

CHAPTER NINE CAREERS IN HORTICULTURE





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A career in horticulture is not just about growing, picking and packing fruit. There are a great number of highly valued scientific, business and technology roles available. People enter the kiwifruit industry through many different pathways – from seasonal workers in the orchards or packhouses, through to graduates with specialised degrees. At every level, there is training available to upskill and build a rewarding career.

THE SECTION IS DIVIDED AS FOLLOWS

9.1 Horticulture Learning Pathways	148
9.2 Careers Map	152
9.3 Career Profiles	154
9.4 Upskilling	158
9.5 Agribusiness in Schools	160



9.1 HORTICULTURE LEARNING PATHWAYS

A career in horticulture can begin at secondary school. NCEA qualifications in any of the following subjects are a great head start in horticulture:

- Agribusiness
- Agriculture and Horticultural Sciences
- Technology
- Sciences
- Marketing
- English
- Maths
- Environment studies

Many schools offer vocational-based training through **Gateway** and **Trades Academy** programs for Year 11-13 students. Schools select a program of theory and practical Unit Standards (usually 20 credits/year) that support

students transitioning from school into employment. Students can also undertake work experience to get a taste of what a career in their chosen field (e.g., horticulture) would be like. In schools working with the Primary Industry Training Organisation (PITO), it can be possible for students to gain industry-recognised qualifications such as the NZ Certificate in Primary Industry Skills (Level 2) or the NZ Certificate in Horticulture (Level 1 or 2) while they are at school.

Bay of Plenty students should watch out for "Cultivate Your Career". This free annual one-day event showcases the broad range of opportunities available in the industry through visits to horticultural businesses, hosted by industry professionals (see students at a previous CYC event on the title page for this chapter).

For more information about Agriculture and Horticulture in schools see the NZASE Resource "Teaching Agriculture and Horticulture" at <https://nzase.org.nz/>



Many successful people in horticulture have started out working in seasonal roles. Employers are always looking out for the right people to offer permanent positions to. Top skills for candidates include:

- Work-ready attitude
- Good communication skills
- Team players
- Problem solvers
- Willing to learn
- Motivated and enthusiastic

Earn as you Learn

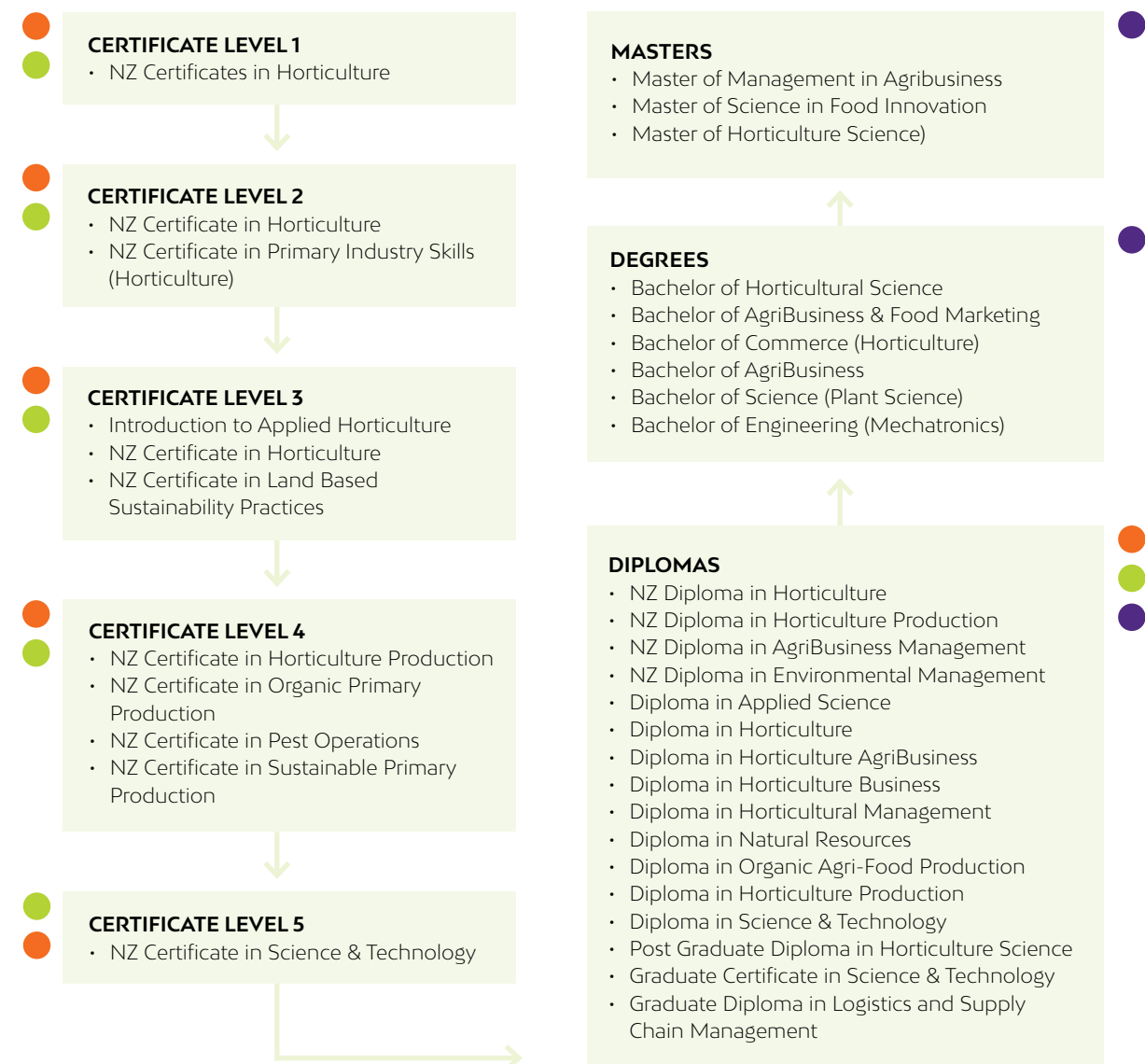
Once in employment, there are many pathways for further career development and upskilling. Larger horticultural businesses provide their own in-house training. Many others offer cadetships and apprenticeships and support their employees to complete further learning as their roles change.

