

TOP REGIONAL INSIGHTS



Horticulture is rapidly expanding as crops are diversified and planting increased. This is providing more interlocking seasons which will offer longer periods of joined up employment for local workers. For example, Tai Tokerau is now the second largest avocado growing region in Aotearoa, with 70% of the crop being exported to Australia.

The composition of the labour force is changing as there are fewer international workers. Growers are embracing local workers which is requiring changes in practice and attitude from growers and workers alike. There are a number of trials underway across the region exploring different approaches.

The number of employers in this sector is reducing as they consolidate their holdings. As corporatisation increases, there is an emerging need to upskill supervisory and middle management roles to meet the needs of the expanding workforce.

Growers are concerned about profitability as margins are thin and some crops are no longer as viable. This may lead some to pull trees out in the future, while other's are researching automation within the cool stores and packing sheds. One grower is looking at automated picking.

Growers using hydroponics are being excluded from the organic market. Classification of organic farming in NZ means food has to be grown in the ground. This prevents growers using hydroponics from accessing this lucrative market.

TRENDS AT A GLANCE



45 The number of full-time new jobs created in Other Fruit and Nut Growing (2019-2020) increasing total jobs to 760 jobs.

1.2% The proportion that Fruit and Nut Tree Growing makes up in total employment across the region.



4,000 The number of hectares of avocados planted nationally, with 40% in Northland.

50-200 The size in hectares of new developments in Northland. The average size of current orchards is 4 hectares.



9,100 The number of students enrolled across NZ studying Horticulture. Open Polytechnic 36% and Primary ITO 34%.

420 The number of students enrolled in the region to study Horticulture. (4.6% of all students studying Horticulture).

TOP LABOUR MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

- Multi-employer contracts are being trialled to offer year-round employment.** Te Runanga o Te Rarawa, Te Hiku Iwi Development Trust, and E Tu are working with employers to co-design sustainable employment options.
- Ngati Hine Forestry Trust is partnering with Seeka to train local whanau.** The labour shortage creates opportunities across the sector to do things differently, and Ngati Hine are providing wrap around pastoral care to attain higher retention rates as the 2021 kiwifruit season starts.
- The Tapuānuku project will inform a new way of learning, working and living.** The project is being co-designed with the horticulture industry, vocational and pastoral care providers, and government agencies. It aims to design a new learning framework for the horticulture sector and to get better outcomes for all stakeholders.
- Harvest Northland is providing seasonal workforces throughout the rohe.** It is a recent 'start-up' from Toko Toko Solutions, funded through the Ministry for Social Development. They have retained 86 people in employment with various growers since starting in October 2020. This will be explored as a model to assist other areas across the region.

TOP LABOUR MARKET CHALLENGES

- Employers are concerned with balancing lower productivity levels with increased labour costs.** Local workers pick-rates are lower than traditional RSE workers which is impacting productivity. Some traditional crops have very slim margins and growers are concerned about getting their crop picked and their ability to cover the increased labour costs.
- Employers need support to promote the diversity of roles in the industry to attract local workers.** There is a perception that horticulture is a narrow field and many people are not aware of the diversity within the sector. Employers need support to link with communities, schools, tertiaries and careers advisors to promote the career pathways available within the sector.
- Local workers need both pastoral care and skill development.** To build and maintain a stable workforce, 'work-ready' and soft skills must be developed. The pastoral care may need to be extended to the wider family to reduce conflicting whanau/work demands on the worker.
- Growers need support to change their systems and processes** to manage the increase in local workers. This includes managing increases in flexible working, and developing formal supervisory skills.

THE TAI TOKERAU

Avocado is being expanded in the Far-North by Te Aupōuri and Ngāi Takoto. Te Rarawa are expanding market gardens.

Ngāpuhi are developing berry fruit plantings at the Ngawha Innovation and Enterprise Park - creating more than 200 jobs

Olives are grown across Tai Tokerau

New Kiwifruit varieties are being trialled in the mid-north and Whangarei

Kumara is grown predominantly in the Kaipara

Te Roroa are trialling a variety of crops including Peanuts in the Kaipara

OUR FOCUS FOR THE NEXT 2 MONTHS:

- Setting up the full RSLG - ensuring we get the best possible candidates appointed, and working with local partners and stakeholders.
- Deep dives with the interim group into their priority sectors of interest, which include horticulture, health and aged care.