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Using ‘Meat for Kids’ as a vehicle to enhancing children’s knowledge about agriculture

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Currently one fifth of New Zealand households don't have enough food for active and growing children to support physical and mental development. Disadvantages such as these aren't isolated to other parts of the world, this is happening on our door step.

It's common knowledge that children need to have their nutritional needs met to have greater success in the classroom. Many industries have entered into the fray to address this issue yet Kids Can still endures a huge waiting list of schools, in the desperate 1 to 4 decile range, searching for external funding for solutions to this problem.

First Light Foods NZ are in the early stages of trialling a 'Meat for Kids' project starting in Hawkes Bay, to provide a low cost-industry good, balanced and nutritious meat-based meal twice a week to children in this situation. Although initially small the intent of the programme is to cover the length of the country to meet the 22% of children that go hungry at least once a week, at the coal face with a warm meat-based meal, that is externally approved by health organisations.

The 'Meat for Kids' programme has an excellent opportunity to open the door and educate the industries next consumer and also potential workforce. The literature has convincingly shown that children aged 6-9 are most receptive to influence than at any other time of our life. Therefore, in using the 'Meat for Kids' initiative as a vehicle to go direct to the children an obvious platform presents itself for the food industry to make a meaningful impression on their life.

As an industry we spend a lot of resourcing promoting the industry throughout secondary schools, which the research has shown is not the most effective age group we should be targeting. Looking through the current organisations that are driving resources from our industry into schools, we can see a trend of barriers, primarily in teachers, with their ever-growing workload, it poses the question – how can we avoid this barrier and go direct to the children?

Through a research survey conducted with teachers throughout NZ seven key areas were identified to successfully capture and maintain a child's attention. From these points of engagement as outlined in the findings of the report, the recommendation of a set of competition cards was born.

The eutopia of these findings will be a greater NZ where all children have access to a nutritious diet, that allow everyone an equal opportunity to learn and develop without circumstantial disadvantages. And also, where the whole of society has an understanding of where their food comes from and that they are active positive contributors to that value system to promote its prosperity.

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1.0 Introduction

This report is a two-part investigation into firstly, the current situation in our NZ schools from kids turning up to schools without lunch and how the meat industry can contribute to solving this problem. And secondly, using that contribution from the industry as a vehicle to enhancing children's knowledge about agriculture.

We first discuss the initiative currently being trialled in Hawkes Bay by Firstlight Foods NZ called 'Meat for Kids' as a meat industry solution to supporting the solving the problem of child hunger in schools. We then delve into the demand of an initiative such as this with the statistics as they are today of the quantity of children in NZ that don't have access to quality, nutritious food to support a growing mind and body.

Part two of the report looks at utilising a model such as 'Meat for Kids' as a vehicle to go direct to children to enhance their knowledge about our industry and what methods are most successful and attractive to particular age groups. We look into the facts around the age we are most influenced, to showcase where as an industry we should be focusing our time and resourcing as well as a teacher survey completed to get an idea on how to best engage with children.

With a lot of different organisations, not only from our sector, but all sectors, trying to get into schools to promote their industry as a potential career option, we also thought it important to investigate the current barriers those organisations face, with this outcome supporting the need to go direct to the children.

The aim of the report is to create a strong recommendation of a tangible product that the industry, from any level, could adopt and adapt to get children excited about learning and educating themselves about our agriculture sector with limited barriers in the way.

2.0 Part One: 'Meat for Kids' Initiative

'Meat for kids' is an initiative founded by First Light Foods in Hawke's Bay to provide two lunches a week to low decile Early Childhood Centres and primary schools, initially across Hawke's Bay, with the ambition to grow nationwide.

Firstlight Foods CEO Gerard Hickey says the project goal is "to develop and supply a low cost, nutritious, pre-cooked red meat-based product for disadvantaged children in low socio-economic schools and early childhood centres in New Zealand, commencing with a trial in Hawkes Bay in 2019." The overall vision of the programme is to "promote education to all New Zealand school children through access to a nutritious meat-based meal for all" (Hickey, 2019). First Light Foods has teamed up alongside KidsCan for distribution into schools and has a focus on preparing a meal that ticks all of the nutrition needs for a young growing mind and body.