- The PITO administers apprenticeships in the workplace – students complete their Level 3 & 4 Unit Standards while they are working and are assessed by their employer or a PITO assessor.
- Many regional polytechs or institutes of technology offer the Level 3 & 4 certificate courses separately or as an apprenticeship, with students attending class part-time as well as working.

Te Pūkenga (New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology) now encompasses the original 16 regional polytechs and the Industry Training Organisations, so in future will provide classroom, workplace, and online learning options for learners.

Horticulture Learning and Career Pathways

● Independent Training Provider ● Te Pūkenga ● University



Keeping it in the family

Sophie Sullivan, Assistant Manager,
Shortridge Estate

Say hello to Sophie! Sophie is a kiwifruit industry native, and has over a year and a half of experience working for Shortridge Estate, where she's already making a name for herself as a dedicated and skilled professional.

Sophie grew up in the kiwifruit industry, and so her passion for the sector began when she was very young, beginning with fond memories of the family orchards. Her family owns an 11-hectare kiwifruit orchard, and Sophie still loves working under the vines alongside her mother. She enjoys being out in the orchards, getting her hands dirty and learning by doing. This hands-on approach has helped her develop a deep understanding of the industry and the skills necessary to succeed in it.

"I'm a very hands-on learner, so just getting out there, being on the tools, just being shown as much as I can, just learning from other people. That was my main way and I did learn quite a lot through Polytech, but yeah it's a very, very cool industry to work in," she says.

In her current role as Assistant Manager at Shortridge Estate, Sophie is responsible for helping to oversee the day-to-day operations of the company. She works closely with other members of the team to ensure that the company's goals are being met on a daily basis, which includes supporting the teams reporting to her as well. Like them, she began in a kiwifruit production role, moving from lab work to field work, and then into management. She now does a bit of both, which she quite likes!

When asked about her career progression at Shortridge Estate, Sophie says that she "started out doing a lot of winter bud counts, and then I moved into a supervisor's role. I moved into a lab role then I moved into an administration role, and now I'm back in the orchard to help the family out."

Sophie is always on the lookout for ways to streamline processes and make the operations more efficient, for both her family and for Shortridge Estate. Her willingness to roll up her sleeves and get her hands dirty sets a great example and is helping to build a strong team spirit.

To her, it's only up from here. She sees that the industry is rapidly growing, and she's passionate about the potential it creates for anyone curious about working in the kiwifruit business.

"There's just so many different jobs that you can do, like you can come from any part of the world or any other industry and pretty much find a job that will suit you," Sophie says.

With the Bay of Plenty sunshine overhead, and her family by her side, Sophie sees a long and fulfilling future ahead of her at Shortridge Estate. Her strong work ethic, positive attitude and natural leadership skills will carry her far, and she's sure to make a significant contribution to the kiwifruit industry as a whole!



Academic Pathways

Horticulture enterprises are not only looking for horticulture or plant science graduates (although they need them too). These high-value businesses employ business specialists (accountants, managers, marketers, data analysts, human resource managers, lawyers, logistics, supply chain managers, and more); environmental science specialists (e.g., agronomists, biosecurity officers, laboratory technicians, sustainability officers, soil scientists); and increasingly technology and engineering graduates as more automation is adopted. There are many opportunities for international placements and travel within the horticultural exporting companies.

Undertaking course-related work experience, or even a student internship, whilst studying at university can be a great entryway to the horticulture industry. You can discover aspects of the industry that interest you, gain experience, and give those businesses the chance to see if you would be a good fit for their organisation.

The Careers Map on the following two pages demonstrates the wide variety of roles available in the kiwifruit industry, and the multiple pathways people can take to enter, both vocational and academic.

