



New Zealand

ASPARAGUS COUNCIL

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November 2021 Update

Contents

Season update.....	1
Change of contact.....	2
Robotic harvester project update.....	2
Variety trial programme.....	3
Nitrate best practice.....	3
Promotions.....	4
Other information & news.....	4-5
New Zealand Asparagus Council Executive Member contacts	6

Season update

Hawkes Bay - starting with a significant rainfall over several days, November has set up to be an interesting month. Highs in excess of 30 degrees followed a week later by several nights of less than 5oC have made for variable cropping and the cooler nights have meant lower yields but extremely good quality as there is almost no seed showing. Overall, yields are slightly up on last year to date and quality is on par.

South-West North Island – Mangaweka: reasonably settled weather for November with good quality. Some weed pressure now. Monitoring spear diameter and yields which will help determine close up dates between now and Christmas. Market improving with the reduction in area being picked.

Horowhenua: the past month has been a real mixed bag for the SWNI. We have had a few cold spells which put the handbrake on production for a few days. Rain has been coming at just the right times when things are starting to look dry. Early closed up blocks are starting to show signs of Stemo and will need to be sprayed within the next 10 days. Diameter had been holding really well but the crop has started to get thin in the past week or so.

Labour supply has been ok but would have likely been a challenge if we had been picking and packing everything. SWNI growers are looking forward to putting the 2021 season behind us.

Canterbury: Great weather for the season to date. Low rainfall, no wind, and consistent temperatures resulted in best quality with no pest or disease issues and has delivered good yields.

Labour supply good, working with locals, backpackers and RSE.



Good early returns, lower during peak and over supply period due to Auckland lockdown and no export options available, returns rising again now. Nothing that was to be expected considering the lack of marketing options. Some blocks shut up early so banking yield for next year therefore supply likely to be the same unless other options arise. Obviously this will reduce volume late this season.

Local growers supportive of Asparagus future project including variety trials, market research, artificial intelligence, and crop densities.

Domestic market - supply seems to have tidied up in the last 7-10 days with pricing returning to realistic levels. As a result retail price points have increased.

Product that is in most retailers seems to be a lot fresher than it has been in the previous month so has helped with repeat sales.

Change of Business Manager

In early December Karen is leaving NZAC and HortNZ to do a twelve month secondment at the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) in the Industry & Stakeholder Engagement team. The aim of this role is to help with the flow of information between Government and the horticulture industry, and she is one of three primary industry representatives being seconded to MPI, joining a representative each from the dairy and agriculture industries.

We will update details on Karen's replacement shortly but meantime please send any queries to: info@hortnz.co.nz.

Robotic Harvester Asparagus Future project update and levy/subscription

All asparagus growers were emailed an update on the 24th November on recent decisions made by the NZAC executive about support of the Robotic Harvester Project. Given the tough season we have proposed in-kind only support for the project and deferring of NZAC-led export work. If any financial contribution is considered in the future, it would be by grower agreement and be used for asparagus industry work towards building our brand story and export markets. If you have not received the update please let [us know](#).

As advised in the update, growers will not be required to pay the subscription of \$100 per planted hectare for the 2021 season. The levy for this season was set at \$200 per planted hectare at the 2021 AGM. As we are unable to change this now any additional levy collected above budget will be discussed at next year's AGM and form part of next year's levy rate vote. Funds raised by the levy will be used towards the operating costs and agreed activities of NZAC (as per the approved budget) which includes the variety trial programme, asparagus promotion, crop protection and environment management.

All growers have been sent an updated declaration and 'Buyer Created Invoice' (BCI) form for completion and return. Under the Commodity Levies (Asparagus) Order 2018, the final date for payment 28th February 2022. For any grower queries please contact info@hortnz.co.nz.

Variety trial evaluation - funding from MG Trust



We are thrilled to advise that the MG Marketing Charitable Trust have granted \$10,000 to NZAC for the development of the variety trial evaluation programme. This funding will be directed to establishing the trial methodology and data collection protocols to ensure we have a robust future-proofed system which enables testing of future varieties down the track. The set up of the methodology, protocols and Year 1 & 2 data analysis is being managed with Plant and Food Research. We would like to thank the MG Trust for their support which is greatly appreciated.

Nitrate Best Practice Project

As noted in the last newsletter, together with LandWISE we received funding to investigate best management practice for nitrogen in asparagus growing. The funding is from Our Land and Water, one of the National Science Challenges.

LandWISE and vegetable growers learned to use the Nitrate Quick Test and a Nutrient Budget template to improve management of nitrogen, with significantly reduced risk of leaching. The process has become a tool for demonstrated application of Best Practice. We don't have the base data to apply this to asparagus growing, and that is the gap this project aims to fill.