Through the Meat for Kids Project Plan the below points are the 'why' for First Light Foods starting this initiative:

- To establish a social responsibility platform for the meat sector and farmer suppliers, recognising that this is a growing expectation from both consumers and public.
- To establish First Light as the project owner in the minds of consumers and tribe of followers
- To promote education of healthy, well fed children as the means to closing the rich/poor gap in NZ society
- To promote red meat consumption and the red meat sector as a positive contributor to NZ society
- To train a number of new employees in meat processing and preparation (Hickey, 2019)

The demand for initiatives and programmes such as this one is without a doubt very high and more detail is shown of this demand in the next section, however this begs the question of how can our primary sector utilise a programme such as Meat for Kids as a vehicle to enhance children's education about agriculture?
How can we create a community linkage between the farmers that supply the programme through the donation of product, and the children that benefit from the lunches on the other end?

Meat for Kids is an opportunity for us to create a story, product or component to the programme that enhances the knowledge of these children as to where their food comes from, their connection and education around agriculture, and as a consequence influence their perceptions and opinions of agriculture from a younger age.

2.1 The Demand for 'Meat for Kids'

The demand for initiatives such as this is still incredibly high within NZ with 254,000 children living in hardship, many of whom go to school without breakfast or lunch several days a week. KidsCan CEO Julie Chapman stated "Demand for hot meals is increasing, teachers say for some children it's their only hot meal of the day" (KidsCan , 2019).

The sad reality for some children in New Zealand is that they are missing school rather than turning up without lunch. For Decile 1-4 schools, around 22 percent of the children at those schools would go hungry at some point during their week, which has doubled since 2011 (Black, 2017).

KidsCan are doing a lot alongside other organisations and the government to get meals and basic essentials into schools across the country, however they have identified that there is so much more that needs to be done with them still having a long waiting list of schools needing support.

A Ministry of Health survey found that 20.1% of New Zealand households with school aged children did not have enough food for active and healthy living (Childrens Commissioner, 2012).
The findings were that children in low income households are more likely to have higher cholesterol intake and eat fewer healthy foods than their peers in higher income families which can lead to health problems and a higher risk of illness later in their lives. Recommendation number 60 from this commissioned report was that the government needed to design and implement a collaborative food-in-schools programme, commencing with decile 1-4 primary and intermediate schools (Childrens Commissioner, 2012).

The decile rating is a funding system established in New Zealand which measures the extent to which the school's students live in low socio-economic or poorer communities. Decile 1 schools are the 10% of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socioeconomic communities. Decile 10 schools are the 10% of schools with the lowest proportion of students from these communities (Ministry of Education, 2018)
Schools in decile one to three on average have access and receive more external support for their students, some from the government, but a lot from other organisations. The system was set up by the government to determine some of the funding and extra resources that the schools receive, therefore the lower the decile, the more funding it receives.

Meat for Kids is looking to be launched in Hawke's Bay for the trial, which statistically across the whole of New Zealand has the highest percentage of schools within the decile one to three range based on total quantity of schools. In Hawke's Bay/Tairawhiti according to Ministry of Education there are a total of 91 out of 176 schools within the decile one to three range which is a percentage of 51%. Compared to the likes of Auckland which has 195 schools in the decile one to three range out of 565 schools, which is a percentage of 34% (Ministry for Education, 2019).

Table 1: Number of schools by education region and decile rating

Education Region	Decile									
	Decile 1	Decile 2	Decile 3	Decile 4	Decile 5	Decile 6	Decile 7	Decile 8	Decile 9	Decile 10
Tai Tokerau	40	35	17	20	13	6	7	6	3	
Auckland	91	50	54	42	39	29	47	45	62	77
Waikato	26	36	33	34	43	20	30	22	13	21
Bay of Plenty, Waiariki	37	29	24	19	16	19	15	10	12	4
Taranaki, Whanganui, Manawatu	14	28	28	26	38	26	22	28	17	7
Hawke's Bay, Tairāwhiti	47	25	19	18	16	13	12	12	9	4
Wellington	24	25	28	21	26	26	21	29	30	58
Nelson, Marlborough, West Coast	1	5	5	16	26	25	18	13	12	6
Canterbury and Chatham Islands	8	7	19	24	14	33	32	45	45	54
Otago, Southland	3	7	15	13	16	36	31	38	38	34
Total	291	247	242	233	247	233	235	248	242	265

