



**KELLOGG**

RURAL LEADERSHIP  
PROGRAMME



New Zealand labour force in the food and  
fibre sector: Resilience in times of crisis

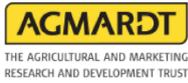
**Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme**

**Course 41 2020**

**Sam Shergold**

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# Executive summary

The Primary Industry has long been stated as being the backbone to New Zealand's successful economy. A reputation worldwide for a high quality of food and fibre, and good agriculture practices on luscious clean and green land. The Primary industry employs over 14% of the total population of New Zealand and has been through a rollercoaster in employment since 2002.

In 2011 the recognised seasonal employment scheme came into effect and it has allowed the food and fibre industry to grow since. Although continued growth requires a capable workforce to do the work. This was identified in 2019 by the Primary Industry Council and the Food and Fibre Working Group which has led to each establishing a vision and strategic 3 - year plan to grow the Knowledge, Employment, Education and attraction of New Zealanders into the primary Industries.

However, the impact of a global pandemic crisis has highlighted that the development of strategic labour force plans like the food and fibre skills action plan and the primary three year plan was all too late to assist with the biggest challenge the industry would face in over 20 years. COVID19 forced the New Zealand border into lockdown and restricted travel into New Zealand. With upcoming seasonal work starting, how was the primary industry get its capable workforce to achieve the level of productivity it was used to.

Immediate challenges affected the kiwifruit and dairy industry, while no one really understood the impact and implications the crisis would have going forward. Now in October 2020, summer is approaching and so is pruning and harvest season for the horticulture industry, the biggest sector of the industry that relies on seasonal overseas workers. At least 10,000 workers are still needed to harvest the crops, turning 2020 into a year of "how much crop can you harvest rather than how much crop can you grow".

Slow but steady support from the government has helped overseas workers and immigrants stay longer in New Zealand, however the closure of the borders is preventing the additional numbers of the workforce coming to New Zealand to help with harvesting. Some New Zealanders will turn to help, but the sector requires a capable workforce to move volumes of fruit and vegetables around the world.

The resilience of the New Zealand workforce has been tested through the duration of the COVID 19 global pandemic crisis but now New Zealand and the primary industry need to plan for the next global pandemic. A contingency plan for the next crisis, greater collaboration with the New Zealand Government and inclusion with the contingency planning and expanding the Recognised Seasonal Employment scheme so New Zealand can have a capable workforce and continue to grow the strengths of the primary industry in New Zealand.

# Acknowledgements

Aongatete Avocados Limited

I would like to thank Tony Bradley and Aongatete Avocados Limited for their continued support and career development through my time of employment. It was originally Tony's recommendation to participate on this course after his successful experience at a younger age. The ongoing support through phases of the course, preparing the final version of this research project and personal development will greatly contribute towards progressing my career.

Patrick Aldwell, Scott Champion and Lisa Rogers

To Patrick, Scott and Lisa, and the new arrivals of Desley Tucker and Chris Parsons who joined the Kellogg management team through the duration of our Kellogg Rural Leadership Program, thank you for hard work in organising, managing, educating and developing us as rural leaders. The wide network of support you have for the course is exceptional and I have enjoyed every moment. The development I will take away from this course will be a big step in furthering myself and my career.

Cohort #41

A massive thank you to the support and friendships of the entire cohort 41. Starting the Kellogg course prior to a global pandemic, creating friendships, supporting one another through the good times and bad times of COVID 19 and the Kellogg program will lead to friends in the primary industries in years to come.

Personal friends and family

I am very lucky and fortunate to have a very supportive Family and network of friends who have always supported me in whatever I aim to achieve. In 2020 more than ever, we have all relied on our friends and family to get through the ups and downs of the year. Always a privilege to have such support.

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## Introduction

The food and fibre sectors of New Zealand has long been recognized as the backbone to New Zealand and its economy. They generate income, provide employment, support communities and form part of our national identity. Based on data captured from the 2017 New Zealand Census, 356,237 people were employed in the food and fibre sector comprised from agriculture, including Dairy, Meat and wool, Forestry, Horticulture, including viticulture, and Seafood, including aquaculture and fishing. The food and fibre sector is responsible for feeding New Zealand and the world, earning over \$36 billion each year.

The food and fibre sector has ridden a long wave of success through the last 20 years, experiencing rapid growth and change. A capable workforce has been available through the New Zealand population, Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) schemes from the Pacific Islands or Asia and backpackers looking to work and travel around our beautiful country. However, the pace of growth and the capability within the sector is now being challenged more than ever.

“The future demands a strong and agile workforce ready to respond to new challenges and to take advantage of opportunities.” Ministry for Primary Industries, (2019).

With the experience of a global pandemic crisis in 2020, it has highlighted how vulnerable the food and fibre sector is and how essential it is to New Zealand’s economy, the isolation of New Zealand and the dependence on a multinational source of labour. Accessibility to a capable workforce has challenged every food and fibre sector, forcing the question of “how resilient is the food and fibre sector? Especially during times of crisis.”

