

How Do We Grow Exports Without Growing People?

Agriculture is one of New Zealand's biggest economic drivers — and the government wants to double exports in the next ten years. But here's the uncomfortable truth: our current workforce is stretched. The pipeline of future talent simply isn't strong enough to meet what's coming, and we don't yet have the systems or strategy in place to grow and sustain the workforce we'll need.

As CEO of Growing Future Farmers — with a background in strategic change and transformation — I see this challenge every day.

We're missing a long-term, joined-up approach to strategic workforce planning for agriculture. One that's aligned to a shared vision, grounded in global trends, and responsive to the expectations of tomorrow's consumers and customers.

We need a connected ecosystem — not just to build the right capabilities for the future, but to foster the mindset and collaboration needed across the entire value chain.

There are papers. There are promising concepts. And many are doing their best to contribute, plug the gaps, and be part of the solution. But where is the strategic plan to help deliver maximum impact?

Right now, everyone is working hard and genuinely trying to be part of the solution — from government agencies to small organisations, industry bodies, and grassroots initiatives. But efforts are often disconnected, and the result is fragmentation. We're all drawing from the same limited pool of funding and resources, which means we're not optimising for impact or outcomes. Commercial players are being asked to support multiple initiatives — often without a clear or coordinated end game.

At the grassroots, it's our farmers — like our GFF Farm Trainers — who are leading the charge. They're doing it because they care. They're investing in their own futures, spending time and money to grow young people. But we can't ignore the weight this puts on them. We need a system that genuinely backs them.

And this isn't just about more education. We need to take a commercial, social, economic, innovation, and sustainability lens to people development — one that recognises the future of farming is changing fast.

So, I'm standing up to say: we need to do better.

We need a shared, strategic approach that puts people at the centre. One that brings the right voices around the table — and builds something that lasts. Who's with me?

Who's with me?

#GrowingFutureFarmers #FutureOfFarming #NZAg #VocationalTraining #PeopleMatter
#WorkforceStrategy #NZInc #BackingFarmers #AgCollaboration