



**KELLOGG**  
RURAL LEADERSHIP  
PROGRAMME



## **OPENING GATES**

Staff attraction and retention on  
New Zealand's meat and fibre farms

Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme

Course 39 2019

John Fitzgerald

# 1 TABLE OF CONTENTS

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1	Table of Contents .....	1
2	Forward.....	2
3	Executive summary.....	3
4	Acknowledgements.....	4
4	Introduction. ....	5
5	Aim. ....	6
6	Literature review.....	7
6.1	Jason Rolfe (2015) - Stoking secondary school interest in the primary industries.....	7
6.2	David O’sullivan (2017) – Primary Attraction, understanding student awareness of the primary sector career options. ....	7
6.3	Olivia Ross (2017) – The Agricultural Lure, understanding the awareness of the red meat sector at high school level. ....	8
6.4	Summary. ....	8
7	Methodology.....	9
7.1	The process. ....	9
7.2	Sheep and beef student survey and interviews.....	9
7.2.1	Student survey results and analysis.....	10
7.2.2	Student survey insight and summary.....	15
7.3	Sheep and beef employee survey.....	15
7.3.1	Sheep and beef employee survey results and analysis.....	16
7.3.2	Employee survey insight and summary. ....	24
7.4	Sheep and beef employer survey .....	25
7.4.1	Sheep and beef employer survey results and analysis. ....	26
7.4.2	Sheep and beef employer survey insight and summary.....	33
7.5	Farmer conversations. ....	33
7.5.1	Group 1. Large scale farm managers. ....	33
7.5.2	First time employers. ....	34
8	Discussion.....	35
9	Conclusions. ....	36
10	Recommendations. ....	37
11	Appendices.....	38
12	References. ....	39

## 2 FORWARD.

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This is a topic that holds great interest to me personally but is also of great importance to the primary sector in general. It is often touted that there is an underwhelming number of applicants looking to fill positions on New Zealand's farms. With this being the case, it is overdue that employers gain an understanding to what is important for their potential employees.

With farmers being an aging demographic and the seeming reluctance of the younger generations to take up farming as a career, it is of great importance that employers have a better understanding of what it takes to create an inviting workplace, one that not only gives people a chance to express themselves, but one that also encourages career advancement along with other opportunities.

My personal journey has taken me through several employers. I believe I have learnt from all of them and am now fortunate enough to be in the position of not only employee but employer as well. But in the present day is having worked for some else enough to provide farmers with the skills necessary to become good employers?

### 3 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.

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This is a research paper into how future employees, current employees and the employers of both, feel about their current situations in their in today's tight labour market. It is concentrated on the meat and fibre production sector.

The process used for the research below initially involves a literature review from previous Kellogg papers investigating the lack of interest in the primary sectors at a secondary education level. The three papers reviewed present information around the lack of promotion by schools and some misconceptions around the primary industries. It is generally accepted that there needs to be more done to attract people towards the primary industries.

The second part of this research revolves around three surveys. The first is presented to students studying at Lincoln University and as combined with semi-structured interviews with cadets from the Coleridge Downs Cadet School. The second of the surveys targets employees on New Zealand's sheep and beef farms. This is circulated via social media along with the third survey, which is directed at employers. The employer survey is also circulated through Beef and Lamb NZ. The employee survey has a large uptake with the other two being disappointing. As with the student survey employee and employer survey were combined with informal interviews to gain greater understanding.

The employee survey results unearth some underlying issues of farm, with an overwhelming amount of respondents indicating they have given serious consideration towards leaving the sector. The underlying cause of these thoughts are directed at attaining better work-life balance.

The key conclusions from this report are as follows:

That there is some discontentment from senior management employees as they are considering leaving the sector in search of better work-life balance and in some cases greater financial reward.

Future and present employees have a very good understanding of their career paths along with a short time frame to reach management. This may contribute to reaching a ceiling at an early stage in their careers which may contribute to the above-mentioned discontentment.

Key recommendations from this research are:

Industry bodies need to build and promote an appropriate and current template that is relevantly shaped where processes can be implemented that will assist employers when attracting and retaining staff.

There needs to be more research done into why farm staff are considering leaving the sector.

## 4 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

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I wish to thank the Kellogg Programme Investing Partners for their continued support:



I would also like to thank and acknowledge my wife, Rachael, without her support and patience, along with the ability to hold the fort while I was away it would have been impossible for me to complete this research or the programme. Great thanks must go to my employers, Richard and Catherine Wilding. Not only did they fund the programme they were overly supportive throughout the whole time. An important mention must also go to Rory Hamilton and Derek Kapinga who kept the farm running well in my absence.

There are many people to thank for their involvement in this research. All the farmers, managers, students and other farm staff I have talked with along with people from wider industry. A special thanks to Melonie Shepherd and members of the Cheviot discussion group for their insight and guidance.

Scott Champion, Lisa Rodgers, Anne Hindson and Patrick Aldwell, for organising and implementing such a well-run programme that kept challenging us and pushing us in the right direction.

Finally, to all the members of cohort 39, what a journey it has been. You certainly have taken my polaroid view of the primary industries and turned it into a panoramic one along with creating a lifelong network of support and different perspectives.

## 4 INTRODUCTION.

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The purpose of this research is to gain an insight into what is necessary to attract and retain staff on New Zealand's Meat and Fibre farms with the perspective being from inside the farm gate.

While it has been acknowledged that there is a shortage of people being attracted to the primary industries initially, through lack of promotion at secondary education level and poor media perception throughout mainstream media. There has been little research done into what is important in the workplace for today's existing and aspiring farmers.

Frequently heard comments around recruitment on farm is that there is a distinct lack of suitable applicants for any positions offered. While meat and fibre farms find recruiting staff less difficult than the dairy and arable sectors, 30.5% have still found recruiting harder in the last six months in comparison with Dairy at 52.3% and Arable at 47.7%. A tight labour market with low unemployment and high labour force participation along with recent restrictions to immigration are also contributing factors.<sup>1</sup> Although it is of note that temporary migrant workers only make up 6% of the Meat and Fibre workforce but account for 20% of total primary industries labour.<sup>2</sup>

The number of individuals employed in Meat and Fibre production has steadily decreased since 2003 from 42,390 to 30,890 in 2016. With MPI's 2014 goal to double export returns by 2025 it is still projected that on farm employment will still slowly decline to around 29,800. With these targets in mind it needs to be acknowledged that there will be greater demand for 'innovative farm managers and owners who are skilled in staff leadership and business management and have the willingness to adopt new technology, and staff with improved literacy and numeracy competency'.<sup>3</sup> It is worth mentioning that in the current political climate these projections maybe reduce further. With current climate change policies such as the 'Billion trees programme' and proposed methane reductions potentially influencing stock numbers and the amount of land grazed,<sup>4</sup> the need for these 'skilled and innovative managers' and 'staff with improved literacy and numeracy skills may be even greater.

Now more than ever Meat and Fibre farmers need to understand how they can become employers of choice rather than employers of need.

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<sup>1</sup> Federated Farmers, Jan 2019 mid-season farm confidence survey.

<sup>2</sup> MPI, Human capability in the primary industries 2002-2016.

<sup>3</sup> MPI, Future capability needs for the primary industries in New Zealand, April 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, Farms, forests and fossil fuels. The next great landscape transformation, March 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Climate Change Response (Zero Carbon) Amendment Bill.

## 5 AIM.

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The aim of this research is to attempt to gain some sort of understanding into what employees find important on New Zealand's meat and fibre farms.

Whether they be junior shepherds or business managers they all have an important role in adding to the on-farm production gains that have been made over the last thirty years.

While we are taught many farming skills by our industry bodies, people management and workplace environment have been lacking, led by individuals rather than industry.

The resulting aim of this paper is to provide meat and fibre farming businesses with the information necessary to become employers of choice in a tight labour market.



## 6 LITERATURE REVIEW.

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This section will provide a brief overview of previous Kellogg projects investigating the lack of school leavers choosing the primary industries as a viable career option. The purpose of this review is to highlight the need for attractive workplaces for the few that do select farming as a professional career.

### 6.1 JASON ROLFE (2015) - STOKING SECONDARY SCHOOL INTEREST IN THE PRIMARY INDUSTRIES.

Rolfe's paper was focused on how to get more young academics interested in a future career in the primary industries. He placed his emphasis on gaining an insight into how school career advisers influenced the decisions students made and how this could be altered to create a better uptake.

Rolfe's main findings were that while most schools do have an understanding and promote a future in the primary industries, they are not career specific inside the greater industry. He was also made aware of the stigmas surrounding the primary industry, being that it was for 'dummies' and was physically hard work.

The conclusion Rolfe came to was that there is a need for a rebranding of the primary industries possible career options at a secondary school curriculum level and that introduction classes could be used to create some appeal followed by an NCEA paper. It was also thought that social media could be better used as a tool to promote these actions.

### 6.2 DAVID O'SULLIVAN (2017) – PRIMARY ATTRACTION, UNDERSTANDING STUDENT AWARENESS OF THE PRIMARY SECTOR CAREER OPTIONS.

O'Sullivan's research was gathered with an 18-question survey involving 20 respondents targeting students in their mid to late teens. This was coupled with three case studies involving potential future leaders in the primary sector along with the interview of two secondary school teachers.

His key findings are that while there is a thirst for more information surrounding the primary industries by students, there are poor historical perceptions by parents, teachers and career influencers that maybe preventing this.

O'Sullivan evaluates that there is a greater need for technology, in particular social media, to create greater awareness and promotion of the primary industry to those at a secondary education level. He also suggests the uptake of a national curriculum that will take initial interest and follow it through to an employment level.



### 6.3 OLIVIA ROSS (2017) – THE AGRICULTURAL LURE, UNDERSTANDING THE AWARENESS OF THE RED MEAT SECTOR AT HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL.

Ross's research follows a similar thread as Rolfe's and O'Sullivan's. She uses a literature review of past Kellogg's papers along with national and international papers to paint a background picture of the situation. This is combined with a series of interviews involving industry leaders, secondary school teachers and students involving of 60 people.