This report details the New Zealand Primary Industry Labour workforce and its reaction to a global pandemic. It is divided into four main sections:

1. Background research – a summary of existing research of labour within the primary industry.
2. Literature review – a summary of the existing research attraction and retention of labour
3. Method – A description of how the primary research to this report carried out.
4. Findings - a description of key insights gained from semi structured interviews and other secondary data.
5. Conclusion: a brief summary of the findings and the next steps.

## Aims and Objectives

The aim of this research project is to understand how the New Zealand food and fibre sector has historically managed a working workforce and what the future plans are for acquiring a capable workforce. From this, the research will then look into how the sector has adapted to the COVID19 global pandemic and what learnings we can take from this is to be better prepared in for the next global pandemic. “It’s not a matter of if, it’s a matter of when” - Ashley Bloomfield 2020.

## Objectives

The purpose of the study is to find out:

- Where was the Primary Industry workforce positioned prior to 2020?
- What have those in the industry experienced through the global pandemic crisis?
- Attraction and attrition of the labour workforce in food and fibre.
- How can we create a strong and agile workforce in the future?

## Importance of the research to the food and fibre sector:

The food and fibre sector has experienced long and successful growth over the last 10 years. This research paper will demonstrate the importance of planning in a modern world for a resilient workforce. Although the Food and Fibre Sector, and the primary industry have developed strategic plans, it has been difficult for the industry to react to the COVID19 Global Pandemic Crisis. I hope all industries can identify the importance of having a resilient workforce as a contingency plan for the next crisis.

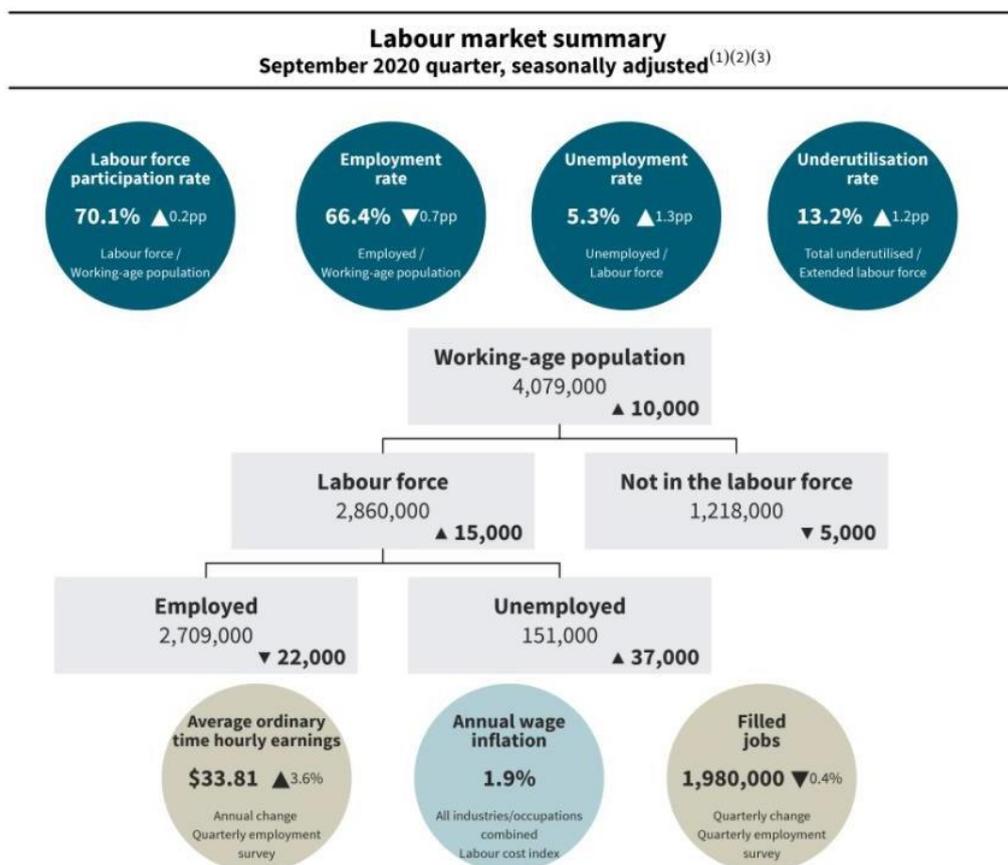


Figure 1.1 Labour Market Summary. Sourced from StatsNZ Sep 2020

## Background information

### The Primary Industries Workforce

For the past 20 years, the primary industry has been recognised as the backbone to New Zealand and has been a key identifier for New Zealand around the world. New Zealand has created a worldwide image as a clean, green country with agriculture practices on luscious fields, free ranging stock and well maintained crops with scenic backgrounds.

