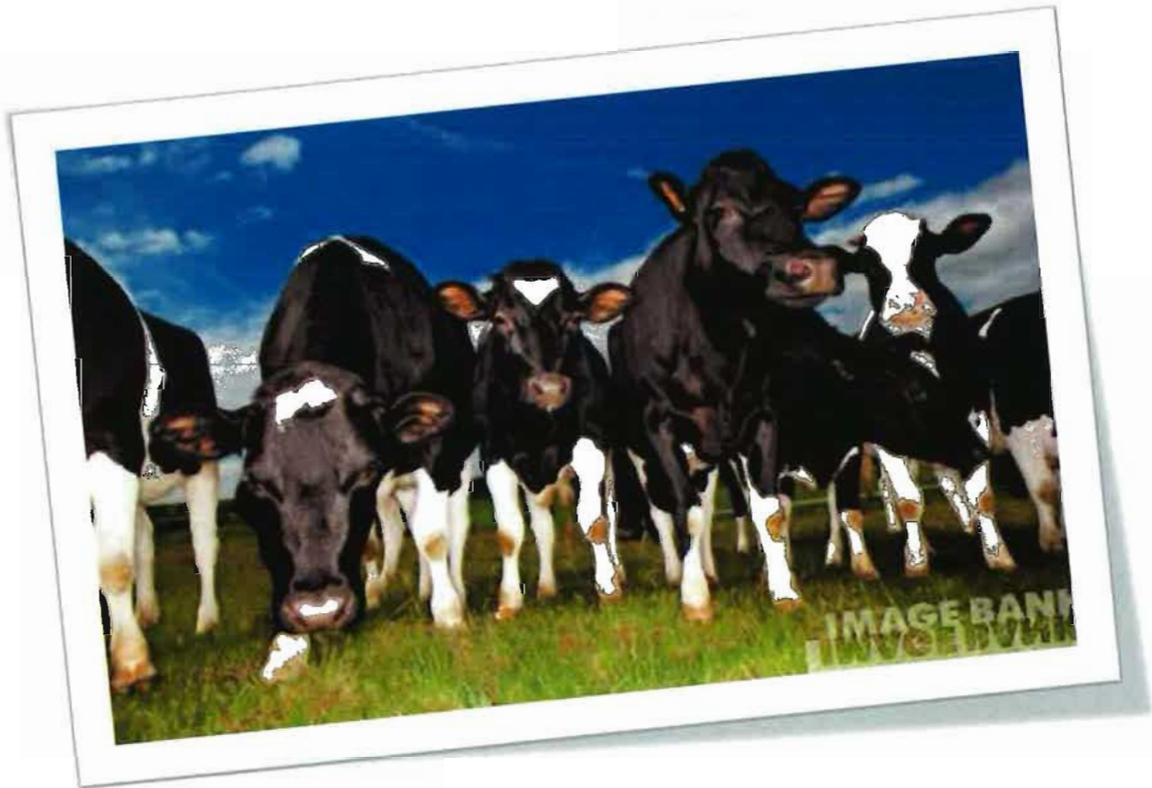


THE FUTURE OF PEOPLE CAPABILITY IN THE NEW ZEALAND AGRI-SECTOR

CASE STUDY: NEW ZEALAND YOUNG FARMERS



KELLOGGS RURAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME 2011

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INTRODUCTION

I feel very passionate about the perceived lack of awareness on the whole in the rural sector in developing the young people's interest and understanding of what the Agri-sector can offer as a career and lifestyle. Another concern is the lack of direction in many cases once people are on their career path within the Agri sector. Agriculture is the back bone of our economy and a huge part of our identity as New Zealanders.

After giving the subject some serious thought for some three or four months I thought what better way to try and make a change but to looking into a case study where an organisation is making head way and explore why it is gaining momentum.

The subject was like opening a can of worms so I have narrowed the topic to a case study of New Zealand Young farmers and touched on the initiatives that are being implemented currently and ones that can be looked at going forward to aid in developing people.

We are continuing to struggle to fill roles in agriculture based courses throughout some education providers nationally and by working on the "people" factor we should address the short falls we are experiencing.

PURPOSE

- 1) To demonstrate short falls or gaps in the Agri sector when it comes to human capability.
- 2) To demonstrate that there are avenues for members of young rural communities to up skill and gain accreditation while working within the Agri sector.
- 3) To prove and provide opportunities with industry to shorten the generational gap using the aid of young farmers initiatives.
- 4) Try to increase the awareness of the Agri sector to the next generation.

Membership and Historical Data

In the 1970's and 1980's Young Farmer's membership numbers in New Zealand were in the thousands. There is evidence that membership was as high as 8,000 in the mid-80s throughout New Zealand. In recent years with the change in farming types, technology and larger diversification, the numbers of those in farm employment (entry to owner) have diminished greatly. There is a large increase in farm size with the average dairy herd now at 322 from 160 cows in 1990.