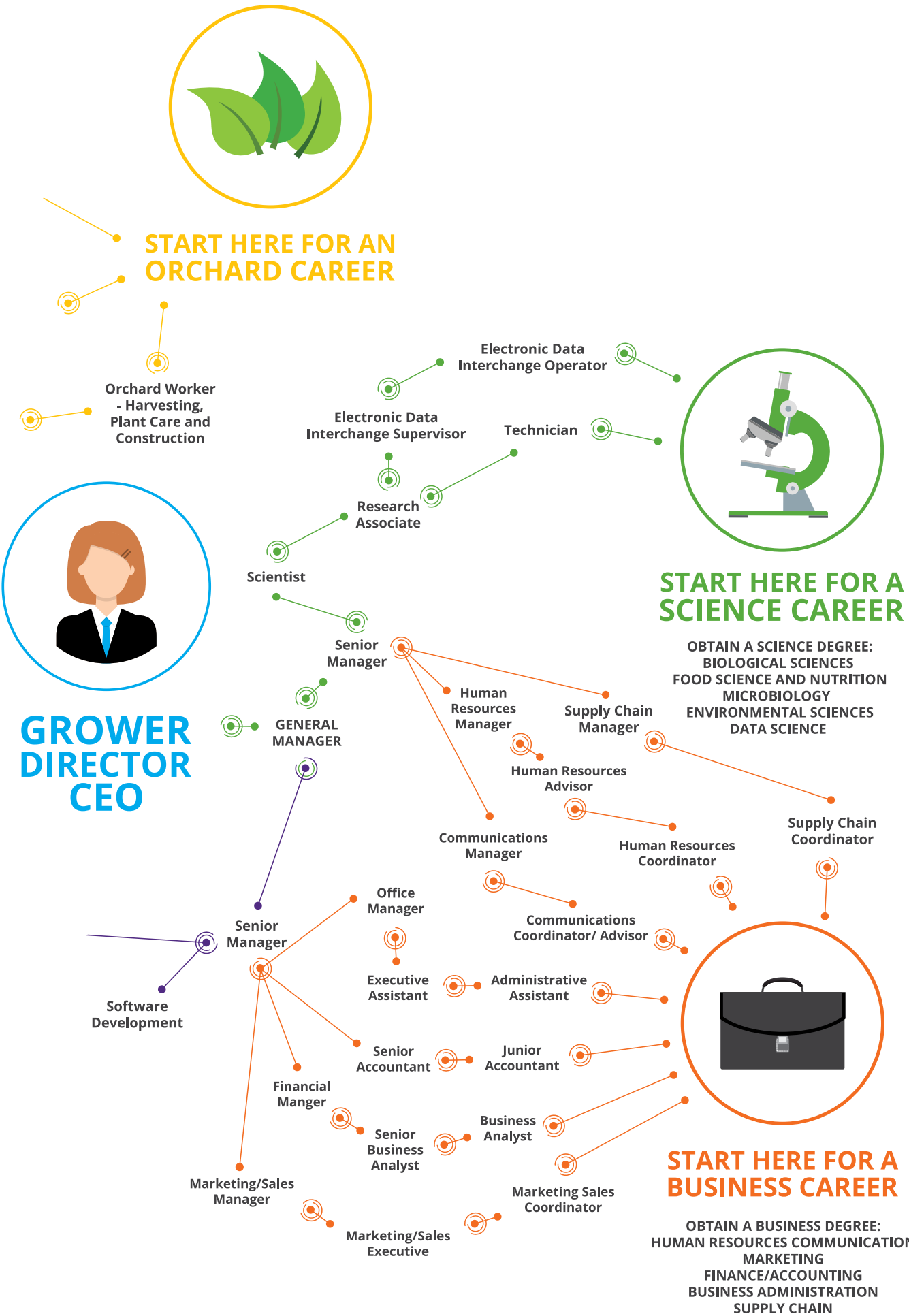
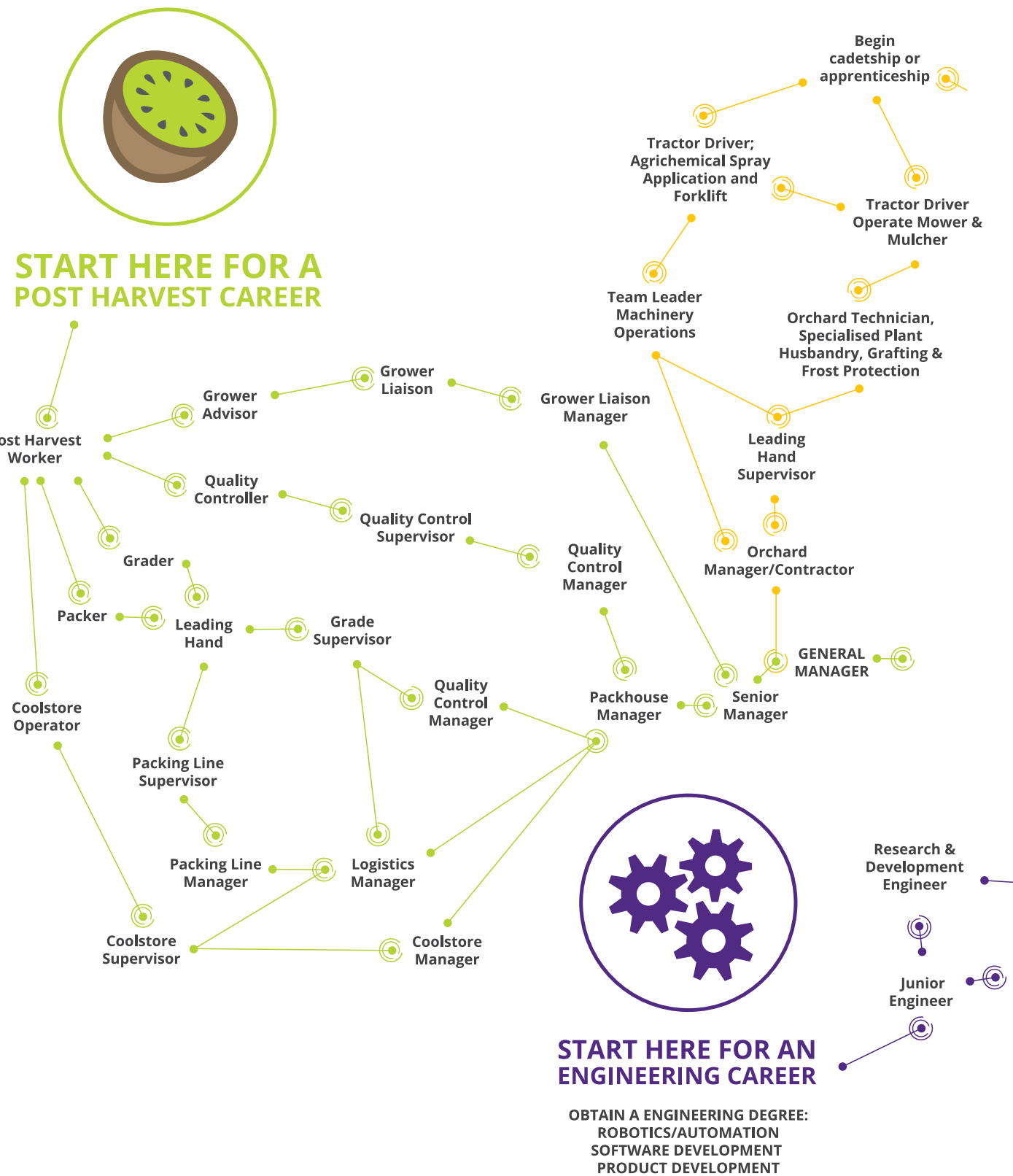
There are many scholarships available to help with the costs of studying. To find out more go to: <https://scholarships.hata.nz>