She finds that while awareness of the red meat sector is mainly focused at an on-farm level, the processing and service sectors are largely overlooked. Ross also concludes that the stigma around agriculture continues and there as a need to rebrand the industry to gain some appeal.

Ross recommends greater collaboration between educators and industry to build better and more obvious pathways for potential primary industry entrants.

### 6.4 SUMMARY.

These three Kellogg reports all follow common threads and present common trends. There is still a stigma surrounding agriculture, whether it is true or false, it is generally viewed as being harder work, long hours and for those with lower educational ability. It is also shown that even though there are many career options within the primary industries, there is a lack of information and promotion at a secondary education level.

While these papers provide a blanket overview on the struggle to attract people into the primary industries, none specifically relate to attracting people into positions on New Zealand's meat and fibre farms. Yet they still highlight the lack of people coming into the industry and emphasise the importance of providing quality workplaces and becoming employers of choice in a challenging labour market.

## 7 METHODOLOGY.

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### 7.1 THE PROCESS.

In order to gain a present-day perspective of what is occurring in the meat and fibre production labour market three surveys were circulated. The first survey was directed at agricultural students at Lincoln University who were specifically concentrating their education towards the meat and fibre sector. The second survey targets employers on New Zealand's meat and fibre farms and the third is directed at on farm employees from the same sector.

These surveys involve quantitative and qualitative research. The quantitative research uses closed questions and rating scales to provide statistical data around people's views and perceptions. This is combined with qualitative research, which involves open ended survey questions and is followed up with semi-structured interviews with employers, employees and students. Thematic analysis is then used to present some trends and to create more conversation.

(The entire survey questions and raw data are available in the appendix).

### 7.2 SHEEP AND BEEF STUDENT SURVEY AND INTERVIEWS.

The survey was directed at students involved in the agricultural diploma programmes at Lincoln University, their focus needed to be in the meat and fibre sector. With only eight respondents, it does not give a broad overview, however it does highlight some key points. This was followed with a semi-structured interview with three cadets at the Coleridge Downs training farm based in Canterbury.

### 7.2.1 Student survey results and analysis.

#### Question 1. Did you grow up on a farm?

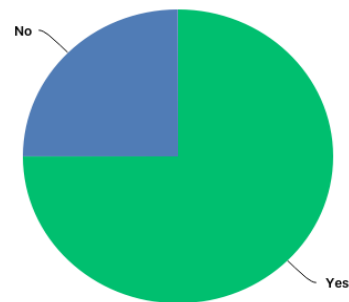


Figure 1. Did you grow up on a farm?

#### Question 2. Does your family own a farming business?

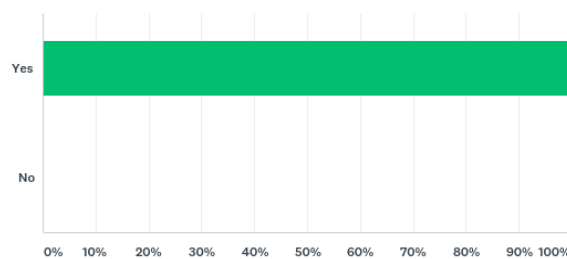


Figure 2. Does your family own a farming business?

These two questions are used to gain an understanding of the contact these students had with agriculture before deciding to study towards a career in it. The overwhelming answer is that all have had some contact, if not growing up on a farm then having a family that has a connection through some sort of farming related business. This matched up with the answers received from the training cadets, with two being from a family farming background and the other having a parent involved in the service sector.

**Question 3. Do you have a career path in mind?**

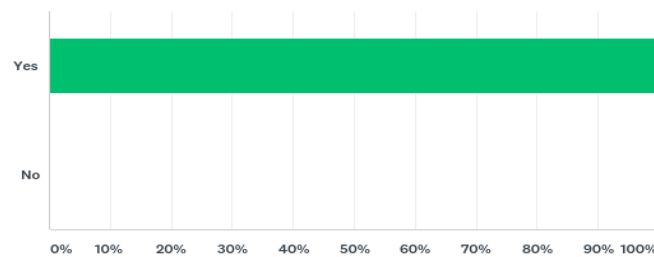


Figure 3. Do you have a career path in mind?

**Question 4. If you do have a career path in mind please explain what it might look like?**

**Question 5. What is your time frame to reach your career goals?**

These three questions are used to build an idea of where these students want to be and the time frame they intend to get there in. There are two clear themes that are developed from both the surveys and the interviews. The first is that within 10-15 years of entering the meat and fibre production workforce they intend to have taken up on-farm management roles. The second is that for those with the ambition of farm ownership this time frame is extended to 20 years. This is confirmed in the interviews with all three having a firm 10 -15 target of being in management roles.

**Question 6. Please rate the importance of the following when choosing sheep and beef farming as a career.**

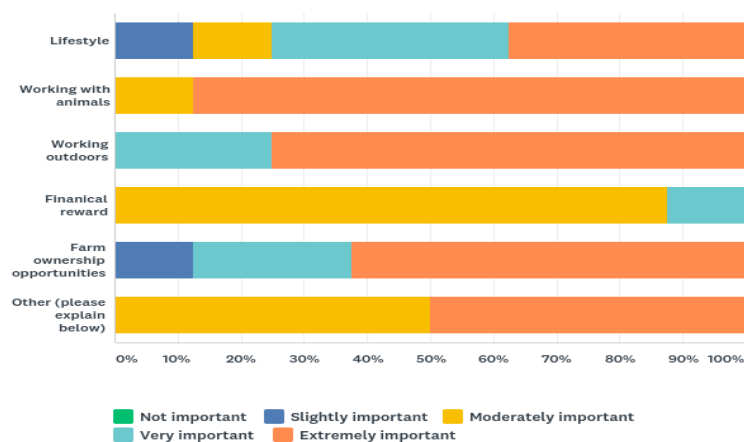
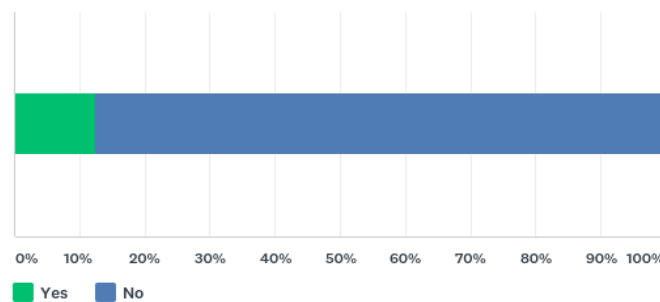


Figure 4. Student importance ratings when selecting sheep and beef as a career.

Question 6 shows the reasons for selecting this career avenue. It clearly shows that working outdoors and with animals is the main attraction which is to be expected. It also shows that while financial reward is important it is not the main driver when choosing sheep and beef farming. It is also interesting to note that over 60% consider farm ownership opportunities as but that does not collate to financial reward and seems to be viewed as different thing. This may be viewed as more of a family succession issue rather than a financial one. The cadet interviews follow the same trend as the survey with those interested in possible farm ownership seeming to envision family help being used. (The Other option shows no relevance having received only two answers and no comments).

**Question 7. Do you think you will leave sheep and beef farming at some stage?**



*Figure 5. Do you think you will leave sheep and beef farming at some stage?*

Both the interviews and the survey showed that there was no real desire to leave the sector at any stage and from those who answered yes it too was to experience farming in another sector or country. The purpose of this question was to unearth if there would be any openness to leaving the sector to gain greater financial reward to build equity if farm ownership was a desired goal. It seems that this is not the case.

**Question 8. When looking at future farm employment, please rank the importance of the following.**

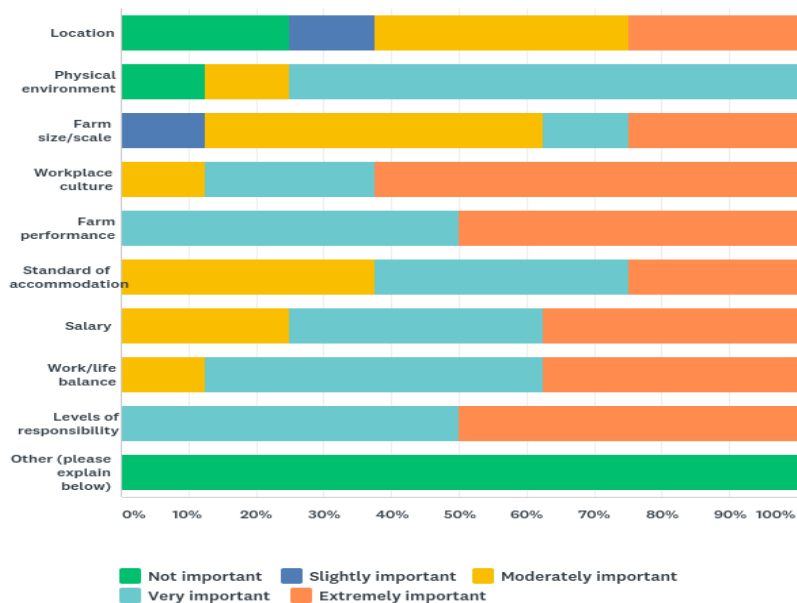


Figure 6. Student importance ranking when seeking employment.

Question 8 looks at what these future farmers find important when considering employment options. While salary is still of consideration it still ranks below farm performance, levels of responsibility, workplace culture and work/life balance. This shows that the focus is mainly on a positive work environment which will provide a good platform for future career growth.

