



New Zealand

ASPARAGUS COUNCIL

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December 2019 Update

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Season update

Domestic Supply - From an Auckland market perspective, it was a slow start to the season and the window of oversupply was later and shorter than usual. Demand has been reasonably strong for most of the season. December quality has been quite seedy; we haven't seen this effect the demand.

Overall - sales across the country have continued to be reasonably buoyant with volumes still relatively tight. All advertised promos have now finished for the season. Quality has continued to be good with a lot more thinner spears appearing. Retail has slowed down in the last week on most products.

Waikato: Demand a little flat this week. Production still steady with the warm days/nights. Weed pressure growing. Pickers getting tired. Aiming for a solid finish before Christmas. Growers starting to think of closing and going on holiday.

South West North Island: Mangaweka - Hot/dry couple of weeks has seen a slowdown in production as expected for this time of year. Rain last couple of days and due in coming week will mean important fungicide programme is up to date on fern on young blocks. At this stage will finish picking most blocks by Christmas as per normal.

Levin – plants in amazing health, expect to pick until Christmas. December market has been a real challenge with very low demand.

Hawkes Bay: several blocks have either closed up or looking to do so soon, with picking tailing off for the season.

South Island: has been productive with good quality. This however has been hampered by two weather events, both of which caused loss of production to some of the areas for 5-10 days. The first was the hail event that was wide spread from Timaru to North Canterbury. This, of course, causing damage to spears rendering them un-marketable. This was followed closely by extreme windy conditions for days on end, in some cases not suitable to work in i.e. causing harvesting delays and again a loss of crop from bent, misshapen spears.

Currently the crops are back on track and quality is looking excellent with little to no seeding and good size spears. It is anticipated the crop will continue to yield for the duration of the season.

Have seen some Tag 2 grade in stores (of course getting left behind by customers).

Seasonal Labour has been sound and committed but moving south now to summer fruit crops, i.e. cherries and stone fruit.

North Island grower visits



Mike Arnold (NZAC Chair) and Karen Orr (Business Manager) visited growers in North Island growing regions during November. Thanks to all those growers who were able to attend; we greatly appreciated the time you took to meet with us.

The meetings provided a good opportunity to catch up with growers on their challenges and discuss opportunities for NZAC to prioritise.

Key feedback included:

- Looking at education opportunities for asparagus with supermarket and produce managers prior to the start of the season, including looking together at how we can add value through the chain and discussing the future of the industry. This may include development of an agreed industry quality standard.
- Updating asparagus health claims.
- Improving leverage from any promotions work with influencers, food writers and chefs to maximise the exposure of asparagus to consumers. Suggestions included reaching out to media such as radio stations; country calendar type television programs to tell grower stories; using recognised chefs to demonstrate best asparagus recipes along with produce and recipe giveaways.
- Consider options for the asparagus levy being valued on sales rather than planted hectare prior to the levy renewal in 2024.
- Look at a closed social media group for growers to share information in a secure forum which is kept between growers and helps them to stay up to date and in touch.
- Chemical registrations of herbicides for weed control.
- Looking at ways to tackle labour issues and ensure fair pay.
- Improving grower returns long term and making the industry sustainable through successful management of volume throughout the season.



Asparagus in the media

December's **NZ Grower** magazine featured a review on Waikato which included Boyd's Asparagus. Congratulations to the team at Boyd's for receiving Countdown's '**Produce Supplier of the Year**' award!

If you don't currently receive the magazine and would like to receive the monthly publication please contact [Karen](#) to arrange it.

Other stories:

<https://www.ruralnewsgroup.co.nz/rural-news/rural-general-news/on-farm-technology-impresses-teachers>

<https://www.freshplaza.com/article/9171307/mexico-leads-global-asparagus-exports/>

<https://www.freshplaza.com/article/9166465/australian-green-asparagus-export-to-china-entering-peak-season/>

<https://www.freshplaza.com/article/9170531/higher-level-of-automation-leads-to-better-asparagus-product-quality/>

Promotion

NEW WORLD Shop Promotions Discover Recipes Who we are

The asparagus season has sprung!
Our New Zealand-grown asparagus comes mainly from the flatlands of the Horowhenua, Waikato and Hawkes Bay. Each asparagus spear is hand-picked and delivered to your local New World, fresh every day.

Meet the growers
Meet Cam and Catherine from Tender Tips In Levin; they grow asparagus for New World. Cam's family has been growing asparagus since 1931 in the temperate climate and light coastal soils of the Horowhenua – it produces delicious asparagus with beautiful colour and taste! Cam knows it's time to harvest when a spear reaches just the right height.

