

2026 Investment Advice to TEC for the Dairy Industry

Muka Tangata is the Workforce Development Council (WDC) for the food and fibre sector. We work on ways to enhance vocational education and training (VET) to meet the needs of industry, iwi and hapū Māori, ākonga (learners), and kaimahi (workers), and support them to flourish.

Alongside our work on qualifications, standards, and quality assurance, we advise government, based on engagement with industry, on what qualifications they should support and fund. This takes the form of our annual Investment Advice to the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC). This focuses on the current set of qualifications (as TEC can only purchase programmes for existing qualifications).

This document sets out industry and workforce trends for the Dairy industry, as well as identified skills needs. We have used this information to determine how many places are needed for qualifications relevant to the Dairy industry.

Dairy Industry trends:

The industry remains critically important to the NZ economy and trade and is forecasting export growth. The industry is dealing with significant changes from regulation, environmental and technological changes. These all drive the need for new skills to be brought into the sector.

Dairy Workforce trends:

The workforce has experienced ongoing labour and skill shortage needs and has significant levels of seasonal variation (which affect how forecasts should be treated). The Dairy sector workforce as a whole is forecast to increase by at least 6% by 2032 with increases being particularly concentrated in higher skill role types that will require increased levels of training (MPI forecast).

The workforce currently has low levels of formal qualifications and would need a substantially higher than requested level of investment to reach industry benchmark parity.

The sector has very strong reliance on those on temporary & work visas making the industry vulnerable to changes in immigration trends and policy shifts.

Industry skill needs identified from engagement

Our industry engagement analysis and review of key industry documents has highlighted the following skill needs across all qualification levels:

- need to strengthen a core set of capabilities for workers (both already in the industry and new to the industry), including soil and pasture management, animal husbandry (including animal health and welfare), and milk quality, finance, best management practice, feed plans, fencing, and communication skills
- need for new workers to have a knowledge of farm systems and the importance of sustainable farming practices in a time of growing change
- leadership skills
- increased technical and management skills to improve productivity

Furthermore, the industry has reported an occupation gap for:

- Dairy farm management roles

Current qualifications and priorities

Below are three tables outlining qualifications and priorities. Where possible, each table outlines how these qualifications may fill skills needs, the scale of change we are seeking in our advice, the preferred mode of delivery, and the level of priority for this change.

Table 1: Dairy related qualifications and credentials

- We are currently planning a review of all the agriculture qualifications, but in the meantime are recommending increases across many of the current qualifications to address ongoing skill shortages as new qualifications may not be in place and industry will continue to have need for these skills.

Table 2: Pan-sector qualifications and credentials

- These qualifications provide skills that are relevant to a number of industries across our sector. We are unsure if Dairy learners are enrolling in these qualifications and welcome any insights from industry.

Table 3: Related qualifications or credentials in development (or planned for)

- To be offered in 2026 or earlier.

Mode

We have not been specific about mode at a qualification level. However, in general, we recommend a preference for workplace training as part of the mix of the provision across all of our industries. This could include both work-based training and campus-based learning that include a strong component of practical 'on job' experience in a workplace setting.

What are we looking for?

For these three tables, we are seeking feedback on the following:

- Are industry using these qualifications?
- What is the preferred mode of delivery? (e.g. workplace-based, extramural, etc.)
- Do you agree with our prioritisation or have any recommendations for qualifications where we have not given a level of priority (low, medium, high)?
- What sort of level change do you anticipate? How many more trained people do you need?

Table 1: Dairy related qualifications and credentials

Qualification or credential	What skills does this qualification provide	Scale of change you are seeking for 2026	Mode of delivery	Priority level (for this advice)
New Zealand Certificate in Agriculture (Level 3) [3869]	The purpose of the New Zealand Certificate in Agriculture (Level 3) is to provide pastoral livestock farming sectors with individuals who have the skills and knowledge to carry out a range of core tasks relevant to either dairy or meat and/or fibre farming (including the skills identified by industries).	15-20%		
New Zealand Certificate in Agriculture (Farming Systems) (Level 3) [2220]	The New Zealand Certificate in Agriculture (Farming Systems) meets these needs by providing graduates who have an understanding of the key inputs into farming systems, and the wider context of the pastoral farming industry in terms of environmentally and financially sustainable farming practices.	30%		
New Zealand Certificate in Land Based Sustainability Practices (Level 3) [2684]	The New Zealand Certificate in Land Based Sustainability Practices (Level 3) provides the skills and knowledge to actively contribute to the skills needed by industry to deal with climate change impacts and changing land use practices. These include environmental, conservation and land-based management practices to enhance sustainability. The qualification also includes a component around applying knowledge of environmental factors and sustainable practices.	30-35%		