This combined with an increase in corporate owned farming operations has led to the career pathway within farming changing from potential land ownership to a land management. With mobility in the industry increasing, an emphasis on building CVs and identified skill sets has improved.

Having said all of that, as a country becomes more affluent so does its citizens. With the move towards a free market economy under the 1984 Labour government, came removal of farm subsidies and with that came a change in the rural culture. No longer were farming families encouraging their sons and daughters into careers on the land but instead actively supporting young people into urban based careers – this was the tipping point for the rural/urban divide.

As much as the economic changes in farming encouraged farmers to work smarter it also reduced the younger under 25 rural population as they migrated to urban centres for education and employment opportunities and has continued to do so.

New Zealand Young Farmers began in 1932 as a mutual improvement society for young farmers aged 15 to 31. The Federation of Young Farmers Clubs (New Zealand) administered by the Ministry of Agriculture until the budget cuts as part of the economic reforms of late 1980s when Federated Farmers took over. Young Farmers became all about the Young Farmer Contest, in fact aside from the membership fees the Club organisation became dependant on the Contest funding to keep operating. By the early 2000s the membership numbers were so low that it consisted almost exclusively of those entering the Contest, which had maintained its reputation as New Zealand's premier rural event even without the Club structure supporting it. On the contrary, there is substantial evidence of strong Club numbers through the 1990s; however they were unpaid social members.

New Zealand Young Farmers has changed direction largely from 2004-2005, where it was in a bad state and it was either sink or swim to put it bluntly. With a break from the excising

management structure, better leadership and ownership by and from the members there was a decision made to go it alone with an independent board structure formed and it is what it is today.

In the past most New Zealanders have had some sort of tie with the agriculture industry but as numbers of farmers diminish greatly and there is an increase in farm size this urban rural divide is increasingly enviable as we move forward.

The core business of New Zealand Young Farmers has changed somewhat to what it was in the recent past. It used to be 15-31 year old members in a socially focused network, now New Zealand Young Farmers is a country-wide network of vibrant, young achievers focusing on education and up skilling in areas of leadership, governance and industry. With the introduction of Agri Kids and Teen Ag, age based groups for primary and secondary school students. The main aim for developing awareness within the schools is to promote rural/ agricultural primary sector career opportunities that are on offer and then feeding those young people into the core business unit of NZYF and beyond. Ultimately the purpose of NZYF is to build communities, support the agricultural industry and to aid in the up skilling of members.

Progression Pathway - four key Areas

Primary school/ Agri Kids NZ

- 8 to 13 age group
- 1200 members
- 700 competitors
- Curriculum alignment of activities
- Ag in Schools and Go Dairy

AgriKids NZ started out in 2006 as a fun, get involved contest modelled on the Young Farmer Contest. Primary and Intermediate aged students were encouraged to get involved through their schools. Run alongside the Young Farmer Contest Regional Finals (seven events across the country annually) with its own Grand Final at the Young Farmer Contest Grand Final, these events attracted 40 teams of three students each team arriving at 7.30am for a full morning of skill based modules, then top eight teams going to a race-off with the winning team going to the Grand Final.

With the uptake averaging 120 students at seven events the network grew rapidly. The introduction of the AgriKidsNZ newsletter, a eight page glossy, quarterly magazine featuring the successes of the participants in 2008 solidified AgriKids NZ presence in schools.

It was identified that the children in this age group are idealistic and straight forward about their career aspirations. If the desire to be a farmer can be retained in this age group the industry will grow. In 2010 as part of the Dairy NZ Primary Growth Partnership funding, AgriKidsNZ further developed a Primary School based education programme introducing agriculture and careers options and pathways. This project has grown to be a partnership with DairyNZ who are now developing the content while New Zealand Young Farmers will be responsible for delivering and promoting the on-line programme in schools. This is part of Dairy NZ's Go Dairy project.

Secondary School/Teen Ag

- 13 to 18 age group (basically secondary school age)
- 485 participants
- 30 Clubs nationally
- 280 contestants in get ahead programme
- 69 secondary schools active
- 760 students attending

Teen Ag is a programme continuing on from Agri kidsNZ, it has teams of two with the same principles and structure leading on to teams having their own final at the Grand final of the NZYF contest.

The winning team of two is then dually crowned the national title.