**Question 9. Do you feel your current educational platform will provide you with the skills you need to reach your goals?**

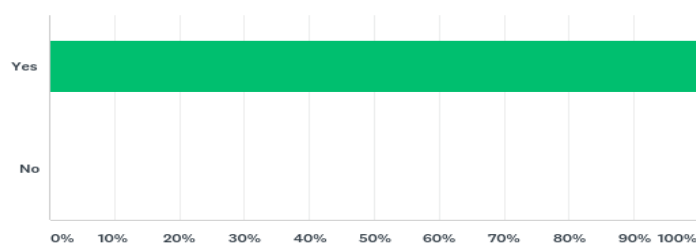
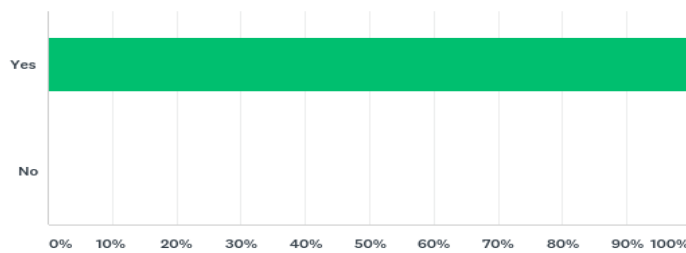


Figure 7. Will your educational platform provide you with the skills to reach your goals?

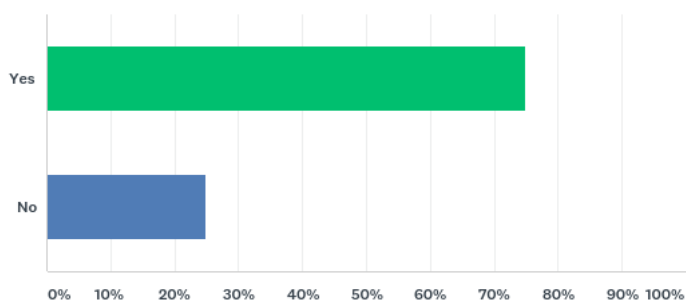
**Question 10. Do you feel your current education provides you with enough information about career options or pathways?**



*Figure 8. Does your current education provide you with enough information about career options or pathways?*

Question 9 and 10 clearly show that students of today feel that their education is going to provide them with the adequate skills and advice to help them achieve the career goals they may have. The three interviewed cadets echoed these thoughts.

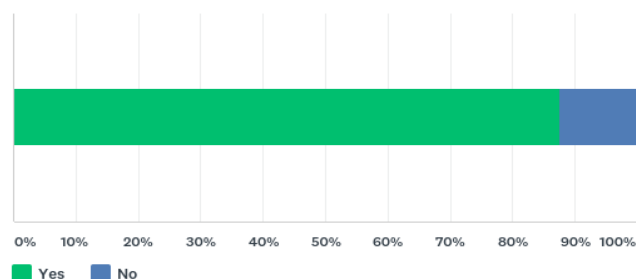
**Question 11. Do you think your education provides you with enough information about building equity/wealth?**



*Figure 9. Does your education provide enough information about building equity/wealth?*

If farm ownership is a goal for some, I was interested to know if they thought their education providers gave them enough (or any) information about building equity. The survey results were in stark contrast from those interviewed. With 75% of survey respondents believing they were supplied with enough information, the 3 cadets all acknowledged that they were given little and showed a definite hunger to gain more knowledge around this topic.

**Question 12. Do you plan on doing any further formal training throughout your career?**



*Figure 10. Do you plan on doing any formal training throughout your career?*

Apart from the one response, those surveyed along with those interviewed had the realisation that to keep up with the ever-changing dynamics of farming they would be needing to continuously upskill themselves. They all had different thoughts on how this could be done and what avenues this may lead them down, some wished to expand on their university education while other preferred to take a practical option such as learning through work experience and gaining further education from their employers.

### 7.2.2 Student survey insight and summary.

The small catchment of people involved in this survey coupled with 3 interviews give only give a narrow snapshot into what these students are expecting when they enter the workforce. But it does come across that they have a strong understanding on what is important to them. The employers they choose will be the ones that provide positive and proactive working environments, not necessarily the ones offering the largest salary. With all of them having such firm goals and time frames to accompany these goals, the focus is being involved with a farming business that can provide them with the skills and knowledge to leapfrog them up the career ladder.

*“5 -10 years for farm manager, 15-20 max for farm ownership”*

When talking freely with the Coleridge Downs cadets, they explained that they had a complete understanding of the people shortage employers were facing and the ability they had to carefully select their employer. They all have the realisation that as long as their skills were relevant, that this gave them some bargaining power then seeking the roles they desired.

They all understandably feel that the education they are undertaking will provide them with the skills they need to enter the workforce and that the potential career pathways are well documented.

*“Lincoln so far have been great at providing information about what sort of jobs are out there in the agricultural sector”*

It is of interest that while six of the eight surveyed Lincoln University students felt they were being adequately educated in building equity, all three of the cadets felt the opposite and were very open to gaining some knowledge around this area. With many having goals of farm ownership, regardless of their families farming background, equity is imperative as is building it from young age. This maybe something that needs to be investigated further.

### 7.3 SHEEP AND BEEF EMPLOYEE SURVEY.

This survey was directed at employees on New Zealand sheep and beef farms. It was circulated through social media on both the NZ Farming and NZ Farming jobs Facebook



pages. It had a large uptake with 118 people completing the survey. It asks some similar questions as the student survey regarding what is important to them when seeking employment along with questions designed to unearth how they are feeling about their current situation.

### 7.3.1 Sheep and beef employee survey results and analysis.

**Question 1. Please choose one of the following which best describes your current position.**

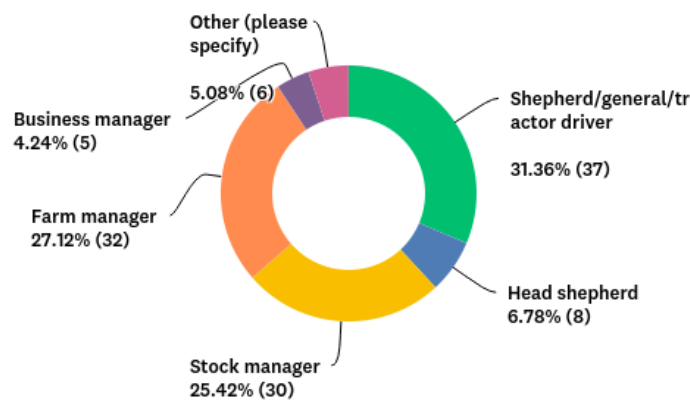


Figure 11. Employee survey farm roles.

This gives an overview of the positions held by the respondents and is used during the survey to break into groups to better clarify certain answers and responses. It needs to be noted that over 30% of replies come from farm managers of farm business managers who more than likely employ staff themselves, yet they still firmly view themselves as employees. Other was made up of people currently out of the workforce (2) or those who took up casual employment (4).

**Question 2. What kind of business are you employed by?**

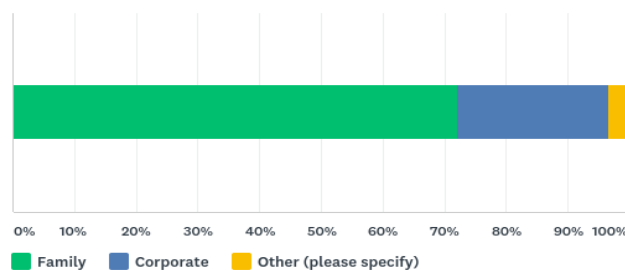


Figure 12. Farm employees by business type.

This gives an indication of the type of business the employees work in. Other was filled by charitable trust and people on work experience. There has been given no definition around these titles, so it is entirely the respondents own perception towards which type of

business. It is acknowledged that not all employees will have a full understanding of the type of business structure they are employed by.

### Question 3. How long have you been in your current position?

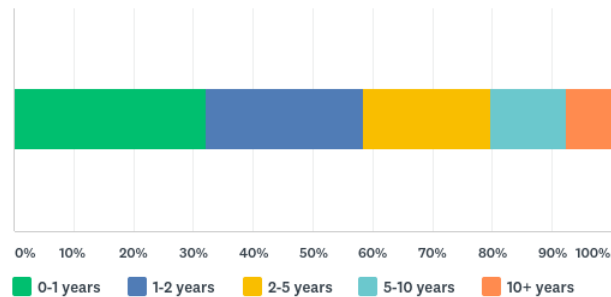


Figure 13. Employee time in current position.

This shows the approximate time held in their current positions. We can now begin to use some of this information and compare different groups.

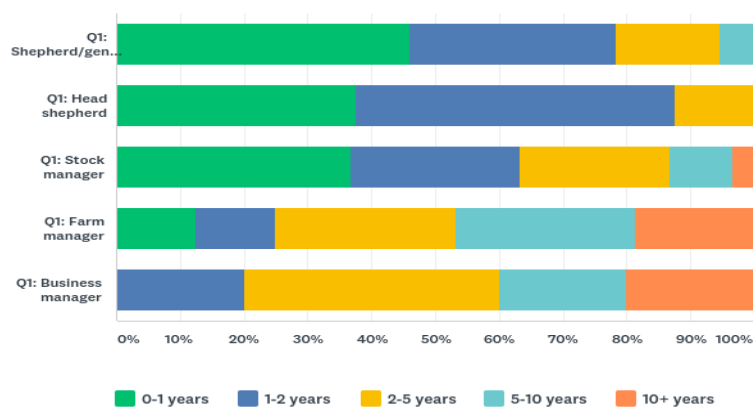


Figure 14. Employee time in position by role.

When broken down into positions held, the information shows the career progression that was discussed and presented in the student survey. A low percentage of shepherd/generals or head shepherds have been in their roles for over two years and we see these figures grow out down to the farm and business managers who have a much larger percentage having been in their current positions for five years of greater.