Below:
Robotics Plus Kiwifruit
Picking machine developed
by scientists and engineers
working with Waikato and
Auckland Universities



9.2 CAREERS MAP



9.3 CAREER PROFILES



ASH DAY

Role/Organisation: **People and Capability Manager, Te Awanui Huka Pak**

Pathway: **University Degree**

Kia ora, tutaki Ash Day. Meet Ash Day! Ash is a respected professional within the kiwifruit industry in New Zealand. She came to NZKGI from sunny Gisborne on the Tairāwhiti coast, and has enjoyed exploring multiple roles during her time with the kiwifruit company.

Her experience ranges from lab work to pack house responsibilities, and she currently works for Te Awanui Huka Pak as a People and Capability Manager. She focuses on the professional growth of individuals all across the company, as well as fostering new talent and exposing them to the kiwifruit industry around the Bay of Plenty.

Ash loves the variety she’s experienced so far, and when asked about her journey at Te Awanui Huka Pak, she said, “I’ve held a few different roles, which just shows the opportunity for growth in this industry, and also the diversity. The roles that I’ve held are from lab to pack house, and now people and capability development.”

As the People and Capability Manager, Ash is responsible for overseeing the development and growth of the company’s managing workforce. This includes managing recruitment, training and development, employee relations, and overall human resource management. Her ultimate goal is to ensure that the company has a skilled, motivated and engaged team, capable of meeting the challenges of the ever-changing kiwifruit industry.

One of the key areas that Ash focuses on is employee development. Being deeply involved in the industry herself, she is aware that it’s constantly evolving, and that it’s essential to have a workforce that is properly equipped with the latest knowledge and skills. To achieve this, she works closely with the management team to identify areas where training and development is needed, and then creates and implements programs that will help employees to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge.

No one day is the same at Te Awanui Huka Pak, and Ash prefers that about her role. She says, “A typical day for me... my day changes. It can look like me going to careers and high school expos to promote the industry to rangatahi across the Bay of Plenty. It can look like creating internships and cadetship programmes to take across industry into different organisations, placing talented rangatahi into high level and meaningful positions as well as developing them through a cadetship programme.”

Ash’s position involves general employee relations as well, and she helps to maintain a positive and productive working environment, where employees feel valued and respected. She works closely with the wider management team to address any issues or concerns that may come up, and to ensure that individuals are satisfied in their jobs.

Te Awanui Huka Pak is a collective of Māori whanau who have a shared investment in Seeka, a prominent kiwifruit company in New Zealand. Part of her personal mission and work is promoting the interests of the industry and to ensure that the company remains at the forefront of developments in the sector.

On the topic of this exciting industry, Ash says, “I think what’s surprising about this industry is that kiwifruit is New Zealand’s largest horticultural export. This industry is multi billion dollars which is predicted to be 4.5 billion by 2049. The Bay of Plenty produces 80% of the kiwifruit for New Zealand, kiwifruit export. Māori grow 10% of that crop as well.”