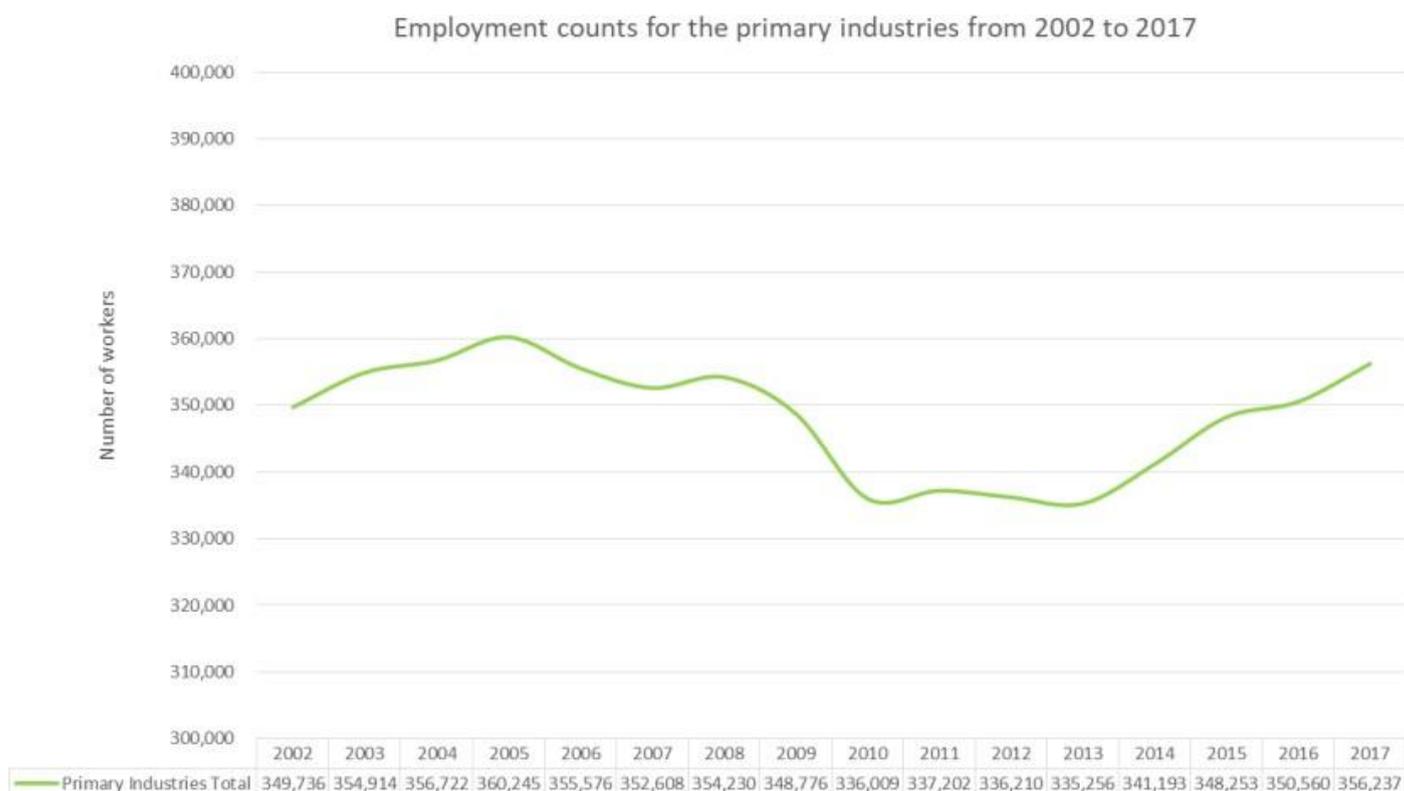


Figure 1.2 Ministry of Primary Industries -Human capability in the primary industries Part 1 2002 to 2017

Figure 1.2 shows us the employment count for the primary industries from 2002 to 2017. A clear observation is the upwards trend in employment from 2013. This is expected to continue to increase beyond 2020 given the availability of capable labour.

Through the 2017 New Zealand Census, Ministry of Primary Industries (MPI) was able to obtain specific information to the industry:

- In 2017 the Primary industry employed 356,237 people, 65% of them were male compared to 35% female.
- In 2013, there were 42,800 new entrants in the primary industry, with 66% of them under the age of 30 and 20% of the new entrants being temporary migrants.
- The average retention rate for the primary industries is 48% after one year, and a decline to 29% after 3 years. The lowest retention rate in the Primary Industry was the Horticulture sector, with a retention rate of 29% after 1 year and 14% after 3 years.
- 14% of males and 25% of females under 30 in the primary industry hold a degree level qualification or higher. However, there is an upward trend in numbers holding a qualification.
- The most ethnically diverse sectors are horticulture and arable, while the dairy sector is the least ethnically diverse.