**Question 4. Please rate the importance of the following when considering employment opportunities.**

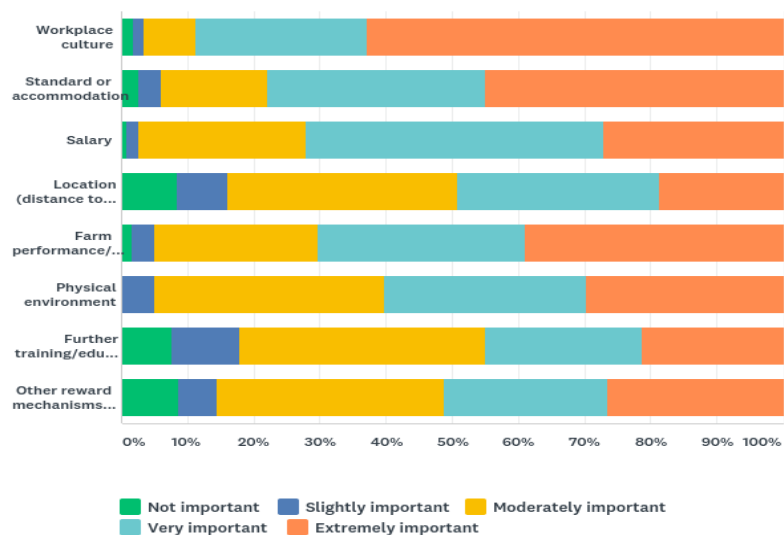


Figure 15. Employee importance rating when considering employment.

The above results show that salary is not the main driver when seeking employment opportunities but is still of high importance. All the options available show high percentages of importance. When the focus is placed on different groups the results start to change only slightly.

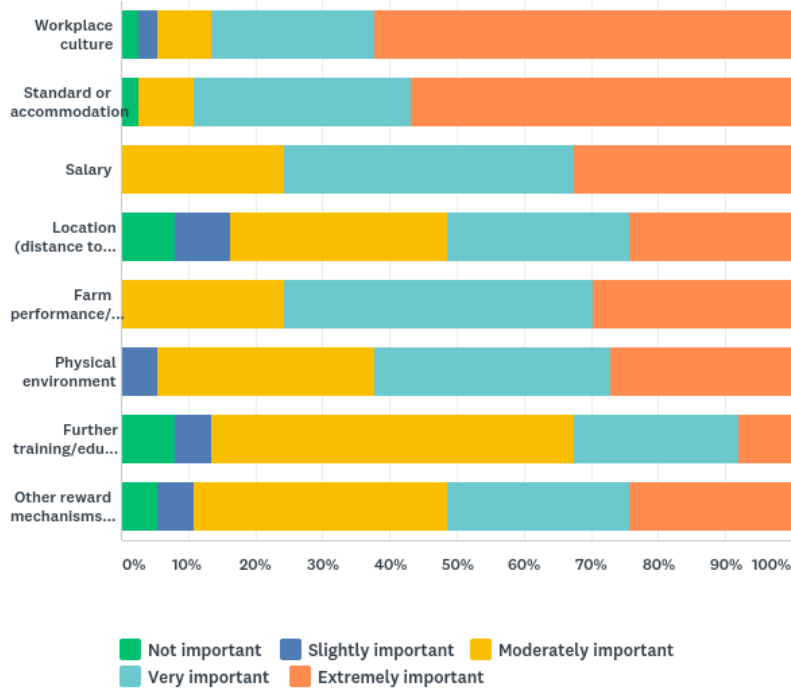


Figure 16. Farm and Business managers importance rating when considering employment.

There is more emphasis placed on the standard of accommodation and less on further education opportunities, but the rest remain relatively consistent, with workplace culture holding the most weight. These trends are consistent when comparing all roles with further education being more important earlier in the career and accommodation more so at a management level. This more than likely is in line with age and the starting of families.

#### Question 5. Do you feel your current salary package fairly reflects the hours you work?

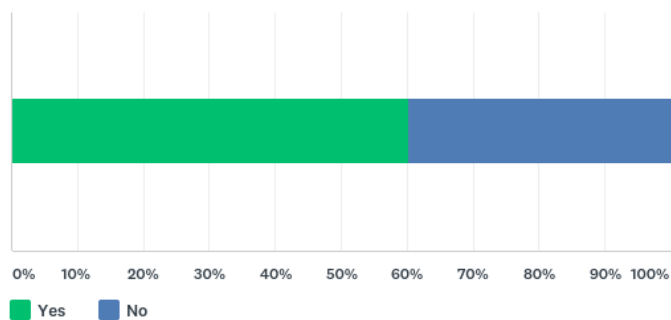


Figure 17. Do employees feel their salary fairly reflects the hours worked.

Over the whole survey group this is a generalised answer. It is when broken down and compared against the role each employee holds that a proper insight is gained.

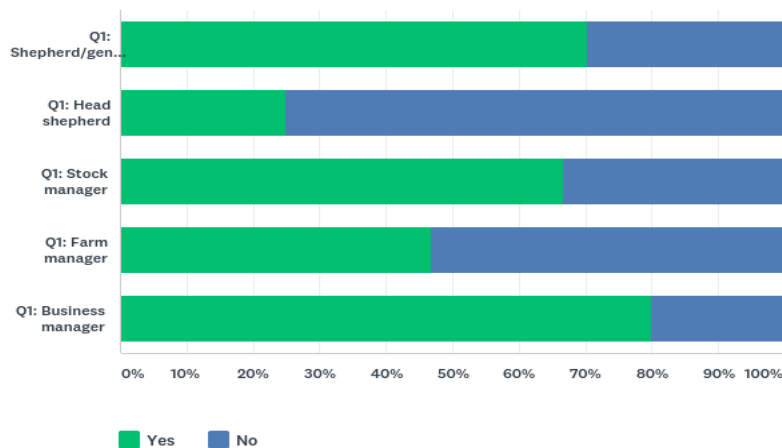


Figure 18. Do employees feel their salary fairly reflects the hours worked - roles compared.

The Head shepherds hold the highest negative position. With only 8 respondents in this category it is difficult to get a broad representation. But it is of interest that with 32 Farm managers having completed the survey over half of them feel as if they are not paid fairly. When asked to comment the common thread was that they felt they would be on less than the minimum wage when they compared their package to the hours they worked. This occurred throughout all the positions.

Positive comments were suggesting that they received extra 'perks' such as flexible working works and extra time off, they viewed that this seem to balance out any long hour worked. It is unsure if this formalised situation of one that plays out over time.

One Business manager commented that they "worked hard and long hours but am well remunerated for them and my pay allows me to live a very comfortable lifestyle".

#### Question 6. Do you feel your salary package fairly reflects the level of responsibility you have in your current position?

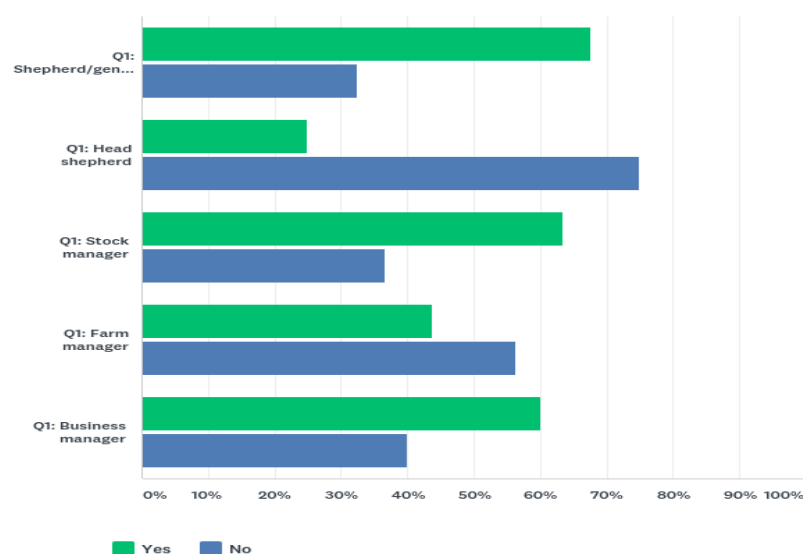


Figure 19. Do employees feel their salary package fairly reflects the levels of responsibility they have - roles compared.

The most value comes from these answers if the roles are compared against each other. In comparison to Figure 18 these numbers start to grow out in a negative trend across all positions. Common comments from Farm managers and Business managers are that they oversee and managing “millions of dollars, worth of assets”.

**Question 7. Does your employer discuss the business goals and direction with you?**

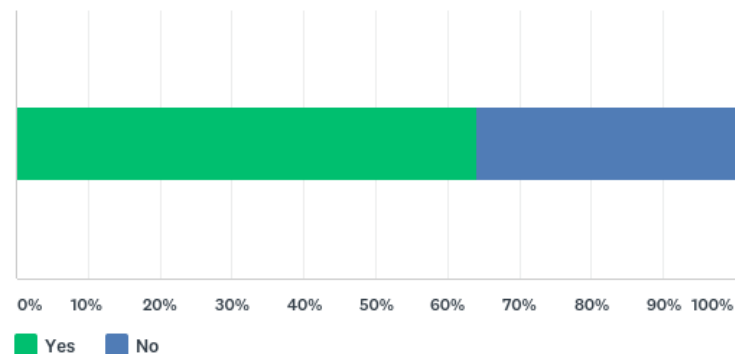


Figure 20. Are the business goals and direction discussed with the employee?

This result remains relatively consistent even when compared against roles held and business type worked for. It is only at Business manager level the ‘yes’ grows out to 80%. This is surprising considering the position held.

**Question 8. Do you feel valued by your employers?**

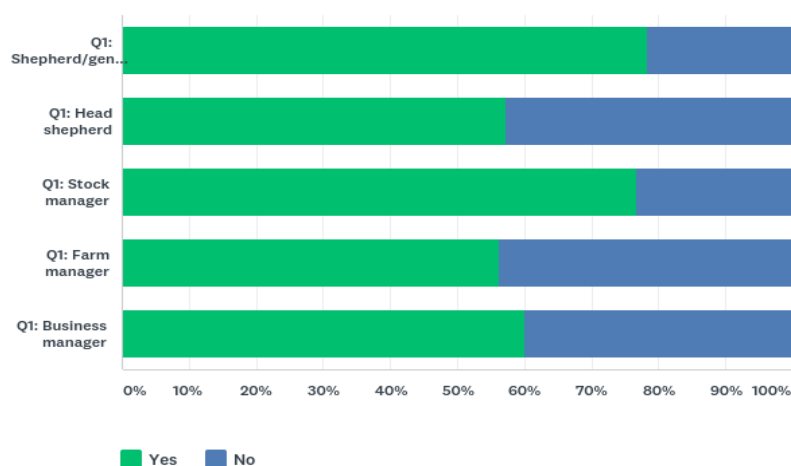


Figure 21. Do employees feel valued?