Her passion for the industry, combined with her deep understanding of Māori culture and values, allows her to approach her work with a holistic perspective. In this way, Ash brings a unique perspective to her role at Te Awanui Huka Pak, where she is quickly becoming a leader in the kiwifruit industry.

Te Awanui Huka Pak Limited (Te Awanui) is a 100% Māori owned company founded in 1984 by a collection of Māori trusts. It currently has total investments in excess of \$20m consisting primarily of commercial property and shares in publicly listed Seeka Ltd.

Te Awanui’s vision is to see Māori at the leading edge of the Horticulture industry.



ASHDON REID

Role/Organisation: **Orchard Manager, Southern Cross Horticulture**

Pathway: **University Degree**

Introducing Ashdon Reid, a recent graduate of Lincoln University with a Bachelor of Commerce. Ashdon is devoted to all things kiwifruit – he has been with Southern Cross Horticulture for just over a year, and even though he is still fresh out of university, he is already succeeding in his role of Orchard Manager.

Although he jokes that he’s the “graduate” at the company, his lifetime of experience in the kiwifruit industry is a major factor in his success, and his rapid growth. Growing up on the orchards and building fond childhood memories has made the industry second nature to him, and he loves working in the field.

“In the kiwifruit industry, I sort of jumped in because my parents have been involved for a long time and I grew up on the orchards, and worked on them during my breaks and holidays and simply fell in love with it,” Reid says.

Reid admits that he did try out a few other industries, and laughs as if his return to the orchards was inevitable. “During uni, I tried a lot of other jobs, agricultural contracting, dairy farming, but just kept coming back to kiwifruit. When I saw an opportunity come up with Southern Cross, I decided to take it,” he says.

At Southern Cross Horticulture, Reid is responsible for managing multiple orchards at their Edgecumbe site. He not only looks after the blocks and the fruit, he also manages and supports the teams of people working there, and is involved in all aspects of the orchards’ operations. In addition to his orchard management duties, Reid helps with administrative tasks, such as developing newsletters and organising information for Southern Cross’ audiences and customers.

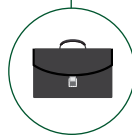
Considering that the New Zealand kiwifruit industry is a major contributor to the country’s economy, with exports valued at over \$4 billion in 2021, Reid has plenty to draw on for his newsletters. The industry employs thousands of people, and is a vital part of the country’s rural economy, thus the importance of sharing the message.

Between his communications responsibilities and on-site management role, Reid stays busy, and shares that every day is different in his role. Fortunately, he enjoys the variety of tasks. Some days he’s out in the orchard doing the “hard yards,” other days he is in the office helping with invoicing and customer communications. During harvest season, Reid proudly shares that, “everyone works together to gather the crop.”

There’s no doubt that the amount of time spent outdoors plays a significant role in Reid’s enthusiasm for the job. He says, “I love the fact that I get to work outside everyday, in the beautiful Bay of Plenty, I love the fact that I’m my own boss, so to speak. I get to manage and run my own time, and look after the orchards the way I want to.”

Reid’s experience and passion for the kiwifruit industry make him a perfect fit at Southern Cross Horticulture, and he is a shining example of the opportunities available in the field for those with the right skills and attitude.

His thoughts for anyone out there considering the kiwifruit industry is to, “Give it a crack! It doesn’t matter where you come in, it’s so progressive but it’s also very linear. You can move between orchards, working postharvest, and anywhere in between. The experience is so easy and linear and valued throughout the whole chain.”



BRENO

Role/Organisation: **Trainee Manager, Seeka**

Pathway: **Direct Employment/Further Industry Study**

Meet Breno, a young trainee manager for Seeka! Breno was born in Brazil but moved to New Zealand 6 years ago, and he has a passion for horticulture that stems from his upbringing. His father, an orchard manager, taught him the ins and outs of the industry and encouraged Breno once he decided to pursue a career in horticulture.

From there Breno focused on his goals, and completed his Level 3, 4 and 5 in Horticulture at Toi Ohomai. He obtained a variety of certifications, including a forklift licence, tractor licence, chainsaw licence, and LUV licence, making him uniquely qualified for his current role as a trainee manager at Seeka.

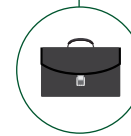
At Seeka, Breno continues to hone his skills and gain valuable experience, helping to oversee the day-to-day operations of the orchard. He works closely with his team to ensure that every aspect of the harvest runs smoothly, from planting and pruning to picking and packing. "I've done winter pruning, male pruning, thinning, picking, pretty much everything," he says.

He understands that there is a lot more to the job than just physical work, as there is a huge science behind it, including the timing of spraying, the effects of weather events, and the intricacies of seasonality. Breno has experienced the full range of horticultural work.

Breno loves the diversity of work in the kiwifruit industry, and feels he's experienced the full range of horticultural work in his field. From harvesting the fruit in February and March to winter pruning and everything in between, Breno is enjoying the variety of work and the challenges that he gets to overcome alongside his team.

"We might do the same thing for a couple of days in a row, but after that it changes and we're doing something else," Breno says. He's also grateful for the diverse team of people he works with, who come from all over the world and share his love for working outside in the sun.