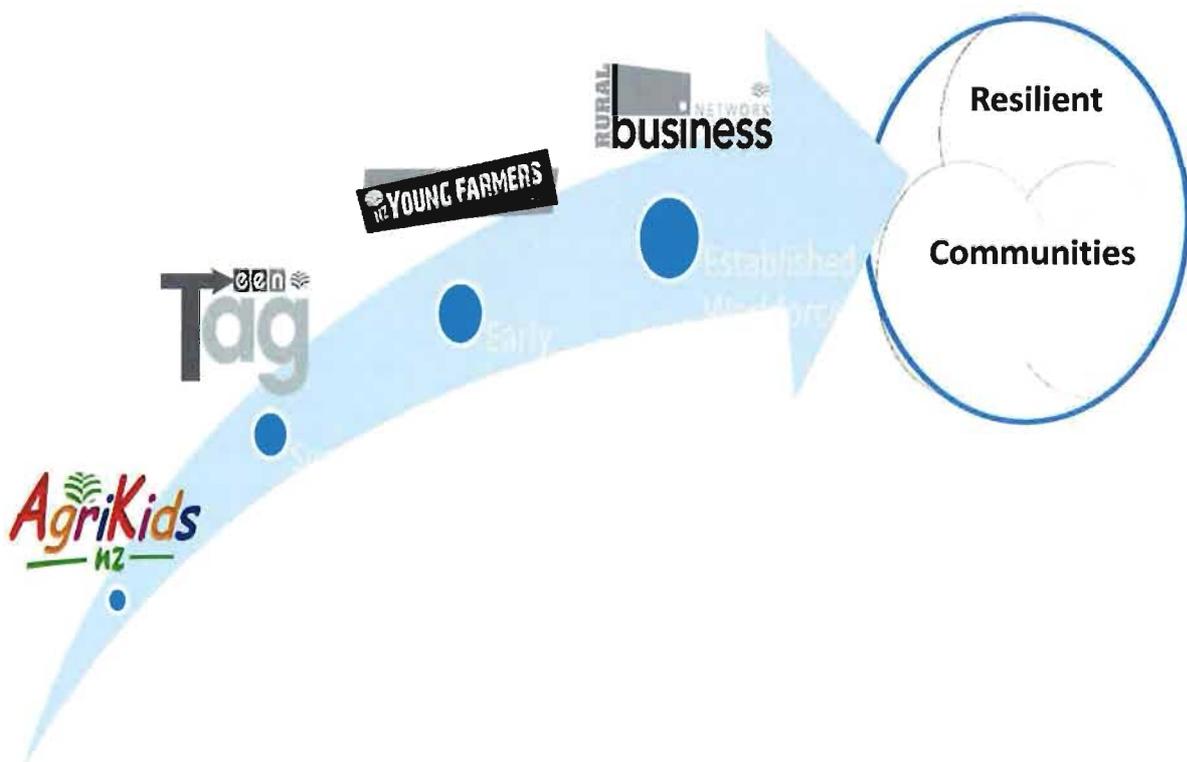
This programme further helps foster the aspirations of the youth to gain an ongoing interest in Agri sector within New Zealand.

Early workforce/NZ young farmers

- 15 to 31 age group
- 1700+ members
- 85 clubs
- Rural Mentor Programme
- Competitions – Fencing, Stock Judging, Debating, Shearing
- Leadership Growth Programme

Established Workforce/Rural business network

- 31 to 40+ age group
- Business capability development
- Rural mentor
- Professional land managers



FUTURE UP SKILLING NZYF

New Zealand Young Farmers organisational focus on building rural communities, strengthening the agricultural industry and up skilling its members. It is understood, culturally that Young Farmers provides good grounding in governance and leadership. While this is true to an extent, it is from members stepping to elected positions in Clubs, Districts and Regions that has provided this training rather than a deliberate attempt to develop skills. Many boards of agricultural organisations and companies are filled with those who have been members in the past. This is a reflection of the experiences and opportunities taken while members and of the community minded philosophy common among members and, as always an element of it's who you know.

While technology and the technical side of farming has moved forward rapidly improving efficiencies and output, the governance and leadership side of the Agri-Sector, in general has lagged behind urban based industries. Farming operations have moved slowly from family farms or one man operations to increasingly corporate structures, even small two man structures are now being encouraged to have advisory boards to help make strategic decision taking in all aspects of their operations, paddock to plate. Increased emphasis on the consumer's understanding of the food production process (not necessarily an educated or based in reality) needs to be taken into consideration - traceability, animal health, environmental responsibility and so on and how to make these things economically viable.

For want of a better explanation, the world has moved on to a bureaucratic process of benchmarking and buzz words with subjective meanings.

Because this is the way of the market, in a manner of speaking farmers are being forced, lead, regulated by their own industry and government, and encouraged to meet those expectations. It is part of how our society operates, in principle the majority rules.