(Ministry of Primary Industries, March 2019)

The Ministry of Primary industries vision is “New Zealand will be the world’s most sustainable provider of high value food and primary products”. The 4 targeted outcomes the Primary Industries include:

- Prosperity: High value food and fibre sectors build prosperity for more New Zealanders
- Sustainability: Future generations will benefit from improved environmental performance by our primary industries.
- Protection: Our products are safe and New Zealand is protected from biological risk.
- Visible Leadership: We enable the food and primary sectors to thrive.

(Ministry of Primary Industry – *Strategic Plan*. 2019)

Discovering and looking into the Primary Industries workforce has provided more hope to the food and fibre industry than what has been portrayed to me in the last six months of a global pandemic. The fact that the industry has a strong strategic plan with a focus on a capable workforce provides confidence to those who are in it. Although the strategic plan may have been side railed by the pandemic crisis, it is important to continue on the plan to build towards their vision of being a sustainable provider of high value food and primary products. Although I found it interesting the fluctuation in employment within the primary industries from 2002 to 2017, I believe the Primary Industry has strategic plan to create resilience in the future, all prior to the global pandemic. I believe 2020 has highlighted an area of the strategic plan the Primary Industry hadn’t fully planned for, however, from the experience now have the knowledge and information to include it a part of the long term strategic plan.

### Tertiary Education Commission

Agriculture is essential in our everyday lives; from what we eat to what we wear. But half of rural businesses are struggling to find workers with the required skills. (Tim Fowler, Chief Executive of Tertiary Education Commission). The education and future career pathway of young New Zealanders has been studied by the Tertiary Education Commission through the research from the “Drawing the Future” survey, a interactive survey providing robust evidence into career aspirations of those from ages seven to thirteen years old and the factors that influence them. The report showed that children of this age have a very narrow mindset in terms of career choices. The report also concluded that unconscious bias caused by a child’s race, gender and socio-economic status can have an early effect on a child's career choice. The report also concluded that we need to engage our children in a wider range of occupations if New Zealand is to thrive, and future generations are to enjoy satisfying, lifelong careers.

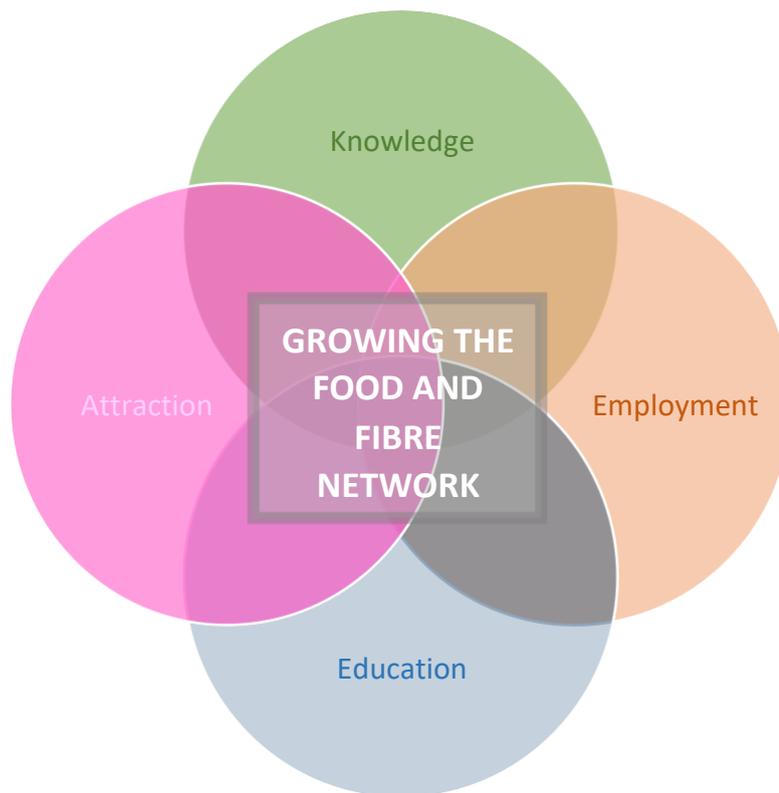
“We’ve taken labour and the workforce for granted for too long. A lot of young people have chosen to move away from the primary sectors”. Minister Damien O’Connor.

Although agriculture had always been the engine room of New Zealand’s economy, it has struggled to attract young kiwis after high school. Although the number of students studying agriculture at high schools in the past few years has doubled, it hasn’t resulted in people entering the workforce. Kilmister, S. (2019, October 29)

Providing clear pathways for New Zealanders is a big issue that seems to be ongoing through this report. Educating and attracting more people around career pathways without any limitations will grow the capacity of a capable workforce for New Zealand. I find it hard to believe that the number of students studying agriculture have doubled and it has not been reflected in the industry.