With his commitment, Breno is poised for a successful future in the kiwifruit industry. He's grateful for the opportunity to work with Seeka and eager to continue making a positive impact in the world of kiwifruit. If you're someone who enjoys working outside and wants to be part of a dynamic and growing industry, Breno says to give it a try. You just might love it as much as he does!



MONICA OHOIA

Role/Organisation: **Supervisor, Thompsons Horticulture**

Pathway: **Direct Employment**

Meet Rotorua native Monica Ohoia, a local legend who's been working with Thompsons Horticulture for the past five years. On the cusp of her sixth year with the company, she's pushing the boundaries, and recently began her Level 3 in Horticulture at the Eastern Institute of Technology in Gisborne.

Although Ohoia was born in Rotorua, she was raised in Gisborne, and that's where her journey in the New Zealand kiwifruit industry began. Those are her stomping grounds, and where she's done an excellent job in a supervisory role for the past three years.

How did she get started? Ohoia reminisces that, "They had an MSD (Ministry of Development) crew running through WINZ (Work and Income New Zealand). So I thought I'd just jump on the MSD crew and give it a go."

One of the things she enjoys most about the industry is the opportunity to meet new people and learn new things on a daily basis. She notes that when she first started with Thompsons, she knew very little about kiwifruit, but that the job has given her the chance to learn about the industry and gain valuable new skills. She also appreciates the networking opportunities, like interacting with RSE (Recognised Seasonal Employee) teams and other professionals in the industry.

"Things I like about my job are meeting new people, people in general, learning new things everyday - well I learn new things everyday - and getting to interact with like RSE teams and other guys that come in from other companies." - Ohoia.

As a supervisor, Ohoia excels in her role and looks to make the most of each day. Her daily doses of Vitamin D are a key element of her happiness in her role, and she prefers to spend the majority of her time outdoors, and engaging with others.

She's a firm believer that horticulture makes a great job for anyone who loves to work outside and have a varied role, especially where there's always room to move up. She says that the day passes quickly when you're on your feet and engaged in new adventures, and she never gets bored of it.

"You do have people that show you what they know about the industry as well which is really, really cool. It's awesome. If you're an outdoors person, yeah, horticulture's the job for you," she says.

As a kiwifruit industry professional, Monica's experience and knowledge are invaluable. Her passion for learning and growing within the industry is evident, and she is a respected and admired member of the Thompsons Horticulture team. She is a great example of what can be achieved with hard work, dedication, and a positive attitude!



9.4 UPSKILLING

Young Grower™ of the year BAY OF PLENTY



Young Grower Competition

There are many opportunities for development and upskilling of people in the kiwifruit industry and the wider horticultural sector. Since 2007, Horticulture New Zealand has run the annual Young Grower of the Year competition. Young fruit and vegetable growers from around the country compete in regional heats, testing their horticultural skills and knowledge in both practical and theory challenges. The winners of the regional competitions then compete in the national final. Young Grower pushes contestants out of their comfort zone and teaches them valuable new skills along the way. The competition provides exceptional professional development and networking opportunities, providing a massive career boost to all who enter. Criteria for entry:

- Must be currently working full time in the fruit or vegetable industry in an organisation that is closely associated with growing.
- Must be 30 years of age or under as at 31 December.
- Three years practical work experience in the industry.
- Must be a New Zealand citizen or hold a current New Zealand residency permit.



Profile: Opportunities abound for Youth in horticulture

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

Reflecting on her national title win, Erin says the Young Grower of the Year competition gave her the ability to continue to do the job she loves — horticultural promotion. Since winning, she has become the chair of the Bay of Plenty Young Fruit Grower Upskilling Committee which organises the regional Young Grower competition but also runs educational events.

“We do a ‘Cultivate Your Career’ event, which is a horticulture careers expo that takes place each September to try and expand the horizon of students of the wide range of opportunities within our industry.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