To meet these expectations, NZYF with other industry advocates and organisations took a look at the pathway a young farmer could take to develop their business, governance and leadership skills. An audit was under taken to look into the formal training the industry offers. The educational pathway is clear. A number of academic and technical tertiary providers offer robust educational opportunities. The leadership pathway has gaps but what is on offer is well respected – Generate, Kellogg Rural Leaders, Nuffield and more recently the Escalator programme for women and the Landcorp leadership course. Most of the Farmer Network Groups offer their members leadership training such as Rural Women's "Growing Dynamic Leaders" short course and Federated Farmer's "Get Your Feet Wet" short course both based on educating members about connecting with government and leading communities.

But there are many gaps which are a reflection of the changing business environment but also of the changing expectations of the generations.

Alongside discussions about what is missing from career and leadership pathways for farmers was a discussion about progression. How does a farmer of any age recognise in himself or herself the value of their skills and experience? Skills learnt as part of daily and seasonal farming planning and tasks. How does that translate onto the CV? How is it measured? Education and courses are easily indescribable as achievements and outcomes are ring fenced.

NZYF chooses to take an inclusive approach to meeting industry needs. Young Farmers is a small organisation that is network and membership focused. While recognising member's needs in career, business, skills, governance and leadership areas there are people and organisations better qualified to build stepping stones for young farmers from across the industry, paid members, social members or not members at all of New Zealand Young Farmers. By partnering with these organisations, developing and delivering their concepts NZYF and partners create pathways for all farmers. Young Farmer's strength is that it has access to the young people in rural communities because it is led by elected members who are young people within rural communities within the industry.

Skills passport

This is still work in progress but will be a series of skills you pass as a member, for example members take part in a fencing competition, tractor safety course, ATV course, chemical handlers programme thus all being kept as a record of learning and as a result members would receive the related qualification gaining a passport of their skills for their C.V. It would tie in directly or interlock with PLM (professional land managers)

Professional land managers

This is currently a very active programme in America. It sits in a digital platform where a series of training benchmarks are reached to gain accreditation of a professional land manager certificate for your C.V

This could be: Ito training up to level 4, past generate leadership course, pasture plus through Dairy NZ, carried out Kellogg's rural leadership course etc. There will be a number of passes or units you need before you are awarded the title.

As far as benefits to the industry go it would then demonstrate what skills participants had and that they are of a suitable competence and as a result would be suitable for such industry positions. This would mainly sit at a senior level however.

Rural Mentoring

NZYF has identified that with a huge resource of skilled and knowledgeable farmers, farmers are sitting waiting to be invited to share their experiences with younger people in the industry. Sharing war stories if you like.

A formal mentoring process is to be implemented to align members with farmers/ industry personnel that are active in the desired area within the industry. This may be a first year vet student being mentored by a partner in a vet clinic. This will further help with education and increase the awareness of opportunities.

These initiatives will all very much be a collaborative primary industry approach with different education providers/industry organisations being responsible for different areas. As a result it will lift the bar and again up skill members/people within the rural based primary Agri sector.

CONCLUSION

After looking into the dramatic changes that have taken place in New Zealand agriculture in the last 10-15 year and the change of farm land use there are a number of major changes that need to take place.

Firstly with the increase in farm scale, technology and diversification throughout New Zealand farming systems we need to approach the people factor immediately or there are going to be some major constrains placed on New Zealand farming in years to come.

In the past it was very acceptable for people to have no formal education but today we need to be up skilling and reaching our potential as individuals within rural communities. With the uptake of a lot of corporate farming nationally this has led to a career pathway within farming with very good structure and opportunity and I think the overall skill set has increased as a result.

As leaders in the industry we need to be proactive in addressing the people factor, having systems in place to aid in up skilling farm staff, help with educational career days in the rural areas and further more get the city folk back in the rural communities with their gumboots on.

Researching at a local farm discussion group locally during phase 2 of my Kellogg's programme I found that one in four famers had grave concerns for the staff calibre coming through the industry looking into the future and there major headaches on farm after financials was staff.

After researching several industry training and education providers I found with the aid of initiatives such as young farmers is running currently with Agri kids at a primary school level and then feeding into Teen Ag at a secondary level this show very positive and comprehensive results looking forward in providing the right aspirations at a young age to hopefully begin the up skilling and awareness of agriculture within New Zealand. Although the programme is only in its early stages as it has only been available in the last few year in some schools this will increase as young farmers gain industry funding and traction nationally. 1200 members in 2011 with 700 competitors in fun farm based activities this has to be the correct breeding ground to change the short falls we currently are experiencing with youth in agriculture throughout New Zealand.

With the increase in young farmer membership as seen during my research we are gaining massive momentum as a rural based country looking forward. If we can change the mind set of youth today, help school students pick the right subjects at school, enrich the rural communities with educated staff we will set ourselves up as a rural based country to feed the worlds increased population in 2050!

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