**Question 9. Please explain what being valued means to you.**

These two questions need to be grouped to gather some understanding. While Figure 21 shows that perceived value drops within Farm managers and Business managers along with Head shepherds, it was important to understand how this term is defined by respondents. There are many common threads that are used to define value and they are reflected evenly

throughout all roles. Keywords used are “*respected, trusted, encouraged, included recognised and appreciated*”. Comments include “*they show a concern for the wellbeing of both you and your family*”, “*they use feedback both ways*” and that “*time is invested into staff both personally and professionally*”.

**Question 10. Do you have access to further education/training in your current role?**

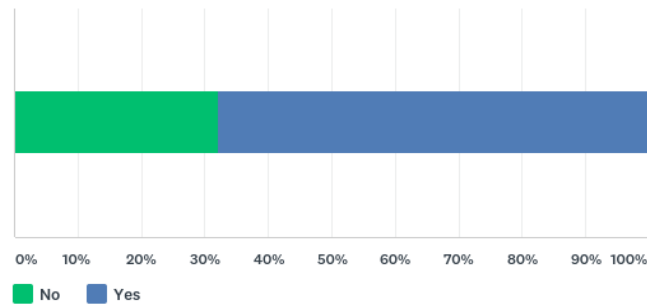


Figure 22. Employee access to further education or training.

With over 65% being provided access to further education, this ties in well with students recognising the need to continually upskill throughout the careers.

**Question 11. Please explain what a good employer looks like to you.**

The trends here are common and a lot are in line with what being valued means to them (Question 9). Key words or comments include –

*“Fair, organised and professional.” “Passionate and care about employee goals.” “Provide good infrastructure.” “Approachable humorous and hardworking.” “Forgiving, knowledgeable, trusting and respectful.” “Helps you grow, inviting.” “Not micromanaging, communicates well.” “Open.”*

**Question 12. Have you ever considered leaving sheep and beef farming?**

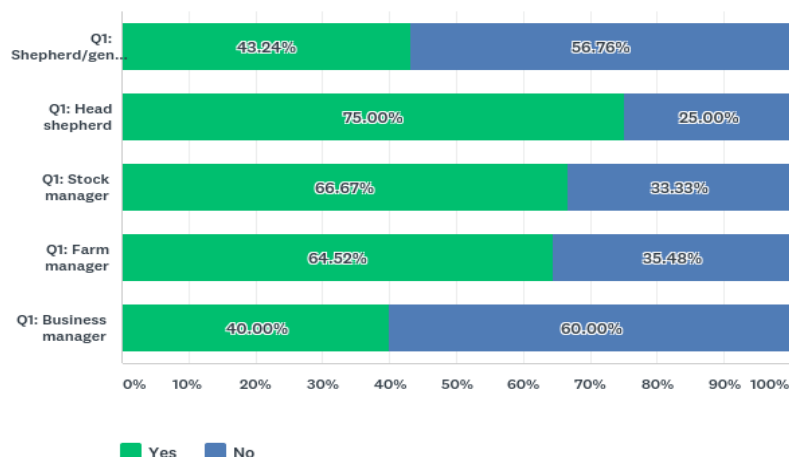


Figure 23. Have employees ever considered leaving sheep and beef farming

The answers to this question really start to open some doors into how these employees feel about the current situation within the sectors workplace. There is an over whelming high proportion of yeses to this question, with only the Shepherd generals and Business managers having a somewhat positive result.

**Question 13. If you have considered leaving sheep and beef farming, please select one of the following reasons.**

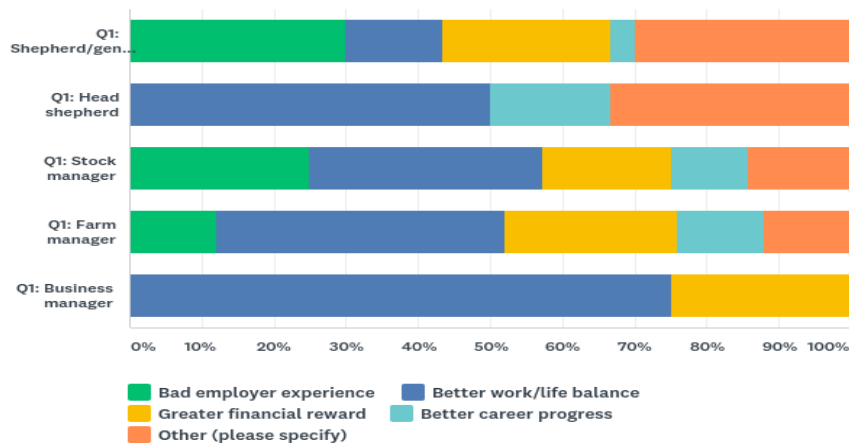


Figure 24. Employee reasons for considering leaving sheep and beef farming.

The results clearly show that work/life balance is a major influence for these people when it comes to considering their future. While for shepherd/generals this is less of a reason, a large portion at 30% indicate that bad employer experiences may drive them from the sector. It is unknown what exactly these experiences maybe. Those who have chosen 'other' have mainly just commented that they have no desire to leave their positions or the sector, if these are removed from the results the percentage of other replies grow significantly, particularly for the head shepherds and shepherd/generals. There is a large response to this question with 93 out of the 118 respondents. 18 of the 93 used the other option and a high portion of these should be discarded from the results.

**Question 14. Do you have a good understanding of the possible career pathways to achieve your personal goals?**

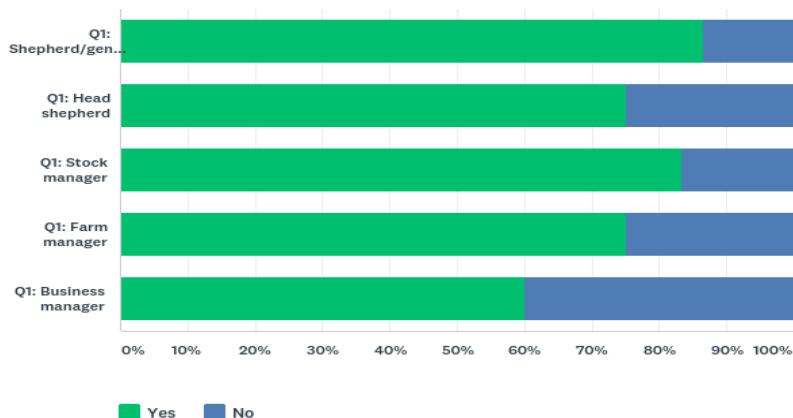


Figure 25. Employee understanding of career pathways.



All seem to have some sort of understanding of career pathways, although it is of interest that for those holding more senior positions such as farm manager or business manager the understanding starts to reduce.

**Question 15. Please list any farming business's you feel will help you build a good career.**

**Question 16. Please explain why you choose these businesses.**

These questions were designed to gain an insight into which employers would provide a good platform to assist them in their farming career. It was then intended to contact these employers and discuss with them why people wanted to go there and what they were doing to maintain this position. The question was misunderstood with very few replies giving the information desired. Instead many of the responses pointed towards Beef and Lamb NZ along with Primary ITO. They all stated that access to relative information and the ability to study via correspondence as being the main reasons. Many of the farm and business managers stated that creating networks were very important along with have a relevant mentor.

### 7.3.2 Employee survey insight and summary.

The information gathered from this survey gives an interesting insight into the thoughts and feelings of employees on NZ's meat and fibre farms. While provides some predictable results it also presents some concerns, particularly in senior management roles. Research undertaken by Randstad<sup>6</sup> shows us what New Zealanders main reasons are for either wanting to leave their job or wanting to stay. This research is undertaken over multiple industries and as it is country specific it makes for a good comparison and highlights the different challenges associated with on farm employment.



Figure 26. Why employees stay in their jobs - Randstad 2018



Figure 27. Why employees leave their jobs - Randstad 2018

<sup>6</sup> Randstad, Enriching the employee experience, June 2018

These results tend to mirror themselves with both work-life balance and salary/compensation. Interesting job content also has some relation to the insufficient challenges mention in Figure 26. It should be interpreted that limited career path, the largest driver for people leaving their jobs, is not necessarily the fault of the employer. Companies may only have so many senior positions available so there is little room for advancement. This is still a problem that all businesses face and is no different in the primary production sector.

When comparing the on-farm data with the Randstad survey there is some common ground. Work-life is very important to all NZ employees, as is the desire to be involved in an innovative and interesting workplace that is performing well. There are also common trends for leaving employment such as career progression, greater compensation along with better work-life balance. The author has purposely compared Farm and Business manager with the other survey respondents. The largest discovery this survey unveiled is the alarmingly high percentage of employees who consider leaving the sector, particularly amongst Farm and Business managers of which over 60% have considered leaving. This appears to be driven by lack of work-life balance for these people. It is also of worthy mention that the standard of accommodation is of importance to all seeking employment, particularly Farm and Farm Business managers. This is a situation unique to all the primary industries on-farm production sectors not just meat and fibre.



Figure 28. What's important when considering employment - roles compared, sheep and beef



Figure 29. Reasons for considering leaving - roles compared, sheep and beef

## 7.4 SHEEP AND BEEF EMPLOYER SURVEY

This short survey was intended to gather information on how employers saw themselves as employers. It was also circulated on the NZ Farming and NZ Farming jobs Facebook pages. It

was also promoted through Beef and Lamb NZ on their weekly e-diary email circulation. It had a disappointing response with only 21 people completing the survey. It consists of 16 questions.

