



**New Zealand  
Asparagus  
Council**

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## October 2018 Update

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### **2018/19 Levy rate**

At the AGM in 2018 the motion was passed that the levy rate for the 2018/19 season be set at \$120 per planted hectare (excl. GST). Invoices for levy for the 2018/19 season have been sent out. This season we have asked for information on the production block including age and hectares. This is to ensure the information we have is up-to-date and help us to keep you informed. The invoices are due for payment by 30<sup>th</sup> November 2018. If you have any queries on the invoice please contact us.

## Change of guard



Mike Arnold was welcomed as Chair of the Council during the August AGM, taking over the reins from Tony Rickman. Mike, General Manager of Leaderbrand South Island, admits he's relatively new to growing asparagus, having grown it now for six years. But he's very familiar with growing being raised in Gisborne where he gained valuable experience in growing a wide range of crops from fresh vegetables for domestic supply, process vegetable crops supplied to Watties and Cedenco, peas, tomatoes, sweetcorn and export squash to Japan and Korea. Mike loves the challenges of growing and over time has built a large network throughout the industry.

Mike has embraced the challenge of stepping into the role of Chair and is keen to put a strategic plan in place building on the work started by Tony. Mike shared the foundation for this at the NZAC conference and at the next executive meeting early in 2019 the group will flesh out actions required.

Eve Williams, who has been Business Manager of NZAC over the past three years, is stepping down from the role to spend more time on her people capability role at Horticulture New Zealand. During her time working with the council Eve has learnt a lot about asparagus growing and can now spout off useful facts when out socially should the need arise.



Karen Orr will be taking over the role and is currently tag-teaming with Eve as she gets to know the ropes. Karen has been working at Horticulture New Zealand for one year as a Business Manager in a split role between working with fresh tomato growers and doing some project work for other product groups and HortNZ. She's in Wellington at the HortNZ office, which currently is home for a team of 26 staff.

Karen's off to Vietnam for a holiday with her family, back in mid-October, so Eve will continue to be your key contact over the next couple of weeks.

We'd like to thank Tony and Eve for all the great work they've done, especially during the past year where the commodity levy order for asparagus was renewed coming into force on 28 May 2018; this involved many hours work both Tony and Eve, along with the executive team. Having the new levy order in place for the next six years put NZAC in a strong position to progress actions for growers.

## NZAC strategy

During 2017 the executive identified four key areas of activity for NZAC to focus on. These are:

- Research and development
- Communication
- Asparagus voice
- Marketing and promotion

See the attached page to learn more about this. We're keen to get your feedback on this as we develop plans to formalise the strategy. Please contact any member of the executive or Karen to discuss any feedback you have on the direction NZAC should take.

### Season update

The season seems to have started earlier in all regions. The volumes haven't quite picked up as expected due to slightly cooler temperatures.

Retail demand has been a little slow but will pick up with advertised promotions now in effect.

The Canterbury Asparagus season looks likely to begin harvest around the first week in October.

After a very warm July and August, 3 degrees above average September has settled back down to what is more normal with a couple of cold snaps and hence the normal start date for harvest.

The main concern will be yield which is determined by last year's production of fern and carbohydrates which was only satisfactory.

Hawkes Bay is recovering from approximately 200mm of rain over a three day period, and it's been too wet for machinery in the paddock. Demand is steady, but the ground temperature is slow to improve due to the conditions.

In the south west North Island at the moment, the season has had a steady start and is on track to start one week earlier than historically, around 10 October. It was a warmer winter with fewer frosts. Temperatures have been relatively cool which has helped keep the volume manageable in the marketplace. Lower than normal soil moisture levels and poorer fern growth may result in a shorter harvest season if the dry summer forecast eventuates.

The challenge now is how best to clean up blocks of old fern- burning to clean up disease, plus best surface for pre emergence.

For Waikato, there has been a slightly later start to the season than last year. Currently blocks are still on a 1.5-2 day harvest cycle. Volumes are expected to lift daily with the higher temperatures. The quality is very good, with larger than expected spear diameters after last year's fern growth. Due to the much drier conditions, phytophthora has not been an issue. Harvest labour availability seems adequate at the moment – but time will tell!

## Promotion



NZAC joined vegetables.co.nz last year to increase the marketing and promotion of asparagus. The benefits from this include promotion of a growing asparagus video on YouTube; and being featured on the vegetables.co.nz facebook page which has an audience of over 16,000 people. Pip Duncan who works for vegetables.co.nz works closely with food writers, nutritionists, chefs and schools to promote fresh, New Zealand-grown vegetables.

Asparagus has featured already in recent vegetables.co.nz facebook posts, with a competition being run from 18th September to promote the asparagus growing video. To get people thinking about asparagus season two recipes have been posted:

<https://www.vegetables.co.nz/recipes/rustic-asparagus-rolls/>  
<https://www.vegetables.co.nz/recipes/asparagus-with-aioli/>

Last year vegetables.co.nz has partnered with the Heart Foundation and the Health Promotion Agency in a new project called 'Easy meals with vegetables'. The project started with providing resources (recipe cards and video) for people with limited budgets, cooking skills and equipment. It has since developed to include teaching skills and provide recipes for the Year 7 and 8 Cooking Curriculum Project. As part of the suite of recipe cards, the team are working on an A4 asparagus recipe card which once published will be available for download.

Vegetables.co.nz has a display table at the Foodwriters NZ conference being held at Villa Maria in Auckland during October. Mike Arnold will represent asparagus growers at the event and the 'Meet the Grower - asparagus video' will be playing as part of a loop of New Zealand growers' videos. Mike will have the opportunity to engage with key writers and bloggers attending, and NZAC will arrange for bunches of asparagus to be provided. This will help to keep asparagus front of mind with key influencers.

In addition, 5+aday are promoting asparagus as a Product of the Month in November. They will run a campaign on asparagus similar to what was done in 2017.



## NZ Grower October edition

An article on the NZAC AGM and Conference will be published in the October NZ Grower magazine. It runs through highlights of the day's events and what was covered. Make sure you have a read. If you don't receive the Grower and would like a copy of this edition, contact Karen or Eve to have one posted out to you.

## Dichlorvos Residue Assurance Programme (DRAP)

The DRAP registration process for 2018/19 has opened and information sent to those looking to export. If you haven't received the registration details please let us know asap. You cannot export to Japan without completing the registration.

MPI were not successful getting the programme removed at the end of last season however they plan to push hard with Japan's MHLW (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare) following this season for the removal of the DRAP programme. This is especially pertinent now that the NZ MRL for dichlorvos on asparagus is lower than Japan (0.01mg/kg vs Japan's 0.1 mg/kg) so it's especially important to meet the minimum sampling requirements this season to demonstrate our assurance around management of pesticide residues.

### **Social media**

We're looking into setting up a NZAC facebook page to help tell our story. We plan to use social media to promote asparagus when in season as healthy, convenient, and sustainable with the aim of getting more people buying and eating asparagus.

Critical to the success of the page is getting good photos and content from growers. Please start snapping and send photo's which show the work that goes into growing asparagus so we can start sharing these online. Email any content to [karen.orr@hortnz.co.nz](mailto:karen.orr@hortnz.co.nz).



### **Upcoming meetings**

We plan for the NZAC executive to meet as follows:

- Late January 2019 strategy session in Wellington
- Early May – timing and venue TBC
- NZAC conference & AGM to be held during HortNZ conference 31/7 - 2/8, Mystery Creek, Hamilton – all welcome! SAVE THE DATE.

**If you have any suggestions or feedback please contact Karen**

## New Zealand Asparagus Council Executive Members

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