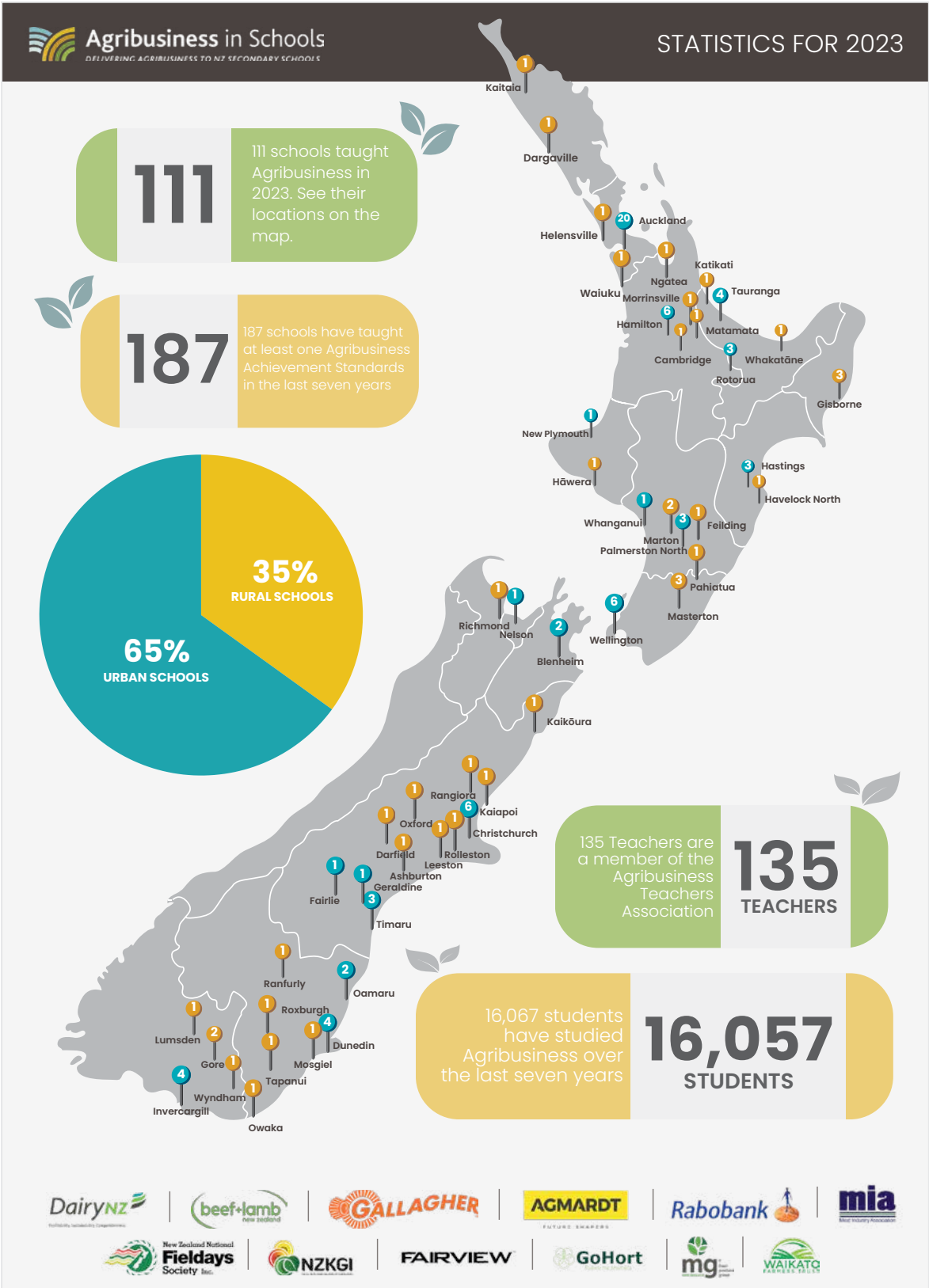
Taken from an article by Helena O’Neill. To read the whole article see the March 2022 edition of the Orchardist magazine at <https://www.hortnz.co.nz/news-events-and-media/magazines>

9.5 AGRIBUSINESS IN SCHOOLS

In 2013, St Paul’s Collegiate School – Hamilton designed and developed a pilot Agribusiness in Schools programme to encourage their own secondary students to consider career pathways in the primary sector. In the first year it attracted 44 students across Years 12 and 13. From this beginning, the school established an Agribusiness Advisory Group made up of key representatives from across the primary sector and attracted business partners to help fund the work they were undertaking. With input from these groups, the Agribusiness national curriculum was developed, with achievement standards at NCEA Level 2 and 3, supported by the Ministry of Education (MOE). This is the only secondary curriculum developed in conjunction with industry rather than written by the MOE.

The Agribusiness in Schools has been made publicly available to all New Zealand secondary schools, and to date, 187 schools have taken up the subject, with the majority in urban rather than rural areas. Many of these schools have also seen an uptake in Agricultural and Horticultural Science as a subject, with the recognition that the primary sector is a dynamic growth area with many opportunities. There have been corresponding increases in entrants to related university courses. Now in its 11th year, the primary sector is starting to see young graduates from the programme entering the workforce.

For more information about the Agribusiness programme see <https://agribusiness.school.nz>





LEVEL 2
83
SCHOOLS

83 schools taught Level 2 Agribusiness achievement standards



LEVEL 3
70
SCHOOLS

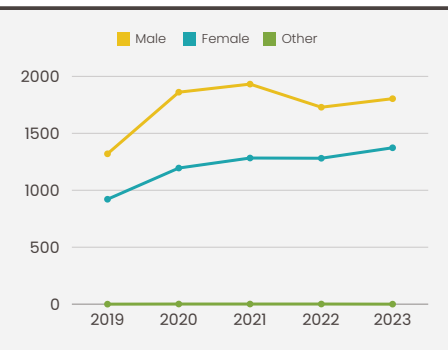
70 schools taught Level 3 Agribusiness achievement standards



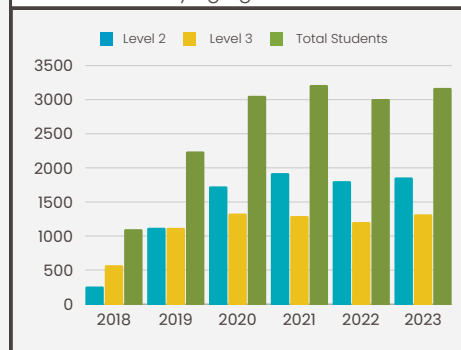
357
SCHOOLS

357 schools are teaching some form of primary sector education (Agribusiness or Agricultural and Horticultural Science unit standards and/or achievement standards).