New Zealand Certificate in Agriculture (Level 4) [Stranded] [2212]	The Level 4 Certificate in Agriculture provides the pastoral farming sector with individuals who have the skills and knowledge to take responsibility for the day-to-day operational management of a pastoral or arable farming production system (a leadership role). It is the qualification for herd managers in the dairy farming industry.	20-25%		High Priority
New Zealand Certificate in Sustainable Primary Production (Level 4) [2685]	The New Zealand Certificate in Sustainable Primary Production (Level 4) builds on the level 3 Land Based Sustainability Practices to provide the land based primary industries with individuals who have attained the skills and knowledge to develop and manage sustainable practices to comply with a recognised production standard. Current enrolments reflect a high percentage of Māori learners.	20-25%		High Priority
New Zealand Certificate in Primary Industry Production Management (Level 5) [Stranded] [2211]	The New Zealand Certificate in Primary Industry Production Management provides the industry-specific skills for those working in the higher-level roles identified in the MPI workforce forecasts and the skills identified by industries. It provides land-based industries with individuals who have the technical skills and knowledge to manage primary industry production systems to maximise productivity in either livestock or crop production.	20-25%		High Priority

Table 2: Pan-sector qualifications and credentials

Qualification or credential	What skills does this qualification provide	Scale of change you are seeking for 2026	Mode of delivery	Priority level (for this advice)
New Zealand Certificate in Primary Industry Skills (Level 2): Optional strand in Self-Management and Employability Skills [2218]	<p>The New Zealand Certificate in Primary Industry Skills is designed to meet the needs of industries by enabling workers to carry out practical tasks associated with an entry level role in a primary industry context; including using safe work practices and self-management skills. It is targeted at new or potential entrants into the primary sector including seasonal workers, career changers and those not yet engaged in education, employment or training.</p> <p>A repeated concern from across nearly all of our industries has been the need for a strong set of basic skills for workers in the food and fibre sector, especially for those who are not familiar with those work settings.</p> <p>From our engagement with the food and fibre sector, industries have particularly identified health and safety, self-management and 'employability' skills as key gaps in their workforces (in fact these form the most often cited skills gaps by industries), especially for new entrants.</p>	15%		High Priority
New Zealand Certificate in Primary Industry Operational Skills (Level 3): Optional strands in	The New Zealand Certificate in Primary Industry Operational Skills is one of the sector's central cross-sector qualifications designed to provide primary industry workplaces with individuals who can safely and effectively carry out operational	20-25%		High Priority

Specialist Equipment, and Infrastructure [2215]	<p>activities which involve vehicles, machinery and specialist equipment, and infrastructure.</p> <p>Industries from across our sector have identified the need to strengthen a core set of capabilities for workers, both those entering the industry and the existing workforce. In particular, industries want people who can (safely) operate vehicles, machinery, and other specialist equipment; and maintain infrastructure.</p>			
Emerging Leadership in People, Food and Fibre Industries (Micro-credential) (Level 4) [5044]	<p>The purpose of this micro-credential is to provide a formal credential to recognise the skills and knowledge attained by learners/ākonga as they enter leadership roles across a range of People, Food and Fibre industries in Aotearoa New Zealand. The micro-credential provides a training scaffold to support and upskill potential, new, or existing leaders, including seasonal workers and career changers, and workers in supporting industries, into leadership roles.</p>	New development		
New Zealand Diploma in Primary Industry Business Management (Level 5) [2221]	<p>The New Zealand Diploma in Primary Industry Management is a pan-sector qualification that builds financial management, business planning and general business decision-making skills. It also contains skills around leadership, including for staff employment and work allocation, and applying interpersonal and leadership skills to monitor staff performance, health, safety, and well-being requirements in a primary industry business. It enables a graduate to plan, implement and review the environmental sustainability requirements of a primary industry business.</p> <p>MPI workforce forecasting indicates the need for more skilled workers, with both technical and</p>	10-15%		High priority

	business/managerial skills needs rising. Most of our industries have also highlighted leadership as a pressing skills gap, alongside a need for business planning and financial management. Environmental sustainability - and the skills required to respond to a changing environment - is an emerging issue for the sector.			
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Table 3: Related qualifications or credentials in development (or planned for)				
Qualification or credential	What skills does this qualification provide	Scale of change you are seeking for 2026	Mode of delivery	Priority level (for this advice)
Entry Level Qualification Development Project: including stackable micro-credentials	We are planning to build flexible, sustainable, and enduring learning pathways for learners as they enter the primary industry sector.			
Agricultural Qualification Development Project: including stackable MCs	We are planning to review all Agriculture qualifications, micro credentials, and standards to build flexible, sustainable, and enduring learning pathways for learners, employers, and agriculture industries.			