With Plant and Food Research and LandWISE, growers are collecting soil, root, spear and fern data. This helps us to understand how nitrogen moves between the soil, roots and crop through the year, so we can determine what Best Practice should be. Growers involved in the project are being provided with Nitrate Quick Test kits and shown how to collect samples and get their own measurements of available nitrogen.

We currently have four trials established and are determining the exact nitrogen comparisons each grower wishes to investigate. LandWISE intern Bram Paans is currently helping to collect second and third samplings for farms, so we are starting to accumulate data.

Other parts of the project include helping growers with on-farm trial skills and knowledge, enabling them to undertake additional trial work to resolve future issues as they are identified, and extending the survey of current grower practice to regions other than the Waikato.

From here on we will continue monitoring soil nitrogen as well as monitoring fern growth on our trial plots. Ideally next year we will monitor spear growth on the trial plots to assess responses to the different nitrogen treatments.

A huge thank you to all the growers involved with the trial sites and sampling process.



Bram Paans has just completed his three-year Bachelor of Horticultural Science at Massey University and he also took out the Zespri prize for excellence in horticulture.

Promotions



NZ Asparagus

Published by Karen Orr · November 26 at 7:38 AM · 🌐

Firing up the barbie this weekend? This easy BBQ side dish pairs perfectly with any grilled meat or pan-fried fish. Or add chickpeas and you've got a yummy vegetarian dish.

Grilled Eggplant and Asparagus with Pickled Onions, Tahini and Feta
Serves 2-3... See more



promotional work please [contact us](#).

We've been busy over the last two months posting asparagus titbits on the NZ Asparagus Facebook and Instagram pages. The regular recipes and serving suggestions posted, written by food writer Laura Bedwell, provide good looking mouth-watering content. Hopefully it's inspiring more people to try asparagus and love it as much as us!

We've reached 22,324 people on Facebook since the start of October, and 9,638 on Instagram, on a very modest ad spend of \$250 to date. Our audience includes good coverage in the 25-45 age group which we're targeting with an aim to convert younger people to buy asparagus. Current stats show our social media audience is around 68% female/32% male.

One of our most popular posts featured Colin Petterson, gaining 124 likes – thanks Colin, I hope that translated to people buying your asparagus! If you would like more information on the

Covid-19 business planning

Ahead of moving to the traffic light framework at 11.59pm on Thursday, December 2, it's timely to look at your business planning and preparing for Covid-19. There is now a checklist for growers on the [HortNZ Covid-19 webpage](#). This includes a downloadable PDF and Word doc version for growers to use.

Free testing for potential herbicide resistance

AgResearch is offering free testing of seed (or live plants) from plants suspected to be resistant to herbicides.

Information about collecting a sample and how to send it is included in the form that can be downloaded below. Samples need to contain dry mature seed and as much information as possible about where it comes from.

Herbicide resistance is emerging as a serious and growing threat to New Zealand's food production. AgResearch is carrying out the first systematic approach to surveying for herbicide-resistant weeds in crops with funding from the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment.

For more information, please email herbicide.resistance@agresearch.co.nz or [Chris Buddenhagen](#). Download the form by [clicking here](#).

News

Alec Boyd & Cam Lewis talk on the poor asparagus season:

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/ruralnews/audio/2018820116/midday-rural-news-for-11-november-2021>

And: <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/country/455501/asparagus-farmers-face-terrible-devastating-times-with-low-local-demand-no-exports>

Cam Lewis interview on The Country (fast forward to 8:00): <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/the-country/news/the-country-asparagus-edition/QIJZB5HKVVGJGS5JMFLM6WMRV7A/>

And Andrew Keaney from Boyds Asparagus on Newstalk ZB:

<https://www.spreaker.com/user/nzme/andrew-keaney-boyds-asparagus-ceo-on-iss>

NZAC Chair, Sam Rainey, is interviewed in this Rural News story:

<https://www.ruralnewsgroup.co.nz/hort-news/hort-general-news/the-valley-of-asparagus>

Asparagus is featuring regularly on Glenn Forsyth's Fruit & Vege Report on Radio NZ First Up including sharing cooking tips on 29th Oct: <https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/first-up/audio/2018818284/fruit-and-vege-report-with-glenn-forsyth>

Higher vegetable prices are not translating into an equally large bump in prices at the farm gate, farmers say: <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/farming/300448818/higher-vegetable-price-dont-mean-more-money-for-farmers>

And from overseas:

<https://www.freshplaza.com/article/9366961/steady-supplies-of-asparagus-continue-from-peru/>

<https://www.freshplaza.com/article/9375176/green-asparagus-and-tunnel-cultivation-are-trending/>

New Zealand Asparagus Council Executive Members 2021/22

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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