Hand-picked fresh every day
Did you know? Asparagus grows as individual spears from bare soil, then when it's at just the right height, the asparagus is hand-picked spear by spear. With a very short season of just 100 days in the year, our growers pick fresh every day for New World customers to enjoy.

We've been enjoying the promotion both **Countdown** and **New World** have done this season on asparagus which has included tv and print coverage, along with billboard displays putting asparagus and growers in the limelight.

Grower Fresh Asparagus | Spring Fresh | Countdown

ASPARGUS FROM CAMBRIDGE
A GROWER FRESH STORY

countdown

"Of course, the Countdown buyers are fussy – you can't substitute good quality," Ash Boyd reckons. He should know, as he's the manager of Boyd's Asparagus in Cambridge, who supply us with those snap-fresh stems.

Here for a good time not a long time, asparagus has a notoriously short season – starting in September and tapering off by late December. We reckon that's all the more reason to get in while the eating's good!

Our Grower Fresh asparagus can be boiled in just four minutes, before going in Ash's words, "onto the plate and into the gob". If you're feeling a bit more creative though, asparagus is delicious chopped into a [Vegan Asparagus Frittata](#), or used to add bite to a [Asparagus and Feta Risotto](#).

It's also amazing grilled on a [Spicy Lamb, Spinach and Asparagus Pizza](#). No matter how you serve the asparagus, you won't find fresher than Countdown's Grower Fresh.

Fresh Produce Countdown
Asparagus Nz Bunch 250g
\$3.50 ea
Add To Trolley

During September to November, **5+ A Day** included asparagus in their fresh produce promotion, conducting a "5 ways with asparagus" campaign. The campaign encouraged consumption by showcasing the versatility, health benefits and convenience of asparagus. You can download their report from the campaign [HERE](#) which provides details about the coverage on the campaign and the fantastic recipes and feedback generated. Or contact [Karen](#) to get a copy of the report.



*** In addition, PR provider The Digital Café, has been running *How to Cook Asparagus* videos with advertisements on social media and google reaching 533,374 foodies, vegetable lovers and household shoppers in NZ an average of 5.53 times. The '**NZ Grown, In Season Asparagus Campaign**' finishes this week and we will share a report on it with growers in the new year.

NZAC are currently getting nutrition claims for New Zealand grown asparagus updated by Plant & Food Research and once this is available will update growers who may wish to use this information.

Asparagus Commodity Levy 2019 /20

Levy invoices for the 2019/20 season were sent out late September. The levy rate is \$120 per planted hectare (excl. GST). Along with the invoice we are asking for information on the production block including age and hectares, and number of people you employ to help with providing aggregated industry information and forecasting. The invoices were due for payment by 30th November 2019. Thanks to those growers who have paid their invoice and provided their information already, and a gentle reminder to those growers who haven't done this yet to please return the information as soon possible along with your levy payment. If you have any queries on the invoice please [contact us](#).

Biosecurity pledge

NZAC have supported a Business Biosecurity Pledge which was launched on 31 October 2019 by MPI.

The pledge is a living document available for any organisation in New Zealand who is willing to take a proactive approach to biosecurity risk management in their business operations to sign up to. The pledge also includes acknowledgement of supporting organisations who facilitate uptake of biosecurity in their sectors. Further information about the pledge can also be found on: <https://www.thisisus.nz/biosecuritybusinesspledge>



Currently a grower biosecurity manual is being developed by the vegetable product groups, including NZAC, and it is planned this will be provided to all growers by March-April 2020.

Upcoming meetings

The NZAC board had a teleconference/video meeting late November which covered the following areas:

- Feedback from grower visits.
- Feedback and update on asparagus promotions.
- Review of the NZAC business plan.
- Farm environment plans.
- Development of material for growers and retailers.
- Export market overview and considerations for export opportunities.

The next NZAC executive committee meeting will be held **25th February 2020** and we're looking at holding the annual AGM and conference in June 2020 in the sunny Hawkes Bay.

If you have any feedback and content suggestions for the newsletter or meetings please contact [Karen](#) or a member of the Executive team.

Merry Christmas

The executive team at NZAC would like to wish everyone all the best for the festive season. We hope you're able to enjoy a well deserved break. We thank you for your support and look forward to updating you on our plans and activities in the new year. Wishing you all the best for 2020!



New Zealand Asparagus Council Executive Members 2019/20

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