



April 2021 Update

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2020 Season wrap

It probably seems a long time ago, but here's a brief wrap up of last season based on regional grower feedback:

- Good growing season in South Island and Waikato with reasonably settled weather. Some flooding experienced in Hawkes Bay. SW North Island experienced low temperatures and a consequent drop in yield.
- Some labour issues experienced, particularly with workers not physically capable of doing harvesting work
- Pricing and volume in market very concerning; one grower quoted as saying it's the worst market conditions he's seen for 20 years!
- The need for good industry collaboration was noted by many as very important.

Autonomous asparagus harvester project

There was a good turn out to a grower meeting held by zoom on 23rd March to update growers on an opportunity to develop the autonomous asparagus harvester project to commercialisation. This project is being led by Robotics Plus, with funding support from Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI). In order for MPI to support this they are seeking the support of the industry.

The meeting covered Robotics Plus plan to develop a commercial harvesting robot under this four year project. Geoff Lewis spoke on the value this could potentially bring to the industry, and MPI explained their funding drivers.

NZAC are currently reviewing how best to progress this opportunity, given the lean times we've had over recent years growing asparagus. Next steps include sharing the full business case to growers who have confirmed interest in seeing the full details, development of an options paper for growers to consider on the funding side, and grower meetings. Once the options paper is available we will circulate this. Meantime if you would like to receive the full business case please contact [Karen](#).

Farm environment plans

Following the workshop we had on farm environment plans for asparagus growers in Taupo in August last year, we are providing two NZAC funded zoom follow up sessions to progress farm plans in preparation for audit.

We had the first sessions this week which covered mapping digitally. The next sessions are either 8am Tuesday 4th May or 7.30pm Wednesday 5th May, During this time we will continue with any assistance needed on mapping, and look at soils and steps required to prepare for audit.

If you would like to know more on these please contact [Karen](#).

Promotion

During the season, NZAC invested in promotion with both 5+ A Day and contracted a promotional plan with the same agency used in the 2019 season, Digital Café. They used our social media accounts on Facebook and Instagram to target household shoppers, healthy eaters, and foodies. The primary focus was now is the time to buy; "Asparagus are in season right now. Pick up a couple of bunches while they're good value."

Overall the 2020 campaign reached almost half a million people NZ wide, and almost doubled the 2019 campaign engagement. The digital campaign reached 431,996 people nearly 8 times throughout the campaign.

At the end of the campaign we caught up with the key contacts at the supermarkets to get their feedback on this work. General feedback was it was a good campaign given only the second season and will limited budget. Need for growers to get fair pricing was noted and there was a comment on some fragmentation and need for better cooperation in the market, with overall the season noted as "uncertain". Quality was generally good apart from some early season product. Overall there is a need to increase the appeal of asparagus as currently the customer base is heavily reliant on retirees, middle aged and older customers.

You can download the full report by clicking [HERE](#). We have previously provided a link to the 5+ A Day report but if you would like to receive it please contact [Karen](#).

NZAC AGM & Conference – Save the date

We have tentatively saved Friday 9th July 2021 as the date for NZAC 2021 AGM & Conference, which we plan to hold in Hawkes Bay. Planning is just getting underway and we will provide details in due course. Meantime if you have any suggestions for topics to cover please contact Karen or a member of the Executive.

Other conferences

The Horticulture conference this year will be held 5-6th August at Mystery Creek, Hamilton. The theme is Resilience & Recovery. For further information and to register go to: conferences.co.nz/hortnz2021

An RSE conference is also planned for 30th June – 1 July in Nelson at the Rutherford Hotel. Keep an eye on the HortNZ weekly newsletter for details on this once available.

Labour – funding for new apprentices

Funding is available for growers who have apprentices, are willing to take on apprentices, or are willing to employ people who need additional support or training to start a job. Below is information on the funding options available, or [click here](#) to view a summary from Work and Income.

Targeted Training and Apprenticeship Fund

This fund makes a range of training and apprenticeship programmes below degree level free for the proportion of training that occurs between 1 July 2020 to 31 December 2022. [Click here](#) for more information.

Apprenticeship Boost

To help keep apprentices in work, the Apprenticeship Boost supports first- and second-year apprentices for a year (including new apprentices).

Employers of first- and second-year apprentices who are in a Tertiary Education Commission approved New Zealand Apprenticeship, or a Managed Apprenticeship can apply for an Apprenticeship Boost through the Ministry of Social Development (MSD). [Click here](#) for more information.

Mana in Mahi

Mana in Mahi helps people kickstart a long-term career and gain a formal industry qualification. The initiative includes a wage subsidy for employers, funding for pre-employment training, ongoing access to pastoral care and incentive payments for participants.

From August 2020, support was extended from 12 to up to 24 months. The wage subsidy also increased: up to \$16,000 for a first-year participant and up to \$8,000 for a second-year participant. [Click here](#) for more information.

Flexi-wage

Flexi-wage is an employment programme that helps employees get the skills they need to meet a job's requirements. Support can include training and in-work support (such as pastoral care) as well as a wage contribution. The job must continue after the Flexi-wage has finished. [Click here](#) for more information.

News

Read more about Richard & Sam Hogg who grow a range of vegetables including asparagus near Fielding in April's NZ Grower (pg 68-70). They were also recently on country calendar: <https://www.tvnz.co.nz/.../country.../episodes/s2021-e5>

Aspara Pacific have shared this article on the asparagus seed harvest & Asparagus Virus 2 FYI: <https://www.freshplaza.com/article/9312351/virus-free-asparagus-seed-improves-grower-s-bottom-line/>

Other recent articles:

<https://www.freshplaza.com/article/9309938/how-the-new-zealand-agriculture-industry-is-preparing-to-enter-the-golden-age-of-robotics>

<https://www.hortidaily.com/article/9308711/french-photovoltaic-greenhouse-4-tons-hectare-of-asparagus-in-one-year/>

<https://www.freshplaza.com/article/9311499/serious-frost-damage-to-stone-fruit-and-green-asparagus/>

<https://www.freshplaza.com/article/9297651/overall-review-of-the-chinese-asparagus-market-in-2020-and-its-prospects-in-2021/?edition=5>

<https://www.hortidaily.com/article/9294344/what-is-new-for-asparagus-and-strawberries/>

New Zealand Asparagus Council Executive Members 2020/21

If you have any feedback or would like to contact either your District Representative, Chair or Business Manager, please find our contact details below:

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