#### 7.4.1 Sheep and beef employer survey results and analysis.

##### Question 1. How many staff do you employ?

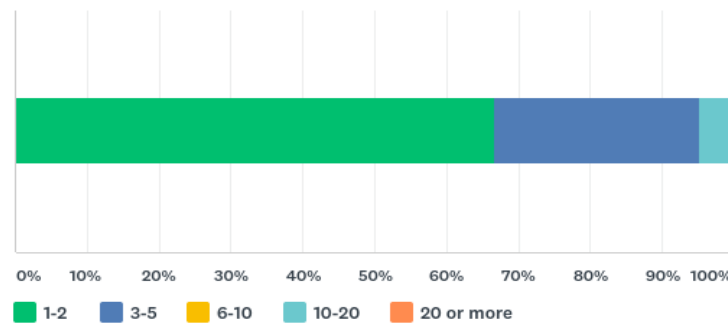


Figure 30. How many staff to you employ?

With only one reply having more than 10 staff, this does give a realistic interpretation on the employment levels on most NZ meat and fibre farms. With 67% have either one or two staff this falls in line with the industry average of approximately 1.7 labour units per farm, with this farm being around 640 hectares and running 4000 stock units.<sup>7</sup>

##### Question 2. Please choose which best describes your farming business.

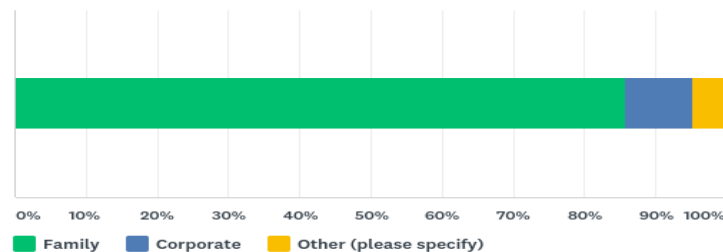


Figure 31. Business structure description.

As above this gives a good perspective into how the majority of NZ's farming businesses are owned and structured. The other answer commented that it was a privately-owned business so could fall in to either of the other two categories. One of the corporates employed 10 or more staff.

##### Question 3. Does your business have clear goals and objectives?

<sup>7</sup> Beef and Lamb NZ, Sheep and Beef Farm Survey: Class 9 All Classes – New Zealand, 2018

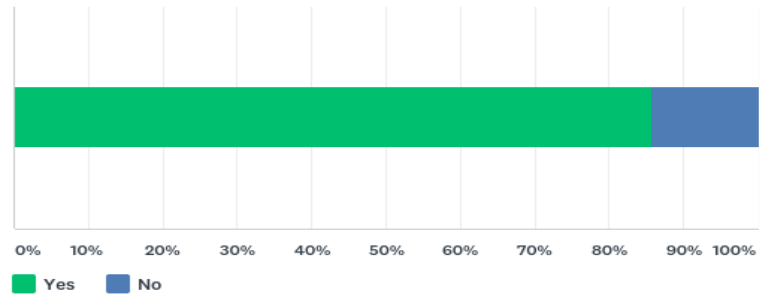


Figure 32. Does the business have clear goals and objectives?

With over 85% responding yes, it is interesting to note that of the three that replied they did not have clear goals and objectives, two were family businesses and the other corporate.

**Question 4. Please explain how you involve your staff in these goals and objectives.**

Of the 21 responses three commented that they did not involve their staff in the goals or objectives. These were not the three that replied no to Question 3. Others commented that that had formal meeting and targets which for some had so reward mechanisms attached to them. For the majority they mention informal meeting and ongoing discussions.

**Question 5. Please rate the understanding your employees have of your business goals and objectives.**

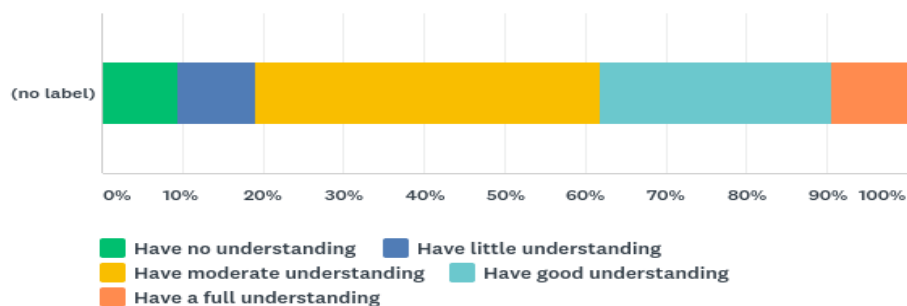


Figure 33. Employee understanding of business goals and objective - employers perspective.

With 80% of respondents saying their employees have a moderate or better understanding of the goals and objectives this compares with the employee survey telling us that around 60% of employees believe that their employers discuss these with them.

**Question 6. Please rate your workplace culture.**

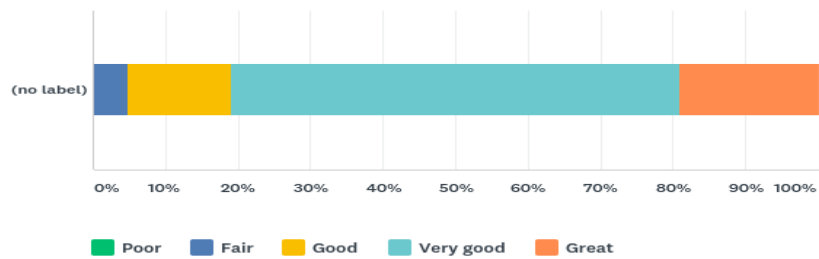


Figure 34. Workplace culture rating - employer survey

**Question 7. Please describe what workplace culture means to you.**

With 95% of the respondents believing they have a good or better workplace culture; it is of interest to have them describe it. Those that believed they have a great culture only comment that staff enjoy being there and working as a team, with only one stating that they encourage growth and involvement in decisions. Other comments follow a similar thread around creating a family atmosphere with open lines of communication. The one comment that took a different angle was that the business had to be put first.

**Question 8. Please rate the following attributes you look for when employing staff.**

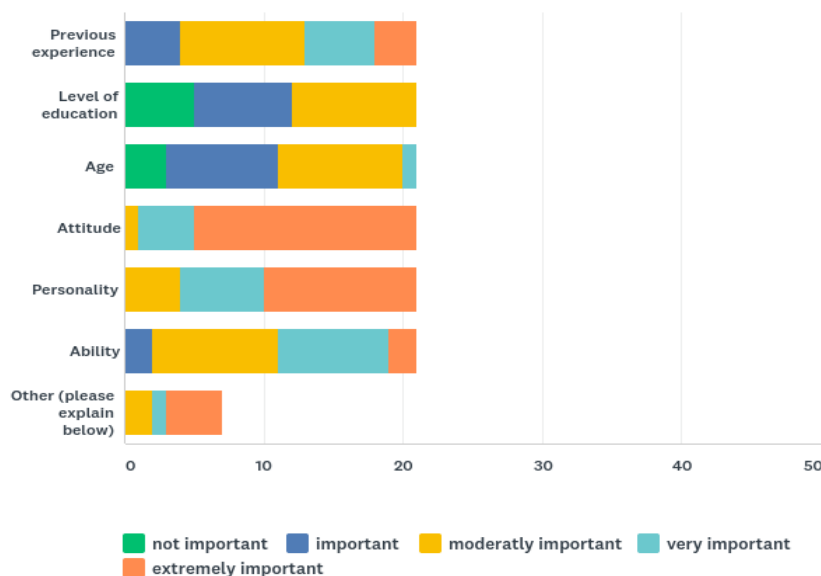


Figure 35. Attributes employers look for when employing staff

The results to this clearly present that attitude and personality are key drivers when employing, followed by ability and experience. All of the comment left on this question confirm these findings, with two of interest being, “the reality is that NZCEA levels are not really relevant, it is more about willingness. Willingness is not dependent on age or education”, and “Age is not so important, but experience is and that tends to come with age”.

### Question 9. Do your staff have employment contracts?

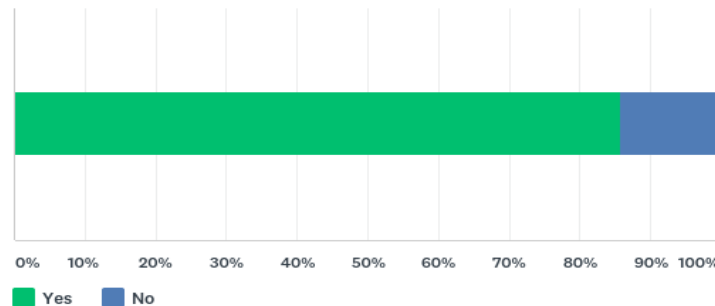


Figure 36. Do staff have employment contracts?

While it is surprising that there are three no answers to this question given that it a legal obligation to have employment contracts, all three comment that this is something they need to change.

### Question 10. Please rate the importance of the following when employing staff.

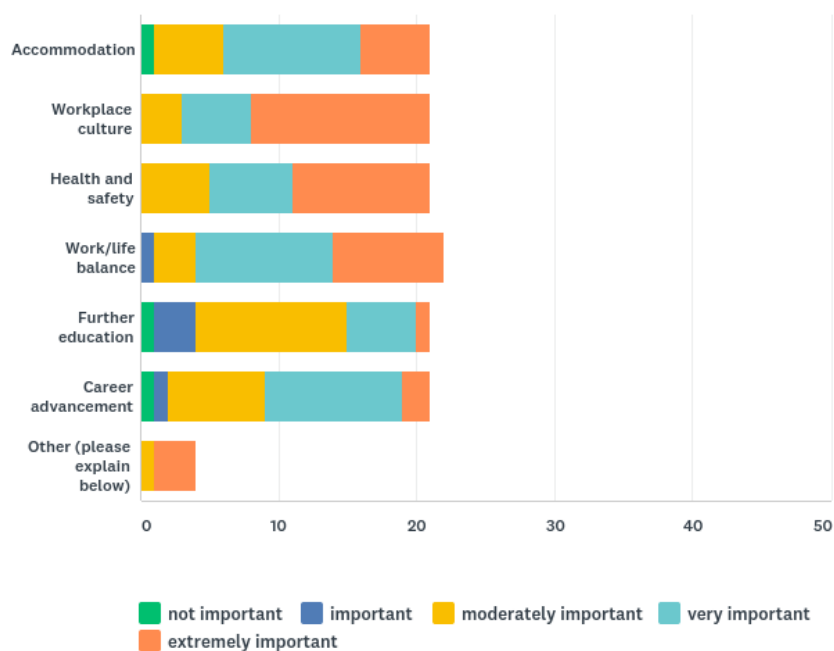


Figure 37. What is important when employing staff.

