

Huarākau Fruit



Key challenges

- Changing technology
- Reliance on manual labour
- Skills needs and qualification alignment
- Adverse weather events

Industry overview

- The **uptake of technology** is seen as a significant driver in mitigating labour shortages in the fruit industry.
- The Fruit industry is **highly seasonal**, and vulnerable to extreme weather events.
- It may take years for Kiwifruit and berry orchards to fully recover from 2023's **silt and flood devastation**, but strong export growth in recent years means the **industry is continuing to grow**.¹

Insights

Industry

- Industry revenue is set to strengthen in future years as **exports continue rising**.²
- The domestic price of fruit is on track to increase, **boosting profit margins** for fruit growers.³
- As the industry looks to **embrace more technology**, reports from industry have indicated that at least 20% of the areas planted in apples and pears are in robot-ready growing systems.⁴

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Workforce

- **Labour shortages** continue to provide challenging conditions for growers, which is compounded by the seasonality of the work.
- The industry is highly dependent on the **Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme** to fill labour shortages.
- The workforce of the Fruit industries is **ethnically diverse** and has the highest proportion of workers who identify as Pacific peoples across all Muka Tangata industries and is much higher than the national average.

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Learners and Providers

- The seasonality of the industry creates **time pressures** for learners undertaking qualifications.
- Because of the seasonal nature of employment and strong representation of a migrant workforce, there is a **need for more flexible delivery models** and short, targeted training programmes.
- The industry is advancing through **increased automation** and the existing **qualifications do not necessarily** align with these changes.

[Read more >](#)

1 - IBISWorld, 'Kiwifruit and Berry Growing in New Zealand', Industry Report (New Zealand: IBISWorld (access is by subscription only), August 2022)

2, 3 - IBISWorld, 'Apple, Citrus and Other Fruit and Nut Growing in New Zealand', Industry Report (New Zealand: IBISWorld (access is by subscription only), November 2021)

4 - Ministry for Primary Industries, 'Situation and Outlook for Primary Industries June 2024', (New Zealand: Ministry for Primary Industries, 2024)

Opportunities

Non-formal Learning

Non-formal learning is currently being used to support employees to move into leadership roles.

- The industry has identified leadership training as a key issue to support employees who are responsible for leading seasonal worker teams (especially in the Kiwifruit industry).
- Some of the existing leadership programmes are too long for the industry needs and extend beyond the seasonal bursts of work where leadership skills are more vital.

Qualifications

Existing qualifications do not always align with the skills required to do the work and attracting people with the right skills is a challenge.

- In some instances, people are gaining qualifications in skills that they have already learned on the job.
- More recognition of transferable skills might help to attract people and move people to and from other industries, ensuring a more continuous work stream in line with seasonal demands.

Diversity and Inclusion

Supporting a multi-cultural workforce is a focus of the Fruit industry.

- The Fruit industry has a diverse workforce that includes people of different cultural backgrounds, mainly Māori and Pacific peoples, people on the RSE scheme, and people on work and work holiday visas. All of these groups have different needs and different approaches might be required when it comes to supporting a culturally diverse workforce and understanding how to best cater for their needs.

The industry attracts a wide range of people from diverse backgrounds, including school leavers and people who may not have any previous training or work experience.

- Because there is no skills or experience required for entry level positions, employees come from all backgrounds, some with limited previous work experience and differing levels of academic qualifications and training.
- The current delivery and assessment model does not always meet the needs of all learners, who have varying levels of literacy, numeracy and other competencies.

Roadmap Actions

Action

What is the problem?

What are we doing about it?

Develop micro-credentials for targeted skills needs

The Fruit industry is strongly seasonal with time pressures for learners undertaking qualifications.

We will develop shorter, targeted training, in the form of micro-credentials, to address targeted skills needs. We are engaging with industry to identify priority areas, such as skills for using emerging technologies. This will form part of our Entry Level qualification development project.

Action

What is the problem?

What are we doing about it?

Better understand and influence informal and non-formal learning

Informal and non-formal learning plays a big role in skills acquisition for the Fruit industry. Formal education and training systems are not the only way in which people develop skills, with people gaining skills through work experience, informal and non-formal learning, and/or outside the country in which they work.