## Food and Fibre Skills Action Plan



*Figure 1.3 - Food and Fibre Skills Action Plan Skills Leaders Working Group. (2019).*

Figure 1.3 has been obtained from the food and fibre skills action plan for the period 2019 to 2022. The action plan has recognised that the food and fibre sector needs to have a plan to meet the current and future needs of having a skilled workforce.

The main areas of focus for the action plan include:

- Knowledge – Food and fibre sectors understand and can articulate their workforce needs.
- Attraction – Food and fibre education and employment opportunities are widely understood, respected and sought after.
- Education – People have the skills, knowledge and capabilities to be successful in food and fibre careers.
- Employment – People thrive in food and fibre workplaces with excellent conditions.

The food and fibre action plan is a 3 year plan the has a focus on creating a capable working workforce for the entire sector to benefit from. The implications of a global pandemic should not completely dismantle the plan as the focus towards New Zealander’s in leaving school, furthering the careers of those already into the industry and attracting more New Zealander’s into the food and fibre sector.

It is estimated the primary sector will need another 50,000 workers by 2025 and more than 90,000 workers with qualifications as the industry fights to retain young kiwis and attract school leavers.

The food and fibre plan includes a collective of knowledgeable and experienced people within the food and fibre sector who are putting the time into focusing on the future of New Zealand; a great example of collaboration in the Primary Industry. The creation of the plan is in reaction to a trend highlighted to the sector within the last 10 years. Although the plan has an immediate focus on the next 3 years, the ability to develop the plan into a 10-year vision will create further strengths for the

industry. The food and fibre skills action plan accommodates a normal world. Does a contingency plan need to be developed for scenarios of crisis? And how does the contingency adjust dependent on the degree of events contributing to the crisis?



## Methodology

This report includes secondary research that describes the situation of the Primary Industry workforce and the plans in place prior to the commencement of the year 2020. Additional research has been completed using literature reviews and interviews with leaders in the primary industry who have been right through the experience of the 2020 global pandemic.

The plan in approaching the research was to use semi structured qualitative research questions for interviews. However, during discussions I started to veer away from the planned interview questions as I discovered more information about the interviewees experience and perspective. I found this a lot more valuable to the contribution of this report, discovering more information than expected.

A literature review was used to establish knowledge around labour within the food and fibre sector and recognize the previous research that related to the research topic. This included a previous Kellogg research project completed by John Fitzgerald on the topic of “Staff attraction and retention on New Zealand’s meat and fibre farms”.

Secondary research was a significant contribution to the report and was very important to include in the research. Contributors that provide collected information and data to the food and fibre sector include Ministry of Primary Industries, innovation and employment, New Zealand immigration, Agriculture New Zealand, Horticulture New Zealand and the Tertiary Education Commission.

## Findings and Discussion

### Semi-Structured Interviews

Chris Lewis – Federated Farmers Board Member and Farmer in the Waikato.

Chris Lewis is the chairman of the Federated Farmers' board, an arable, drystock and dairy farmer, and a former Kellogg Rural leadership participant. Chris's policy responsibilities include immigration and labour supply, employment and adverse events. Chris provided some great perspective on how he has used labour in the past and how he has managed his source of labour through the global pandemic.

Chris employs 5-8 migrant labour units on his farm, with a herd of 1000 cows and has done so for the past 12 years. His farm staff is now made up of 4 migrant workers from the Philippines and 4 from New Zealand. He has found migrant workers have a different attitude and carry different personality traits that Chris originally found difficult to overcome. The migrant workers value their job security, a safe place to live and food on the table. In contrast, Chris has had difficulty employing New Zealanders because they value the education too highly. All employees work a roster of 6 days on, 2 days off.

As COVID 19 approached, Chris held five staff; Four Philippines and one New Zealander. Additionally, he had one casual, but the preparation and the industry insight he had because of his position with federated farmers, meant he was prepared for the lockdown. A combination of communication and planning during current events around the response to COVID 19 meant that Chris was able to call his migrant workers and urgently get them to fly back to New Zealand before the country closed the borders. Chris managed to get all of his migrant workers back to New Zealand three days before the border was locked down. This set him up well for the winter. However, other farmers were not as lucky with their insights.

As we progressed the discussion in to the future of labour in the primary industries, to assist with the future demand and the potential of the next crisis, Chris brought forward some great things happening. One of them included a "CE's meeting" which involves a number of associations who all deal with migrant workers at different times of the year. Some of them are the Meat Industry, Master Builders, Business New Zealand, Shipping New Zealand, MBIE, Health care, Federated Farmers, NZ Horticulture, Hospitality Association, Road and Transport and the Wine Industry. The group meet three to four times a year, and combined they can take a very strong position to government. The ability to leverage off each other provides some of the best collaboration I have heard about within New Zealand and our workforce.

