HORTICULTURE NEW ZEALAND ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22: *EVOLVING SIDE BY SIDE*

It was a challenging year once again for the commercial fruit and vegetable growing industry with Covid-19 affecting labour supply, logistics and towards the end of the year, costs.

Seasonal labour supply was constrained by border closures and a lack of backpackers - 5000 this summer versus 45,000 Pre-Covid - that would ordinarily help fill seasonal picking vacancies. On a positive note, a border exception issued by the government enabled the continued movement of workers from the Pacific during the pandemic under the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme - a significant achievement that ensured growers could continue supplying New Zealanders with fresh fruit and vegetables. Industry stepped up and worked collaboratively to recruit locals through incentives, campaigns and the launch of the PickNZ job board. However, there remained a paucity of New Zealanders able to fill such roles.

In spite of the impact of pandemic, central government chose to only briefly stop the flow of consultations and request for feedback on policy proposals - many of which could have a fundamental impact on New Zealand's food and fibre sector. To protect grower interests, HortNZ made 24 written submissions to local and central government on behalf of growers over 2021/22 on issues such as: phasing out the use of fossil fuels in process heat, the inquiry on the Natural and Built Environments Bill, He Waka Eke Noa, Freshwater Farm Plan regulations and more.

Communications were key during the 2021/22. HortNZ maintained regular engagement between growers, product groups, government and stakeholders to ensure the sector's adaptation and growth continued in the face of changing alert level settings. HortNZ provided growers with timely, plain English interpretations of officials' announcements and advice, emailing the information out to nearly 6000 recipients and repeating it on the website. Thirty five media releases were distributed, key topics being the cost of vegetable production, the RSE scheme and immigration, labour shortages, the Young Grower of the Year competition, the Commerce Commission supermarket inquiry and use of highly productive land.

Despite challenges, the sector has continued to experience growth, with total export and domestic figures increasing horticulture's worth to $7 billion. As we sign off on this financial year, we would like to express our thanks to all growers and the wider horticulture sector for their ongoing commitment and passion.

Read the complete annual report here.

$7bn
Value of horticulture in NZ

40,000
People employed in the horticulture industry

2600+
People placed into training or employment through Career Progression Manager programmes

83%
Growers say HortNZ is focussed on issues that make a difference for them