The fact that these skills are invisible magnifies the challenge of skills under-utilization and mismatch and can lead to learners repeating unnecessary training.

The Food and Fibre Centre of Vocational Excellence is undertaking research into non-formal and informal learning. Muka Tangata will work with stakeholders, including industry, providers and government, to identify and address barriers to recognising existing skills. Delivery and Assessment for the 21st Century is a joint project between Muka Tangata, Food and Fibre Centre of Vocational Excellence and Te Pūkenga.

Research pathways for learners gaining new skills

Some of the existing leadership programmes are too long for the industry needs and extend beyond the seasonal bursts of work where leadership skills are more vital.

In some instances, people are gaining qualifications in skills that they have already learned on the job. More recognition of transferable skills might help to attract people and move people to and from other industries, ensuring a more continuous work stream in line with seasonal demands.

Because entry-level roles tend to be categorised as low skilled, with no previous experience or qualifications required, the current delivery and assessment model does not always meet the needs of all learners, who have varying levels of literacy, numeracy and other competencies. More flexibility is needed to meet the diverse needs of learners and employers.

We will work with industry and learners to understand the range of pathways learners take to gain new skills on the job, including the support offered to undertake a qualification while working.

Investigate including cultural competency training in qualifications

The food and fibre workforce is diverse, and none more so than the Fruit industry. The ability to work constructively with a range of different cultures is a critical skill.

We will investigate if including cultural competency training in qualifications is a valuable addition to how we can build and enhance those skills. Muka Tangata is exploring the integration of cultural competency into qualifications, skill standards and micro credentials as part of our Agriculture qualification development project currently underway.

Action

What is the problem?

What are we doing about it?

Support appropriate delivery models

Industry has raised issues about having more flexible delivery that fits with the different parts of the industry and the seasonal calendar. Industries have indicated that they are looking for delivery that is flexible and that meets their industry's circumstances. In addition, we know that not all learners learn the same way.

Working with industry, learners, and providers, Muka Tangata is exploring and supporting different ways in which learning can meet the diverse needs of learners and employers. For example, meeting the needs of RSE workers. This recognises that the vast majority of learning in the sector is carried out on-job. It could include better combinations of on-job and 'classroom' learning; learning closer to where learners live and work; and/or online or computer-based learning. Delivery and Assessment for the 21st Century is a joint project between Muka Tangata, Food and Fibre Centre of Vocational Excellence and Te Pūkenga.

Support the use of more flexible assessment methods

The industry attracts a wide range of people from diverse backgrounds, including school leavers and people who may not have any previous training or work experience. Because entry-level roles tend to be categorised as low skilled, with no previous experience or qualifications required, the current delivery and assessment model does not always meet the needs of all learners, who have varying levels of literacy, numeracy and other competencies. For example, a text-based delivery and assessment model does not always suit learners who are time poor at work and after work, and the seasonal requirements of the work do not always align with programme delivery. More flexibility is needed to meet the diverse needs of learners and employers.

Muka Tangata is supporting providers to use assessment methods that are suitable to a wider range of learners. We are exploring how well assessment provisions can allow for other methods of presenting evidence that cater for different learning styles, such as videos, photographs and naturally occurring evidence. Delivery and Assessment for the 21st Century is a joint project between Muka Tangata, Food and Fibre Centre of Vocational Excellence and Te Pūkenga.

Support learners to succeed

We know that supporting the physical and emotional wellbeing of learners (pastoral care) is an important component of helping them to succeed.

Through our quality assurance processes we are increasing our focus on pastoral care as we look more holistically at providers' delivery and assessment. As part of our programme endorsement function, we will ensure appropriate support is available to learners. And we will continue to talk to providers about how they are implementing the Education (Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Learners) Code of Practice 2021.

Research has already identified good practice and successful models, but there still appears to be a gap in implementation. We will investigate what barriers may exist to the wider uptake and use of proven pastoral care approaches.

***Keep up to date with progress on our Workforce Development Plans**

This represents a snapshot in time of the workforce development plan. For the most up to date information, please visit: mukatangata.workforceskills.nz or [sign up to our mailing list](#) for updates.