Source: Ministry of Education

Table 2: Number of schools by education region and school type

Education Region	School Type									Total
	Primary (Year 1-8)	Contributing (Year 1-6)	Intermediate (Year 7-8)	Composite (Year 7-10)	Composite (Year 1-15)	Secondary (Year 7-15)	Secondary (Year 9-15)	Teen Parent Unit	Special school	
Tai Tokerau	63	43	5		20	10	7	2	1	**151**
Auckland	160	218	42	2	34	27	64	4	14	**565**
Waikato	149	68	8	3	12	7	28	2	3	**280**
Bay of Plenty, Waiariki	73	57	9		21	7	15	4	2	**188**
Taranaki, Whanganui, Manawatu	121	63	10		9	4	26	2	1	**236**
Hawke's Bay, Tairāwhiti	72	50	8		16	8	17	3	2	**176**
Wellington	128	81	15		16	9	33	4	3	**289**
Nelson, Marlborough, West Coast	58	37	6		9	4	11	1	2	**128**
Canterbury and Chatham Islands	139	67	9		22	15	23	2	7	**284**
Otago, Southland	100	82	5		8	20	14	1	2	**232**

Source: Ministry of Education

The statistics clearly show that there is an on-going need for food and resource support within schools across the country to ensure our children are getting the best start in life, and the proper nutrition needed to get the most out of their education. But as a primary sector, how can we use the initiatives such as the Firstlight Foods 'Meat for Kids' to enhance the children's education and knowledge about agriculture and get them interested in our sector?

3.0 Part Two: Enhancing children's knowledge about agriculture

As an industry we are constantly talking about needing to promote our sector in schools so that not only are we enhancing their knowledge about agriculture but we are promoting potential career options they might want to take.
Currently there are three areas of Part Two that will be looked at in this report

1. At what age are we most influenced?

This shows us where we should be targeting our time and resources.

2. How do we engage that age group? What gets their buy in?

This shows us how we can get their attention and retain their interest about the industry

3. How do we break down the barriers standing in our way?

To support the research in this area a qualitative survey was done of teachers across New Zealand to help us answer some of these questions and form the recommendations at the conclusion of the report.

3.1 At what age are we most influenced?

We currently spend a lot of time in the agriculture industry targeting secondary schools through programmes like Get Ahead and agriculture-based education resources, as we are lead to believe that these are the years that teenagers are making decisions for their future career pathways. But what if we are too late by that age?
A lot of the research goes to indicate that the ages of middle-late childhood, six to eleven years old, are when we start to form our identities, become more self-aware, and shift to independence, forming our opinions and perceptions.
By adolescence and our teenage years, we may start to vocalise our opinions a lot more but the research indicates they are a lot harder to influence.
A study was conducted on age-related changes of social influence from late childhood through adulthood in a large group of participants aged between 8 and 59 years. The study results were that the social-influence effect was highest in late childhood and decreased with age. The results also indicated that, children were more influenced by the opinions of adults, whereas young adolescents, aged 12–14 years, changed to be more influenced by teenagers and their peers than towards the ratings of adults (Knoll, Leung, Foulkes, & Blakemore, 2017)

It's important to understand what is happening in children's minds over their years of development and the following is an extract from a piece of research that was done on ages and stages of development and the characteristics shown at each of those years.

Six to Eight years old
- Start to think independently and plan ahead
- Socially more conscious and connected to their emotions
- A lot more agreeable to adult suggestions than when we are slightly younger, and this also changes as we get older
- The concept of independent self is developing and getting stronger over those years

