of water capture and storage schemes to enable the growing of healthy food.

#### WATER ALLOCATION

Water allocation should not constrain future land use and land management flexibility. Rather, it should enable growers to respond and take into account the positive and negative effects that land use type and property scale have on environmental,

social, economic and cultural values, within a catchment context.

We ask for an allocation model that provides certainty while allowing for variation between catchments. Transitioning to the new allocation model needs to ensure grower viability and provide flexibility to enable development within environmental limits.

#### FRESHWATER OUTCOMES

We have welcomed the current government's pragmatic approach to achieving the freshwater quality outcomes. The government's approach acknowledges that growers know how to achieve the outcomes wanted while continuing to ensure that New Zealand has food security for a growing population.

Fruit and berry production improve freshwater quality and ameliorate the impact of climate change. In addition, for many years, vegetable growers have been investing heavily in improving freshwater quality and reducing environmental impact by retiring land, putting in sediment ponds, and using precision irrigation and modern cultivation techniques.

We ask for recognition of the importance of commercial vegetable growing through a National Environmental Standard for Commercial Vegetable Production.

#### CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTION

Growers currently lack some of the techniques and technologies needed for successful climate change adaption, while maintaining, if not increasing, food production and exports. Government direction coupled with investment and incentives for research and development

is necessary, if New Zealand is not to slip behind its international competitors.

We ask for government direction and investment in Crown Research Institutes that reflects the research and development needs of horticulture.

#### FARM ENVIRONMENT PLANS

Grower developed, audited Farm Environment Plans are a powerful tool for growers to use to achieve climate change adaption, improve freshwater quality, reduce environmental impact and provide evidence for regulators. Farm Environment Plans are a pragmatic way for growers to achieve environmental outcomes.

We ask for national and catchment wide support for Farm Environment Plans, and investment in their rollout and associated grower outreach activities. At the same time, support for sediment control and wetland development is needed to match growers' own investment over several years.

We ask for recognition that the grower is in the best place to manage climate change and freshwater. Growers' Farm Environment Plans should be exempt from horticulture consultant sign off, provided the grower has attended industry workshops. Note that we have independent Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) audits that will validate Farm Environment Plans and identify areas for further work.

We ask for recognition of GAP schemes for managing environmental outcomes.

### 2 Market access and biosecurity

#### MARKET ACCESS

New Zealand and the world needs food, and that's what the horticulture industry is good at. But to increase exports of our food to the world's consumers, we need access to new markets and more safe trade pathways.

We ask that the government invests in exploring new export market opportunities and expands safe trade pathways.

#### NEW PLANT VARIETIES

Linked to this, and supported in Budget 2020, is enabling the safe importation of new plant varieties so New Zealand can keep up with international competition by selling the latest and best fruit and vegetables.

We also ask that the Government invests both in a post-entry quarantine facility and the development of new varieties through Crown Research Institutes (CRIs) and other research providers.

#### BIOSECURITY

At the same time, we need to keep pests and diseases out but if they do enter New Zealand, we need to be able to contain their spread and eradicate them.

We ask that the review of the Biosecurity Act is completed and that the government continues to invest in all aspects of New Zealand's biosecurity strategy and activity.

### 3 Labour and small business support

#### EDUCATION AND TRAINING

For many years, horticulture's growth has been hampered by labour shortages across growing, harvesting, value-add processing and transportation.

Many New Zealanders need to develop new skills and take on different jobs thanks to Covid. This is no easy process and will require aptitude and re-training.

We ask that the reform of the education and training system needs is completed, while ensuring that the system reflects post-Covid requirements for flexible delivery and innovation.

#### RSE SCHEME

Horticulture relies on seasonal workers for harvest and pruning. These workers enable continued growth that creates attractive permanent career opportunities for New Zealanders. All the primary sector relies on offshore labour. However, if access to offshore labour is limited, the post-Covid growth that New Zealand needs will not eventuate.

We acknowledge the current situation with the border. But long-term, we ask that the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme is expanded to support the continued growth of horticulture, which at the same time, will increase permanent job opportunities for New Zealanders. We also ask that the RSE scheme is put on a firmer footing to give growers more certainty.

#### CUTTING THROUGH RED TAPE

Like most industries in New Zealand, horticulture is made up of a majority of small businesses. These businesses need expensive and time-consuming red tape to be reduced if they are to prosper by focusing their efforts on growing and not form filling. It is Horticulture New Zealand's vision – through GAP schemes – to see 'just one auditor come up the drive' – and in the post-Covid world, that this auditor be able to conduct audits remotely.

We ask that central and local government recognise GAP schemes so that red tape that adds no value or provides no additional safeguards is reduced dramatically. This will enable growers to get on with what they do best – sustainably growing fresh, healthy fruit and vegetables for New Zealand and the rest of the world.

#### COUNTRY OF ORIGIN LABELLING

For more than a decade, the horticulture industry has campaigned for Country of Origin Labelling. Yet again, there are more delays to Country of Origin Labelling becoming mandatory, which we see as a misalignment with government calls to buy and support local.

We ask that the government makes Country of Origin Labelling mandatory by 1 January 2021.