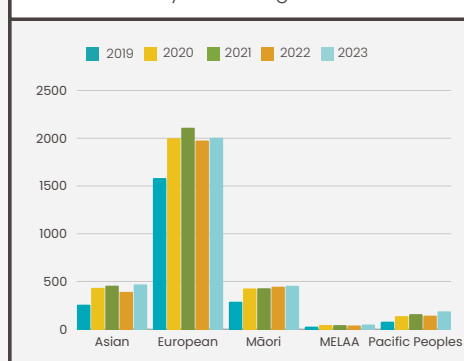
Student Gender in Agribusiness



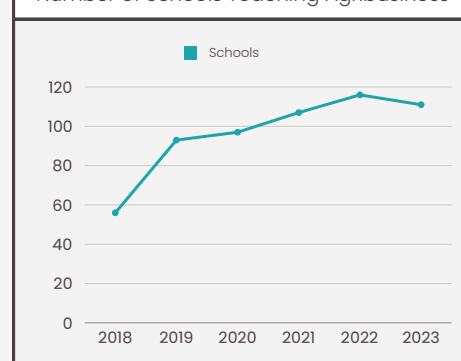
Number of Students in each Year Level studying Agribusiness



Ethnicity Total in Agribusiness



Number of Schools Teaching Agribusiness



Interview with up-and-coming young Primary Industry leader Sarah Wilson

What inspired you to take Agricultural and Horticultural Science at Bethlehem College in 2020?

Growing up in the township of Te Puke a lot of my parent's friends were already connected to the horticultural industry in some way. My neighbour was an engineer working in a kiwifruit packhouse. My parents don't work in the Primary Industries, however, they did a lot of research for me and they were the ones that suggested I should think about the sector as a possible career path for myself. They created a network of people for me to talk to prior so that I could get a better understanding of what the industry was like. This was when I was deciding which subjects to take in Year 13, that would lead me on to further study at university. There were talks of doing a business degree or going into other science subjects, however I felt that the Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences subject offered at Bethlehem College was a good mixture of everything that I'm passionate about. I had also known a few people who were above me at school and went on to do some awesome things. One was working at Southern Cross Horticulture and another one was at Massey University studying Agribusiness. She had been on trips to Asia and had other amazing opportunities. On top of that, I had been to a career expo, where Zespri, NZKGI and quite a few of other companies in the kiwifruit industry attended. It was all those three things together that made me think, Agricultural and Horticultural Science had some really great opportunities. It wasn't until I was about to take NCEA Level 3 in Year 13 that I became really interested.

The ZESPRI conference in Year 13 that you attended, was it really inspiring for you?

Through our Agricultural and Horticultural Science class, we were invited to attend a Zespri conference and Young Grower of the Year Awards. It was my first ever taste into networking events and was such a great opportunity. I left the conference just buzzing! We had awesome speakers that had come from around the world, and they talked about the future of supermarkets and how we must be innovating ahead of supermarkets overseas. With so much new technology developing around the world, New Zealand must be ahead of the game. We must be even more sustainable, so that we're creating value. That's what Zespri does, and it's not because kiwifruit are expensive to produce, but it's because they've managed to create value throughout the supply chain.

At the end of Year 13, how did you make the ultimate decision to study a Bachelor of International Agribusiness at Massey University, from which you graduate this year?

My original plan was to do a straight Business Studies degree, I didn't want to close any doors and to keep my options open, but the more I thought about it, the more I thought it would be wise to keep an industry tied to the business degree and it was the best decision I ever made.

Studying Agricultural and Horticultural Science meant that I had an industry tied to it, I had companies tied to it, I had potential scholarships tied to it, so many opportunities to go overseas.

I went to Mexico working for Nestlé last summer and I'm off to Thailand and Malaysia in a few weeks with the Southeast Asia Pacific Excellence Trade Group. I have had so many opportunities that I would never have got, if I didn't have a niche degree. It differentiates you from a lot of other people.

Why do you think there's not enough young people coming into the industry seeing as it has all these massive benefits?

I think it's just a lack of exposure, they don't know enough about what's out there. When people think about the agricultural and horticultural industries, they immediately think of early morning starts and hard physical labour. There are a lot of jobs like that, but not all of them, we need people in marketing, engineering, and technology. There's so many different roles and people just need to know about them.

What do you love about the Primary Industries?

Lots of people are really keen to have young people that are passionate about the Primary Industries, there's such a shortage of skills in our sector. Ultimately, it's the people in the Primary Industries, they're humble and down to earth, good New Zealanders and that's why there's such a tightness in the industry.

What do you want to do when you leave university?

I would love to add real value to the industry. I want to possibly end up in consulting, and use what I've learned to help people. I have enjoyed marketing, but with the bigger companies a lot is done offshore and harder to get into. I am really interested in the trade industry, the bilateral agreements and going to see different cultures and talking up the New Zealand agricultural and horticultural industry. We have such a competitive advantage in New Zealand, however we must keep up our clean green image to keep our edge in the sector.

Taken from an interview by Catherine Bryant for Sow the Seed. To read the whole interview visit <https://hata.nz/mod/page/view.php?id=4048>