

## National Party Response to Questions

1. The cost of growing kiwifruit is increasing significantly. A major driver of these costs are regulations from local and national Government which are putting Growers under increased financial stress. What will your party do to reduce these costs for growers?

Under Labour there has been an attack on the primary sector. National recognises the extreme burdens placed on growers by the overregulation from central Government and the ever increasing compliance costs placed on the kiwifruit industry. To address this National will:

- Simplify processes by introducing a 'no duplication' rule to prevent councils from asking any growers for the same information twice.
- Require local and central government to assess the costs of all new rules on the rural sector and publish the findings.
- Establish a permanent Rural Regulation Review Panel to consider every local and central government regulation affecting growers – when the cost is more than the benefit it's red tape and National will fix it.
- Allow growers to use GAP programmes to deliver freshwater farm plans.
- Improve EPA functions & streamline approvals for Horticulture under the HSNO Act 1996.

2. Labour: Access to People. Despite investment into automation, a lack of access to seasonal workers means that can't achieve the sustainable growth that our industry needs in areas where automation is currently unavailable. The increasing costs and immigration processes for seasonal workers are causing uncertainty and negatively impacting business confidence. What will your party do to increase access to good people?

National will Change the Accredited Employer Work Visas for agriculture to create a new path to residency and eliminate the median wage requirement to allow wages in line with local workers and replace it with an industry average that fairly reflects skills and experience. National will also phase in a cap increase to the RSE scheme to 38,000 over five years and explore other countries entering scheme, replace the requirement for employers to pay RSEs 30 hours minimum each week with a requirement for employers to pay RSEs at least 30 hours per week on average across the contracted period; lift the age limit for a Working Holiday Visa from 30 to 35; and allow people from eligible countries to apply for a second or third Working Holiday Visa if they work in areas with worker shortages.

3. The RSE Policy has been vital in addressing labour shortages in the horticulture and viticulture sectors, but like any policy, there is always room for improvement. How does your party plan to further progress the RSE policy review to ensure it remains relevant, robust, and adaptable to changing dynamics in the labour market, global trends, and industry requirements? Can you highlight specific areas that your party will focus on in terms of amendments or refinements to the existing policy to cater to both the welfare of the seasonal workers as well as the needs of the growers?

National recognises that due to the seasonal and shifting nature of primary sector work, RSEs requirements are always changing. To address this National will:

- Double the RSE cap from 19,000 to 38,000.
- Ensure the relationship is determined in a close working relationship with our Pacific neighbours.

- Remove the requirement for employers to pay RSEs 30 hours minimum each week and replace this with a requirement for employers to pay RSEs 30 hours minimum per week averaged across their contracting period.

National also recognises the massive value of our RSE workforce, National is adamant that instances of workplace exploitation have not been investigated at a sufficient level under Labour (with only 12% of cases being investigated in Horticulture this year). To address this National will:

- Work with the Labour inspectorate to ensure it identifies and prosecutes any instances of modern slavery and worker exploitation.

National will also investigate multi-year visas for RSE workers who have worked one season prior to applying for the multi-year visa.

4. In recent times, the availability of proper accommodation for the seasonal workforce (e.g. WHV and New Zealanders relocating for seasonal work) has emerged as a pressing issue, with direct implications on the welfare of the workers as well as the operational capabilities of the growers. How does your party plan to improve access to affordable, safe, and decent accommodation for the seasonal workforce, and consequently, foster a more stable and sustainable working environment in the industry?

Current regulations for RSE workers are cumbersome for growers. National recognises this and also recognises the need for affordable, safe and decent accommodation for the seasonal workforce. To address these issues National will:

- Allow employers to build RSE accommodation on land categorised as “highly productive” under the National Policy Statement – Highly Productive Land and allow RSE employers to consider other rental accommodation options provided they meet health & safety requirements.
- Lift the upper age to apply for a Working Holiday Visa to New Zealand from 30 to 35 for all eligible countries.
- Allow people from eligible countries to apply for a second or third Working Holiday Visa if they work in areas with worker shortages such as agriculture.

5. Significant changes for growers are underway with regional councils working hard to update their freshwater policy and notify their regional policy statements and regional plans by the end of 2024, along with the phased rollout of the freshwater farms. Would your party make any changes to the legislation that is driving these requirements? If so, what would those changes look like?

National’s freshwater policy will be released in the coming weeks. Freshwater is a crucial matter for farmers and growers across the country, and for the environment. National wants better outcomes for freshwater, and to empower local communities to decide catchment-level limits, not one-size-fits-all rules.

National supports Freshwater Farm Plans, as they are a useful alternative for farmers to getting resource consents. National may look at the 2024 deadline to see if that is realistic. National would repeal the government’s RMA 2.0 - Natural and Built Environment Act and would work with councils to revisit whether current Regional Freshwater Plans process still makes sense.

6. Can you please share your party's views around the potential to use precision breeding or gene editing to reduce the time taken to find new cultivars?

National has committed to remove the effective ban on research and use of gene technologies outside laboratories including GE and GMO. National will establish a dedicated Biotech Regulator to ensure safe and ethical use of biotechnology. In addition, National will streamline approvals for trials and use of non-GE/GM biotech.

7. What is your parties' stance on the RMA reform?

National will repeal Labour's RMA replacement legislation, the Natural and Built Environment Act 2023 and the Spatial Planning Act 2023, by Christmas 2023. We believe that Labour's legislation will actually be worse by making it harder to get things done, without improving the environment. National will campaign on changes to the RMA legislation and national policy statements, some of which we have already announced including one year consenting for major infrastructure and renewable energy projects, alongside our 'Going for Housing Growth' plan. We will also begin work on a longer-term programme to repeal and replace the RMA.

8. What support will your party offer to growers affected (past, present and future) by severe weather events?

National supports the creation of a National framework for climate adaptation, this will involve bringing together all parties in Parliament, as well as local government, insurers, banks and industry to work out a framework about how costs of adaptation and recovery from Climate Change will work. This will include how the government can support industry including growers as well as others impacted by the severe weather impacts of Climate Change.

9. How will your party support New Zealand Kiwifruit Growers?

National wants a thriving Kiwifruit sector. As a major exporter and employer, Kiwifruit growing is integral to the New Zealand Horticulture sector and economy. National will cut red tape and get Wellington out of growing to give growers certainty to invest and grow. National backs Kiwifruit growers to compete and win on the world stage. Our world-class growers deserve fit-for-purpose regulation and reliable access to skilled workers, which National will deliver. National is committed to our hard-working growers and will continue to work with the industry on issues of importance.

10. Does your party support the Single Point of Entry?

Yes

11. Any final comments.

National backs our farmers and growers 100%.