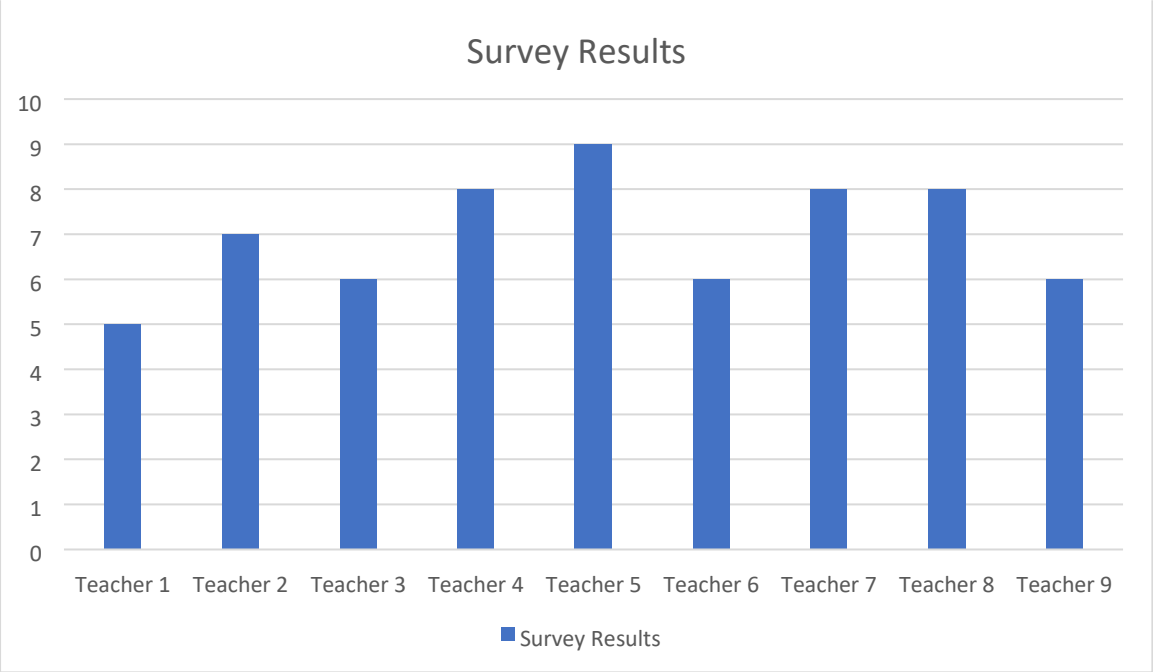
Nine to eleven years old
- Entering late childhood, early adolescence, we want more independence and want our voices to be heard
- Start forming our values and happy to stand up for what we believe in as we get older and this will continue to grow into adolescence

(California Department of Education, 2000)
Although how we learn and take on messaging varies between individuals, it's when we are forming our independence and becoming more socially aware that our influence is heightened by others, and in particular adults.

Jacquelynne S. Eccels who is a professor of psychology, education and women's studies wrote a journal article on 'The development of Children Ages 6 to 14 and again backs up the

research that over these years children are “becoming more competent, independent, selfaware and involved in the world beyond their families.” (Eccles, 1999)
A lot of our cognitive development is done in our very early years and a huge part of our brain is developed by the age of five years old but it’s in the middle childhood years that children take in information that builds their knowledge base and understanding of a situation with a more independent mindset. This basic mental capacity is in place at a young age as our cognitive development is forming, but it is during the middle childhood years that these abilities become more conscious and reasoned (Eccles, 1999).

Across the teacher’s surveys that were conducted for this report, the following results were formed:



It’s also important to realise the amount of influence children have in their home and family. A study that was conducted kids influence the following things:

- Breakfast choices (97% of the time) and lunch choices (95% of the time).
- Where to go for casual family meals (98% of the time) (with 34% of kids always having a say on the choice of casual restaurant).
- Clothing purchases (95% of the time).

- Software purchases (76% of the time) and computer purchases (60% of the time).
- Family entertainment choices (98% of the time) and family trips and excursions (94% of the time)

(Poulton, 2018)

We are often led to believe it is easy for kids to be influenced by adults and teenagers, but the amount of influence children have over the older demographics is substantial and not something that should be glazed over. If we want to get kids learning about the industry, we don't need to get parents and teachers on board, let's get the kids on board and let them do the influencing.

Through these findings, my recommendation is that we should be spending more time and money as a sector putting resources and information into primary schools where the age of influence is more applicable, as appose to secondary schools when those future career decisions are being made.

With initiatives such as 'Meat for Kids', which is a targeted programme for Early Childhood Centres and Primary Schools, it fits well with this 'age of influence' target, but how do we use it as a vehicle to get other resources in front of the children to enhance their knowledge about agriculture and where their food comes from?

3.2 Barriers to current programmes in schools

As mentioned earlier, we have a lot of programmes across the industry that are putting resources, time and money into schools to promote career options and grow student's knowledge about the industry. They all vary in their success due to the requirement of one out of two resources for most of the programmes being: parents and/or teachers. Teachers are overcome and overloaded with extra-curricular activities, over populated classrooms, increase in learning disabilities and the lack of resourcing or pay to be able to support that. Unless a teacher is passionate about the industry the chances of getting them to take on extra work by organising speakers, field trips, parental permission slips and the time to educate themselves sufficiently about the industry we are wanting them to teach, is very slim – nor should they be required to do this.