With a clear focus on workplace culture and health and safety, these are not only important to any staff, but they may also have an immediate impact on the farming business. It is good to see work-life balance being of importance when employing as this has presented itself as the major contributor towards people considering leaving the sector. It is also shown to be a key driver for all New Zealanders across all sectors when considering their employment options. (Figures 26,27 and 29).

**Question 11. Please rate the issues you face when employing staff.**

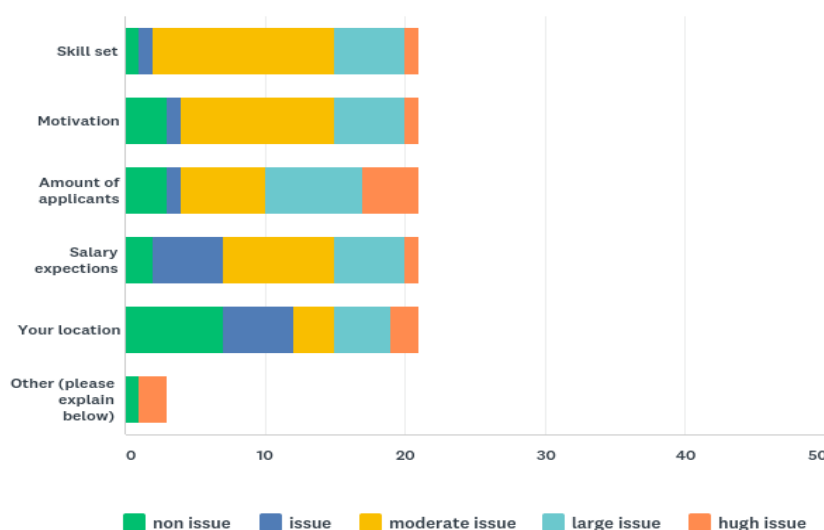


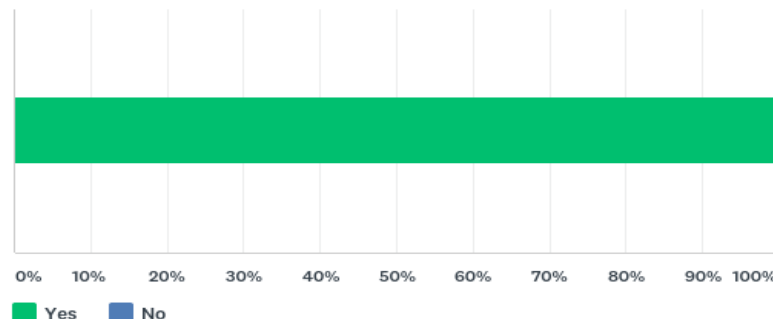
Figure 38. Issues faced when employing staff.

This confirms the lack of people in the sector and their ability to be able to be selective when choosing employment. Many commented about the distinct lack of applicants followed by the challenges of finding someone with the required skills needed for this small number of applicants. One acknowledged that due to the remote nature of his property (50 minutes to the nearest town), it was necessary to pay and reward well. Comments from the other section were that it was very challenging for partners or spouses to find employment in a rural setting.

**Question 12. Please explain how you deal with above mentioned issues when employing staff.**

Following on from Question 11, it is of interest to gain an understanding around how employers deal with the issues they experience. There are varying comments from the respondents. 25% agree that it is important to wait for the person that is going to be the right fit for the business and once found secure them by rewarding them well, not only financially but with other rewards, such as being flexible around hours worked. It was acknowledged that these tools will help you build a good reputation as an employer. Others suggest that they just have to select the best of the few applicants they receive as it is not feasible to wait for the right person to come along. It is suggested that the use of a recruitment agency may have weed out unsuitable applicants and only but the ones suitable up for selection. It is noted by three of the employers that they have the ability to promote roles through 'word of mouth' and seem to have little trouble filling position. This would suggest that they already have achieved a good reputation and could consider themselves employers of choice.

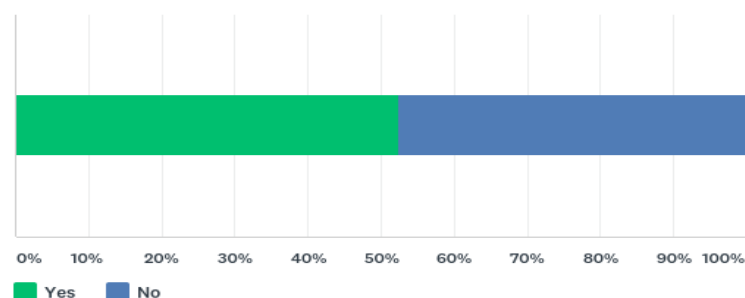
**Question 13. Do you feel that you pay a salary package that fairly reflects the hours and responsibility your staff have?**



*Figure 39. Does pay package reflect hours and responsibility?*

All believe they are good and fair payers, which is somewhat at odd with data received from the employees. The comparison between the two surveys need to be made carefully as it confirmed that any of the employees worked for any of these employers. But with over 40% of employees feeling that their salary package did not reflect these things it is a stark contrast to the employer's thoughts. A common comment from these employers was that they made sure they kept working the salary back to an hourly rate. They felt that this also prevented staff being overworked and assisted with work-life balance.

**Question 14. Have you considered offering other reward mechanisms to your staff?**

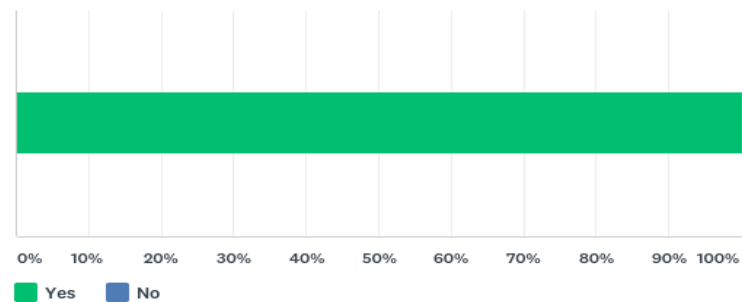


*Figure 39. Employer consideration of using other reward mechanisms.*

With 52% having considered offering other reward mechanisms, the comments the respondents have left gave an insight into what these maybe and if they have been applied. Many comment that while they have considered this, they have found it hard to measure and a challenge to implement due to the variabilities in farming and the different roles carried on farm. They mentioned that they may pay unexpected bonuses to staff when it is possible. Other comments emphasis that having extra time is an overlooked reward. Perks such as fuel and funding extra training are also considered rewards. One mention of electricity, firewood and meat could be considered as part of a salary package. Only two of the respondents reported having a formal measured system for providing such rewards.



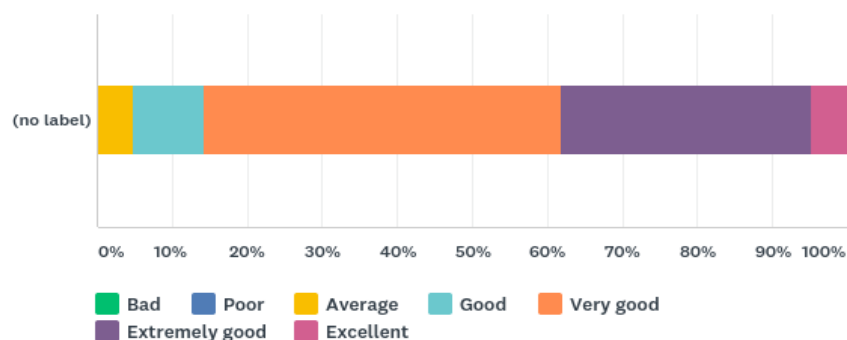
**Question 15. Do you feel your staff add value to your business?**



*Figure 40. Do your staff add value to your business?*

A firm yes to this answer indicates the understanding of these employers, that they cannot run their businesses alone. This is also at odds with the employee survey with approximately 30% answering no when asked if they felt valued by their employer.

**Question 16. Please rate yourself as an employer.**



*Figure 41. Employers self-rating.*

With only one respondent placing themselves in the excellent category and none calling themselves bad or poor, the common trend in the comments was that it was something that they all recognised they could keep improving on. Many admitted to making poor hiring decisions in the past and understood that these experiences have made them better employers over time. Comments also state that they have worked as employees so now have a good understanding of how they should as to how that should behave as employers.

#### 7.4.2 Sheep and beef employer survey insight and summary.

The 21 respondents to this survey all show a good understanding around the staff employment although have acknowledged the issues they face in gathering enough applicants to select from when they are recruiting. The author found the response to this survey disappointing as it was well circulated. It is suggested that this itself gives somewhat for an indication into the importance placed on the whole staffing issue. When looking at information collected by Federated Farmers<sup>8</sup> 30.5% of respondents in the meat and wool sector have found harder to recruit over the last six months since the previous survey. With this being the case, it still only ranks fifth as farmers main concerns.

With this low survey uptake, it makes it challenging to compare these results with those of the employees as was originally intended.