Moving towards our future of a capable workforce in New Zealand food and fibre industry, Chris also mentioned New Zealand's unemployment rate of just 2%. All the good, hard working kiwis are employed, so makes it very difficult to try and employ kiwis who want to work. Chris has offered the kiwis more money than the migrant workers he has employed, and he still can't seem to attract them to the farm. The real way forward is to ensure 3-year work permits are available for migrants and more accredited employers for RSC schemes. Accredited employers must provide training, job security and schooling for the family and they will stay for an average of 3-4 years, with the good one going on to become managers. Alternatively, programs out of school have been experimented with on Chris's farm. 3 days a week, Chris got troubled kids from school to come and work on the farm and provided them with career opportunities. Labeling the job as a Farm Apprenticeship rather than a Farm Assistant provides hope of a better career pathway for those

seeking work, a small experiment Chris ran through the paper with a neighboring farmer saw the apprenticeship get 5 times more interest.

#### Mike Chapman – Chief Executive Horticulture New Zealand

Mike Chapman has been the Chief Executive of Horticulture New Zealand for the last 5 years and was previously Chief Executive of New Zealand Kiwifruit Growers incorporated. Mike has also spent time in the Royal New Zealand Navy as a Defense Force Solicitor. Mike's political experience, knowledge and passion for the food and fibre sector, especially horticulture, was evident during our discussions. Mike also writes a blog on Horticulture New Zealand's website that also directed some of the discussion.

The horticulture has the most seasonal staff in the food and fibre sector. Relying heavily on backpackers and overseas workers to get a lot of the jobs done. "For horticulture, 50% of these workers are New Zealanders. The remainder are workers from the Pacific Islands and Asia under the Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme, and backpackers to meet the peaks". (Chapman, M. 2020, July 24).

In response to COVID 19 and upcoming harvest for the horticulture in the back end of the year, backpackers and other overseas visitors have been the opportunity to extend their visa for an additional 6 months. This will include some 22,000 backpackers still in the country and approximately 2000 RSE workers that can stay on for the start of the horticulture harvest. Mike suggested "move the community, take the people, alone they don't last" as they travel around the regions in demand, specifically the Hawkes Bay and Central Otago.

Mike also referred to New Zealand's lowest unemployment rate making it harder to find good workers. New Zealanders retention rate and work ethic causes greater attrition than backpackers. The backpackers proving to have a better work ethic and are more reliable. However, the question remains, are the backpacker's better workers because they know they are only in for short term work period and the New Zealander's don't see a long term career pathway?

One of the greatest developments to help build the labour workforce is the Recognised Seasonal Employment scheme that was created mainly between Horticulture New Zealand and the labour government in 2007. The response from this has seen the Horticulture industry grow and have the reliable workforce to match it. "Fruit, vegetable and wine harvests and pruning need large numbers of workers, let's say 40,000 workers all up. In pre-COVID years, about half of these workers have come from offshore", (Chapman, M. 2020, July 24)

Continuing our move and focus to the future, immediate assistance for the horticulture would include a COVID free pacific bubble, but Mike said "We won't get a pacific bubble until we get a trans-Tasman bubble". A recent announcement of the extension of visa from October to June 2021 provides Horticulture NZ and Mike Chapman some relief for workers that are still in New Zealand, but Mike is still persistent we need more. Mike is a bit concerned for the employment of New Zealand when the wages subsidy runs out more New Zealander's are without a job; he is hoping a lot of them can turn to the horticulture industry for an income. Mike still expects that the industry will be 10,000 workers short.

#### Ben Gallogly – Operations Manager at Aongatete Avocados Limited

Ben has been the operations manager at Aongatete Avocados Limited for the last 5 years. He has permanent core team to get through work throughout the entire year. During the season of harvest, September to January, Ben has used international workers to boost the numbers in the team. Finding capable workers and training them up with the right skills is the most difficult challenges of

his job. 2020 has created some concern about what employees he would be able to get for the main harvest season. However, Ben has found international workers that are still in the country and are willing to do the work. "One international worker that was with us has come back to work for us so he doesn't need training and he already has the experience of a good picker." Worried about finding workers, Ben managed to get some workers who had previously worked for him while they are on their study breaks.

When finding new workers, part of learning is how to pick and operate a hydralada. This takes about four weeks to get use to and pick to a reasonable speed. The faster the employees gets trained and up to the skill level the more fruit can be harvested per person. However, the only place to learn is on orchard doing the job. Some growers can get grumpy because they have beginner pickers on their orchards. Sometimes they get a learning fee, but still don't want to pay that. It makes it very hard to try and bring new blood into the industry. Growers need to understand that to be able to get more fruit harvested, we need to we need to train new employees.

The additional overseas labour Ben is using for the 2020-2021 season are enjoying the job and experience in New Zealand. There countries are still in lockdown restrictions, so they are happy to be able to be working in New Zealand.