Table 3: Current organisations supplying food education into New Zealand schools (but not limited to):

Current organisations supplying food education into New Zealand Schools (but not limited to):
Life Education Trust - with the mascot Harold the giraffe, Life Education trust makes educational programmes to meet the needs of the particular school based on their values and culture. Food and Nutrition is one of these learning outcomes. Resources are based on the guidelines from Ministry of Health and uses collaboration with other partners like Garden to Table
Enviro Schools - piloted in 1993. Enviro Schools now have 1160 schools, kura and early childhood centres involved focusing on sustainability in their communities
School Kit - Organisations outsource their education or marketing to School Kit. School Kit create free resources for schools that are curriculum based to aid teachers
Agrication - NZ Young Farmers with support from CORE Education has funding from the Red Meat Profit Partnership to help teachers and students learn more about NZ land based industries. Part of this is connecting farmers and schools for school visits
Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) - has teacher resources available with topics around biosecurity importance, food and primary industry careers
Garden to Table (as above)
5+ a day - A charitable trust formed in 2007 to promote awareness of health eating of 5+ a day. Curriculum based resources are available online
Dairy NZ - Connect farmers and schools to give students the opportunity to visit a dairy farm
SAFE - Animal rights organization providing resources and text books into primary and secondary schools

Source: (Price, 2018)

The current teacher to student's ratio average in New Zealand for years 4-8 which is ages 8 through to 12 is 1:29 (Education, 2019). Through all of the teacher strikes in 2019 we saw 50,000 teachers take part in protesting class sizes, under-resourced staff and a general lack of support for students with special needs and learning difficulties (Newshub, 2019). These strikes are a perfect example of how teachers are overloaded with the basic demands of their job, let alone further demand from industries wanting their resources put in front of the children and for the teachers to be clued up enough in those areas to be able to talk through the resources with their students.

Teacher Josephine Franks wrote a piece published by Stuff on a day in the life of a teacher which compiled of the following:

- 8:00am – Arrive at school, before school meetings
- Permission Slips
- Marking Speeches, writing, maths, homework
- Proof reading 4 pages per student with personalised feedback
- Supervising student work during morning tea
- Tracking student progress reports on their system
- Researching China for their international students
- School production rehearsal during lunch
- Updating wall displays at the end of the school day

- Cleaning desks
- Checking emails
- School production marketing
- Updating database with latest marks
- Planning for following day or next week
- 4:51pm – Home time

(Franks, 2019)

Although 8:00am to 5:00pm may sound like normal working hours to most, during these days it is non-stop on your feet, responding to your name 100 times from all directions, dealing with a lot of different personalities and learning abilities and every day is different to the last: exhausting.
Teachers do not have time to learn about the agriculture industry if they have no involvement in it already to be able to teach resources and curriculum in that area.

A study done by Rabobank of urban teens showed an alarming statistic of 81% saying they knew little or nothing about farming and food production. Eight per cent had never been on a farm, while a further 35 per cent have visited a farm three or less times in their life. And further than that, 72% don't know anything or little about how their food gets from farm to plate (Rabobank, 2016).
If we can get into primary schools and start building this knowledge base and understanding from a younger age then hopefully statistics such as these will start to decrease and will naturally have an impact on the urban rural divide.
As an industry we need to come up with a product, service or tangible item that can engage our target market age group, get them excited about the industry and in conjunction with that, enhance their knowledge and understanding about agriculture.
We need to bypass the requirements of teachers and parents to a degree to get the buy in from the children and use their engagement to drive the actions of teachers and their parents.

3.3 How do we engage children?

When trying to come up with a strategy to go direct to children, it's important to create a product or resource that is going to get their buy in and engage them from the start.
Utilising the teacher surveys there were some strong common themes that emerged as to how to best get children engaged in a product or activity.
Below are the Top Seven responses that came up across almost all of the teacher survey responses in some form or wording:

1. Make it relevant to the child or their experiences
2. Make a game/competition out of it
3. Give them an active role/control of it
4. Change it up, give it variety
5. Allow them to create stories or role play
6. Use colour
7. Consistency and reputation

These common themes are supported through external research that was conducted, which also indicated that keeping it simple and clear are really important for engagement otherwise if children don't understand they will move on to the next thing (McKeown, 2016).