It is of interest that while there is interest in using other reward mechanisms to motivate, attract and retain staff, there is little real uptake. While many stated that it was overly difficult to document and measure these systems, there is information available to assist in these matters via Beef and Lamb NZ<sup>9</sup> and the Red Meat Profit Partnership.<sup>10</sup>

There was however a good representation of family farms which employ between one and two staff, this does give somewhat of a perspective into the challenges of the average NZ meat and fibre farm.

#### 7.5 FARMER CONVERSATIONS.

Several conversations and informal interviews have been held throughout this research and while there is too much content to provide in this paper the author has put them into two groups. All have chosen to remain anonymous.

##### 7.5.1 Group 1. Large scale farm managers.

These conversations took place separately with three different farming business managers. They all operate at a large scale and employ 10 or more staff. They also consider themselves as employees. The conversation was prompted with asking them to explain how they create an environment which makes them employers of choice. All three of the managers acknowledged that for them to be able to create a positive environment for their staff it had to flow down from their own employers. They stated that the direction provided from those above them was of utmost importance to allowing them to create a positive environment. Each had different tools they used to ensure that this environment was upheld. One stated that they had a set of 'rules' documented in the employer contracts. These rules were based

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<sup>8</sup> Federated Farmers, Mid-season Farm Confidence Survey, January 2019

<sup>9</sup> Beef and Lamb NZ, RMPP, Performance agreement and schedule example. [www.beefandlambnz.co.nz](http://www.beefandlambnz.co.nz)

<sup>10</sup> Beef and Lamb NZ, RMPP, Performance incentives, [www.beefandlambnz.co.nz](http://www.beefandlambnz.co.nz)

around basic legal requirements such as animal welfare but also included such thing as how it was expected to behave with other staff and visitors to the farms. It was thought that by signing up to these requirements they were effectively signing into the farms culture.

All three talked of having weekly staff meeting with one of them have them very formalised. This included sending out an agenda before the meeting and recorded minutes for the meeting that had taken place. This was effective as staff could see any issues coming up and prepare themselves. They also talked of having an open-door policy in regard to them always being approachable over any matter. They also understood the need to let staff leave well, meaning if a staff member felt it was time to move to another position in another business, they would assist them and make certain that the transition was a successful one. They also wanted to sure that the employee was making a positive step in their career.

When considering themselves as employees they all noted that their employers promoted them having some sort outside business interest, as this gave them some interest outside the business they are employed to manage. They also talked of the respect their employers had for all staff and even though they may own the land and buildings, they respected and understood that these were their employees' home and should be treated as such.

All recognised the challenges when employing staff and admitted to having made mistakes in the past. They all felt that these experiences made them better employers and had better processes in place to deal with any issues. All had a firm understanding that they needed to remain at the front of the pack when attracting staff as there was a shortage of skilled people available. They all believed that while financial reward was important along with quality accommodation the biggest factor was to keep challenging and engaging their staff. This was not only of great importance to staff development and the financial performance of the businesses, but they also found it incredibly satisfying. They found that this was also another unforeseen reward that made them enjoy their own roles even more.

#### 7.5.2 First time employers.

These conversations were prompted with asking them to explain their employer journey to date. These are family farms that have either increased production, increased landholdings or have off farm commitments that required them to take on a staff member for the first time. The first thing they all commented on was the difficulties they had in letting someone else do the things they had always done themselves and accepting that different people may do things different ways. The other challenge they found was the inability to communicate well with the new staff member. After a long period of time just dealing with themselves, they found it hard to formalise all the information they had stored in their head. All felt there was value in having a checklist for themselves to use as a self-reflection tool which would then in turn make it simpler to formalise information to pass over to the employee. They all admitted to finding it hard to get a suitable applicant and felt relieved that they had eventually found one. Their next concern was that they keep them there. When asked if they would consider sharing the businesses financial information, the general consensus was that overtime once trust was built up it maybe an option. All agreed that they were at the start of their employer journey but felt having worked for people in the past gave them an insight into how to treat an employee

## 8 DISCUSSION.

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This research has presented as many questions as it has answered. The disappointing response to the Employers survey indicates to the author that while there is a lot of commentary around the lack of people being attracted into the industry and the lack of applicants for these on-farm positions, there is little consideration given to creating an attractive workplace counteract any of these issues. The finger continues to get pointed at the education system and other industry bodies. People will complete a survey if it is something they feel strongly about. The Employee survey confirms this with 118 respondents. It is this survey that delivers some disturbing results. The most concerning to the author is the number of employees that have considered leaving sheep and beef farming (Figure 23) and in particular farm managers at over 60%. Having stated that the biggest driver for these thoughts is lack of work-life balance. While these people are still in the sector it is incredibly challenging to find the ones that have already gone.

Why is it that these managers feel this way? If we refer back to the student survey and interviews, they all clearly state the understanding of their career path and the time it will take them to get there. If from the age of 20 these young people can achieve a senior management role, are they hitting a ceiling in their careers at an early age? Or is this more a fact of employers expecting their employees to work as they would themselves but without experiencing the capital gain they will over a period of time?

With the students and employees all having such a firm grip on their career path<sup>11</sup>, how do employers create an environment that prevents this sort of sentiment, and if work-life balance is the biggest driver to leave, possible burnout.

With farm ownership a goal for many, it needs to be portrayed how challenging this can be without large amounts of equity behind them. More education may need to be given around these areas, and the measuring stick of success need not be farm ownership, just some sort of positive investment so these people can secure their futures. Do you need to own a farm to be a good farmer? Perhaps you just need the correct environment to encourage your skills and then become a great farmer.

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<sup>11</sup> Primary ITO, Sheep, beef and deer – role descriptions. [www.primaryito.ac.nz](http://www.primaryito.ac.nz)

## 9 CONCLUSIONS.

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The conclusions reached from this research are many. There are also more questions that need to be asked around employer satisfaction in the workplace. With primary industry exports forecast to reach over \$45.6 billion, the meat and wool sector is the second largest contributor, forecast to provide over \$10 billion of export revenue to New Zealand.<sup>12</sup> Like any of the primary industries all production starts on the ground and it is on this ground people are needed to drive production. The meat and fibre production sector are no more immune to any of the people capability issues than others and with plenty of work being done into directing people towards agriculture we find the issues are plenty. There is evidence that there could be more promotion done at a secondary education level to guide people in the agricultural direction, whether it be at a production, processing or research and marketing level. In saying this there is promotion taking place by partnerships such as the Primary Industry Capability Alliance which through its GrowingNZ<sup>13</sup> is actively promoting these sectors and providing scholarships to those who qualify. While this research focuses on the meat and fibre production sector it is less at an education level and revolves around what is happening in the workforce itself.

The conclusions taken from the survey results and semi-structured interviews are as follows.

Those students and employees that have chosen to take up a career on a meat and fibre farm have clear understanding of the career path they are going to take and a firm time frame to achieve these goals. They also realise that there is a labour shortage and that they can be selective when considering employment.

All employees and future employees want to involve themselves in an exciting, dynamic and productive business. They want to be engaged and involved. This ironically is also what employers want their business to be and how they want their staff to behave but it seems that it is not always communicated well and gets lost somewhere in translation.

There appears to be an overwhelming feeling amongst farm staff, that they are overworked and under-rewarded. This most emphasised amongst farm managers. What are the reasons behind this? There are a few different possibilities. If the biggest driver for these managers considering leaving the sector is the gain of better work-life balance this eludes to them being overworked. This could be down to lack of good time management skills or perhaps they are understaffed. Using all the data attained from the surveys the conclusion made is that with such a defined pathway into management in such a short period of time, these managers are reaching a ceiling in their career at an early age and lose their engagement within the business they work for. This is not always recognised by the employer. More questions need to be asked in this area.

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<sup>12</sup> MPI, Situation and Outlook for the Primary Industries, March 2019

<sup>13</sup> GrowingNZ, [www.growingnz.org.nz](http://www.growingnz.org.nz)

Accommodation and salary are relatively unimportant at the early stages of these people's careers but as they grow into more senior management roles and possibly begin to have families a lot more emphasis is placed on them.

Workplace culture is defined differently by different individuals. It is important to understand that each employee is an individual and their needs responded to as required. All employers surveyed place a large emphasis on this, along with health and safety, when thinking of employee's needs.

## 10 RECOMMENDATIONS.

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Red meat and wool farmers have a lot of information provided to them by their industry bodies. Agronomy, animal health and succession planning are just some of them and while many of the above conclusions seem obvious, it seems apparent that at times farm business owners are entirely focused on their farm and business and may unintentionally lose track of the employees wants or needs.

### **Promote better employer education.**

While there is some useful information available from Beef & Lamb NZ along with Dairy NZ<sup>14</sup> which is poorly promoted and buried in a web site. The first recommendation from this research is that a newly developed template be designed that is user friendly and easily accessible to all employers. It is also suggested that it be promoted by industry bodies and pushed harder at field days. It is recognised by the author that there is some work being done around these issues by the Red Meat Profit Partnership but as it is not yet publicly available it cannot be used in this paper.

### **Provide better employee equity building education.**

If the goal of farm ownership is to become real for any of these people, they need to learn to build equity from an early start. It is also suggested that it be promoted for reasons other than farm ownership. This can just be in a form of investment designed to secure these peoples futures, as this can often be overlooked when working on farm with accommodation provided in a salary package.

### **Investigate stronger support networks.**

It seems of great necessity to follow up the employee survey and gain a better understanding into why such a high percentage of people consider leaving the meat and fibre production sector and into why they believe their work-life balance is not where they want it to be. With farm managers treating these properties as if they are like their own, perhaps a better support network needs to be provided for them, so they feel as adequately supported as farm owners are.

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<sup>14</sup> Beef and Lamb NZ, Dairy NZ – HR Toolkit, 2009

## 11 APPENDICES.

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Sheep and beef student survey raw data link.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-NL9GKGXZV/>

Sheep and beef employee survey raw data link.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-5Z3C8BXZV/>

Sheep and beef employer survey raw data link.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-WFZH2BXZV/>

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