### Summary of interviews and comparison

Chris and Ben both brought a good point of view into this research project as they could relate to the experiences, they have been through prior to a pandemic crisis and during a pandemic crisis. During the discussions it was identified that there has always been some degree of challenge to find capable labour for the job, no matter what sector, the major difficulty being the availability of that labour. This point was supported by Mike as the Chief Executive of Horticulture amplifying the fact that the availability of capable labour has been reduced since the closing of our borders. Although a Global Pandemic Crisis is very hard to plan for, through the personal communications it has highlighted the need for a more resilient workforce structure within New Zealand. While some people have been fortunate in the turnout of the situation due to luck, others have suffered a more with the lack of workers and the availability to get capable and willing workers. From the discussion I had, all participants would be willing to contribute to a wider working group to ensure that next time New Zealand and the world face a similar situation the was more rigidity and structure to support the resilience of a capable workforce.

All three interviews held a similar view that there are New Zealanders who could do the work, however, they do not bring the work ethic or attitude like the international seasonal workers. Ben and Chris brought a perspective with direct contact with the labour they are employing and share had relatable issues around getting international labour versus New Zealand labour. Mike's perspective came from a representative body, Horticulture. I found that Chris and Ben held similar perspectives about there labour force, however the key difference was that Chris was prepared to get young in and train them up and give them a career pathway. Ben had a lot more problems with being able to show a career pathway due to the seasonality of his work. Training someone up for them to leave in two months was a big job and almost a waste of time. The peak of bens seasonality work would go for 6 months.

## Literature review

This section provides a brief overview of a previous Kellogg project,

[John Fitzgerald \(2019\) – Staff attraction and retention on New Zealand’s meat and fibre farms](#) Fitzgerald’s research project was focused on understanding what employees think is important on New Zealand’s meat and fibre farms. An emphasis was placed on new entrants into the industry including school leavers and cadetships and experienced sheep and beef farmers. Although he did not get an overwhelming response and conclusive finding on why some new entrants weren’t attracted to the industry, the sheep and beef survey information provided some important information into retention of staff on meat and fibre farms.

Fitzgerald’s main findings were suggesting that more promotion is required to attract new entrants from school into the food and fibre sector. The small number of new entrants into the industry had a career pathway and had set goals. Retention of staff is a major concern with more than 60% of respondents to Fitzgerald’s survey identifying they have considered leaving the industry due to work life balance the job provides. It is identified that career progression, salary and benefits are important contributing factors to retention of staff the more the careers progress, an overworked and under-rewarded feeling amongst farm staff.

Recommendations derived from Fitzgerald’s research suggest the user friendly and easily accessible information needs to be promoted by industry bodies to attract new staff and better career pathways need to be better identified and discussed by employers and employees.

## 2020 Pandemic Reaction

On the 25 March 2020, the New Zealand Prime Minister announced through an Epidemic Management Notice that all visas relating to immigration expiring before 9 July would be automatically extended to the 24<sup>th</sup> of September. Those visas that expired after the 9<sup>th</sup> of July were not extended by the Epidemic Management Notice. (Ministry of Health. 2020, June 23). An Epidemic Management Notice states how provisions in a piece of legislation are to be invoked to manage the practical effects of the outbreak. New Zealand Immigration (n.d.). Additional to the epidemic management notice on the 25 March, on the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2020, the Government made 3 key changes to temporary work visas. The changes were due to the impact that COVID-19 continues to have on businesses and temporary work visas in New Zealand. The changes included:

- Six month extensions for employer-assisted temporary visas.
- Delay to the 12-month stand-down period for lower-paid workers.
- Some Essential skills work visas reduced to six months

On 4th September 2020 the New Zealand Government then made further changes to the visitor visa system by automatically extending current off shore visitor visas that were due to expire between 4th September and the end of October 2020 by five months.

New Zealand government has also made border exceptions for ‘other critical workers’ where employers can request to bring critical workers into New Zealand while the border is closed. Exceptions to the critical worker’s visa include: unique experience and technical or specialist skills, a time critical role or work that bring in significant wider benefit to the nation or regional economy. This does not help assist the food and fibre sector, especially horticulture who will need thousands of “critical workers” for harvest. The voice of many food and fibre sector providers are expressing their concerns in whatever way possible to get the attention they need.

The apple industry needs 10,000 people to start next month (October 2020) for pruning then picking. “We’re nervous about the upcoming season, we normally have 350 harvest employees and we’re wondering where they’re coming from, we’re terrified”. Paul Paynter from Yummy Fruit. Growers like Paynter have been relying on seasonal workers from the Pacific Islands every year since 2007.

May Brothers Contracting employs around 12 full time staff and up to 30 at peak season for the harvest of small seeds and grass seed industry. Many of the seasonal workers coming from overseas.