4.0 Conclusions

It is evident through the research and investigation into the current New Zealand situation that the demand for an initiative such as 'Meat for Kids' is substantial. The facts, such as 20.1% of NZ households with school aged children, do not have enough food for an active and healthy lifestyle, therefore many children are turning up to school without lunch, particularly at low decile schools.
The 'Meat for Kids' initiative of supplying a low cost, nutritious, red meat-based product as part of a balanced diet for disadvantaged children is Sa great solution to the meat industries contribution towards these terrible statistics and was one very well received from the surveyed teachers.

Through the research around children's age of influence and an investigation into the current organisations that promote agriculture in schools, it showed that our resourcing is perhaps not aligned to successfully educate youth. Whereas, the industry should be targeting efforts for enhancing and influencing the youth coming through schools. Currently industry-wide a huge focus has been placed on the early secondary school age group, whereas the research suggests we should be focusing on 6-9-year olds where we can influence their thought processes, and make an impact prior to impressions already being made from exterior influences such as parents, TV and social media.

Breaking down the current barriers that the industry faces in getting into schools with an ever-growing demand on teachers' time and their already fully packed schedules, the conclusion was made that we need to create a concept/product that allow us to go direct to the children. With this as a focus point, research was completed on how to engage children of that particular age group to successfully adopt a go direct method of communication for influence. This research outlined the seven engagement areas in which majority needs to be utilised to have the best chance at getting the children's attention and then more importantly, holding onto that attention for a long period of time.

Recommendations

Using all of the research throughout this report, the surveys completed by teachers and my personal experience with children in education and agriculture, my recommendation is to create a product that alongside 'Meat For Kids' could be used as a tool to enhance children's knowledge about agriculture.
Here is a list of bullet point recommendations to focus this product on;

- Avoid the barriers of teachers in schools and create a product that allows us to go direct to the children
- Focus on the ages of most influence which was 6-9 years old when targeting youth for industry related exposure
- Create a concept that focuses on four of the seven engagement areas; make it a competition, give them an active role, use colour and allow them to create stories/role play.
- Create a concept that could be adopted and adapted industry wide to collectively send a cohesive message in promoting the agriculture sector and enhance children's knowledge about agriculture in a fun and engaging way

- If resources allow, create a prize/end goal for the children to work towards in collecting the cards such as a field trip on farm to further that exposure and engagement of the industry

The Recommendation Concept

Creating a concept using the research provided as outlined in my conclusions and recommendations, I focused on four of the seven engagement areas; make it a competition, give them an active role, use colour and allow them to create stories/role play.

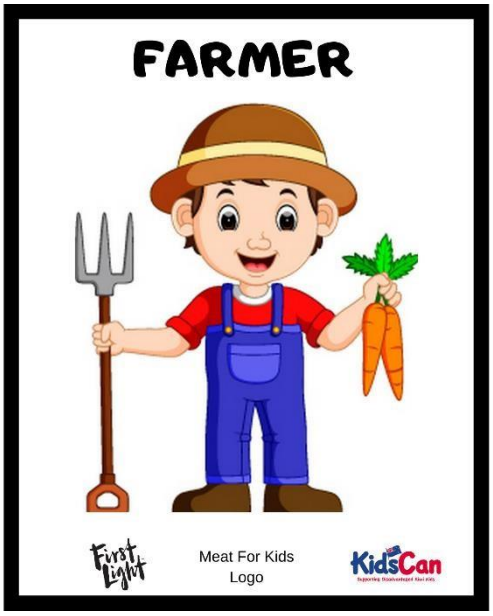
The concept, in summary, is a trading/collector's card based around different aspects of the industry. For an example one edition may be a 'careers' card, or a 'seasonal' card with the different farming seasons, or an 'animals' card with a selection of different farm animals. The cards to include not only colourful cartoon photos of the subjects, but the back of the cards to provide fun facts which is the beginning of enhancing some knowledge about the sector to the kids.

For the purpose of this report we will use the 'careers' card as the example/demonstration.