Growing concerns around labour for food and fibre was not just within New Zealand. Australia has a similar concern with the upcoming harvest season, especially in Mangos. “After all of this time spent looking after the crop, growing it, irrigating it, spraying it, and then have to worry about whether anyone will be around to pick it, it keeps me up at night.” Mentioned Mitchael Curtis. “We’ve got a crop, we’ve got some fantastic mangoes here... but this year might not be how much I can grow, but how much I can get into a box.” Cook, A. (2020, September 12). The Australia Government announced on 4 April 2020 temporary changes to visa arrangements that would allow Pacific workers under the Seasonal Worker Programme and the Pacific Labour scheme to continue working in the Agricultural sector until the coronavirus crisis has passed. It allows worker to continue working to support themselves for an additional 12 months, a quick response relative to the situation of events.

In Darwin Australia, 160 seasonal workers from Vanuatu landed at the start of September 2020 as part of a trial program to fill the labour shortage for the Northern Territory’s mango harvest, as the season looks to peak during October. Although Australia is in strict lockdown with strict border controls, an exemption has been made for the trial program. The trial program included using a chartered plane and the Northern Territory mango industry covering the cost of a 14-day quarantine fee. Following a successful trial, Australian farmers are hoping the program can be quickly expanded to cater other agricultural industries in need of labour. (Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020, October 20).

The New Zealand Government made adjustments to visas in order to assist with the temporary immigrants in New Zealand. Early in the piece the adjustments to visas were to assist the facilitation of overseas visitors in returning home. Consequently, this helped the kiwifruit industry get through the early stages of COVID 19 when the harvest was starting. As COVID 19 progressed so did the help from New Zealand Government to accommodate the overseas visitors in New Zealand. Difficulty started to build as Farmers faced challenges in trying to get overseas workers to help through the bust times of year, June to October. However, the main concern was still being developing for the primary industry sector who was most dependent on an overseas workforce, Horticulture. The small visas extensions were not of support as was preventing the planning of harvest and with the continued closure of country borders, eliminating the availability of a capable workforce. Experiments from Australia’s mango industry should be learning experiences for New Zealand. There is still a big fear of lack of a capable workforce for the upcoming Horticulture industry moving forward from October 2020 through to March 2021.

## Conclusion

The food and fibre industry has again been highlighted as the backbone to the New Zealand Economy throughout the global pandemic crisis of COVID19. Many New Zealanders have once again been reminded that the industry is essential to New Zealand. Through the research done for this project, it is clear to identify that industry bodies have a clear vision and strategic plan to assist in the perpetual issue of finding a capable workforce to keep New Zealand's Primary Industries economy going.

The research identifies the planning Primary Industries have developed with reference to the vision and strategic plan for the next three years. Equally, the food and fibre sector have collectively created a strategic action skills plan to enable a more capable workforce. Both plans have included education in collaboration with the Tertiary Education Commission. This provides a big focus and drive towards getting more New Zealanders into the food and fibre sector.

Building resilience for a capable workforce is an area of focus New Zealand and the food and fibre sector can develop further for the next Global Pandemic Crisis. Some positive and negative learning experiences from COVID19 should be able to be documented to create a contingency plan for when the next Global Pandemic Crisis hits. Although the strategic planning builds some resilience into the capable workforce of New Zealand, it does not take into effect the thousands of overseas visitors and immigrants that contribute to the success.



## Recommendations and next steps

**Collaboration of key stakeholders-** Collaboration between industries, highlighted in the communication with Chris Lewis, was a collective Chief Executives meeting where the major industries of New Zealand get together to discuss, plan and prepare the economy for moving forward. The continued development of this group will help build the resilience of the overseas visitor's workforce. Ensuring the workers are entitled to visas and the work will increase the interest and demand of overseas visitors.

**Extending the Recognised Seasonal Employment scheme** –extending the cap of RSC employees and encouraging the development of accredited RSC employers can lead to better management, assistance and resilience of a capable workforce through New Zealand. In a Global Pandemic Crisis these accredited employees have the established networks and contacts for future labour outside of New Zealand if it is ever needed again.

**Contingency plans for Global Pandemic Crisis** – A development from this research report highlights the need for a contingency plan for the next Global Pandemic Crisis. Although it may have been difficult to predict such event to occur in the past, from the experience we have been through in 2020, a contingency plan for all industries and businesses should be developed, especially for the food and fibre sector of the Economy. A developed contingency, with the collaborative inclusion of the Government in the plan, will assist in the implementation of the contingency plan. This made include bringing labour into the country, encouraging more New Zealanders to get involved into the industry for a small period of time or even the use of the New Zealand population in the confinement

**Avocation within the schooling system-** Making the Primary Industry attractive to school leavers seems to be a big challenge. Building on the strategic plans developed by the Primary Industry and Food and Fibre working group will be important to include New Zealanders in the future. A defined career pathway needs to be available to the New Zealand school leaver who values their education.

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