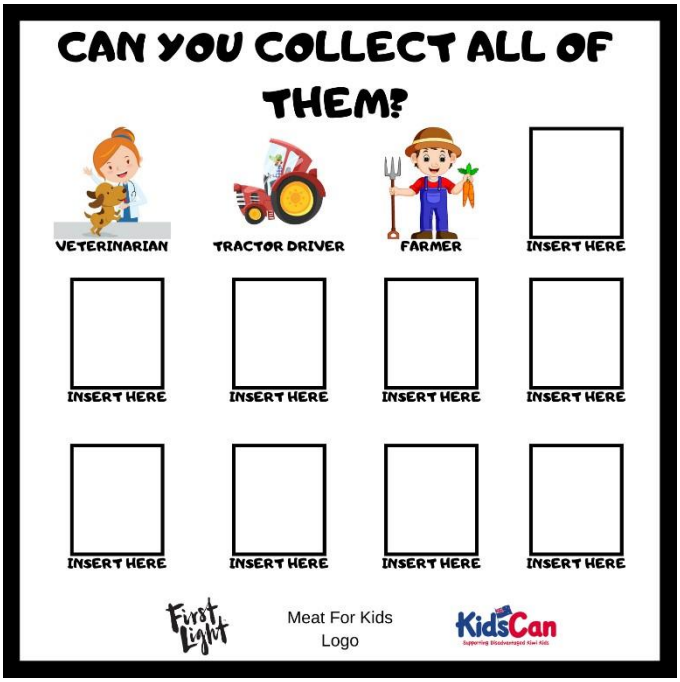
When the lunches are delivered for the Meat for Kids programme, they will receive a card along with their meal which will have one of ten or perhaps 15-20 careers on the card. With each classroom having received a poster of all the cards there are to collect, the kids will collect and trade amongst themselves and their peers to collect the full range of cards.

Collector card examples:

FRONT: *BACK:*



Poster example:



These cards allow the children to make it a competition in trying to collect the full range first out of the peers, gives them an active role as they have total control of their cards and what they do with them, uses colour as much as possible to draw their attention and lastly, gives them the opportunity to create stories or role play with their cards.
Although the fun facts on the back may not add a huge amount of education towards the sector, it starts the questions being asked. It may be the beginning of their interest in the area and create the desire to want to go and find out more about that area.

If the resources allow part of the recommendation to Firstlight for the Meat for Kids programme is to include an incentive in the collector cards for the children which is where the community linkage comes in.
Once a child has completed the full poster above with collecting all of the cards for that section e.g. all of the careers, then they win a field trip for their classroom to visit a farm.
This is a similar model to the 'Yummy stickers' initiative where kids collect the yummy stickers on their apples onto a piece of paper and once they collect a certain amount, they can win some sports gear for the school.
The Yummy School Sticker programme has been running since 1998 (Yummy, 2019) very successfully so therefore shows its worth of being adopted and modified by another industry.

The main barrier for this part of the recommendation is the resourcing required to monitor and liaise with schools around the posters and then organising the field trips to the farms once the poster is completed by a student.

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Appendices

Appendix One: Teacher Surveys

Kellogg Research Project – Questions for Teachers

Earlier in 2019, Firstlight Foods designed a programme in which they have teamed up with Kids Can to deliver 2x hot lunches a week to low decile Early Childhood Centres and eventually progressing into schools. Their trial area will begin in Hawke's Bay and have ambition to make it a nationwide programme to support children that turn up to school without lunch.

As part of the programme we want to create a product or initiative to create a community linkage between the farmers supplying to the programme and the children receiving the meals. The two main purposes for this is to enhance the children's education about agriculture and to help bridge the urban/rural divide.

Please note this is completely confidential and no names will be used

1. Please describe the tools and resources you were provided at teacher's college or in your training to effectively engage with children?

2. What are effective ways to get kids excited about a product or activity?

3. How do you get kids buy-in and retain their interest with a product or activity?

4. What are some games/activities that kids play at school in their own time?

5. At what age in your opinion are kids most influenced by what they are taught? Why do you think this?

6. Meat in schools/meat for kids is an initiative being proposed to roll out alongside KidsCan to provide lunches two days a week to schools/ECC's in low decile areas. What are your thoughts on this initiative?

7. Firstlight are wanting to use this initiative to enhance kids' knowledge and education about agriculture in a fun and interactive way – do you have any suggestions on how we could do this?

8. As part of the initiative we want to connect classrooms with farmers and include a field trip on farm to support breaking down the urban rural divide. Do you see a field trip being achievable?

   What would you say are the biggest limiting factors to getting a field trip over the line?