

# Occupational Insights

## Why explore our occupations?

Exploring occupational data provides valuable information about roles that comprise our industries, the demographics of workers in occupations, as well as insights about how they work and how much they earn. We also get some visibility to smaller industries that are 'clumped' into an industry.

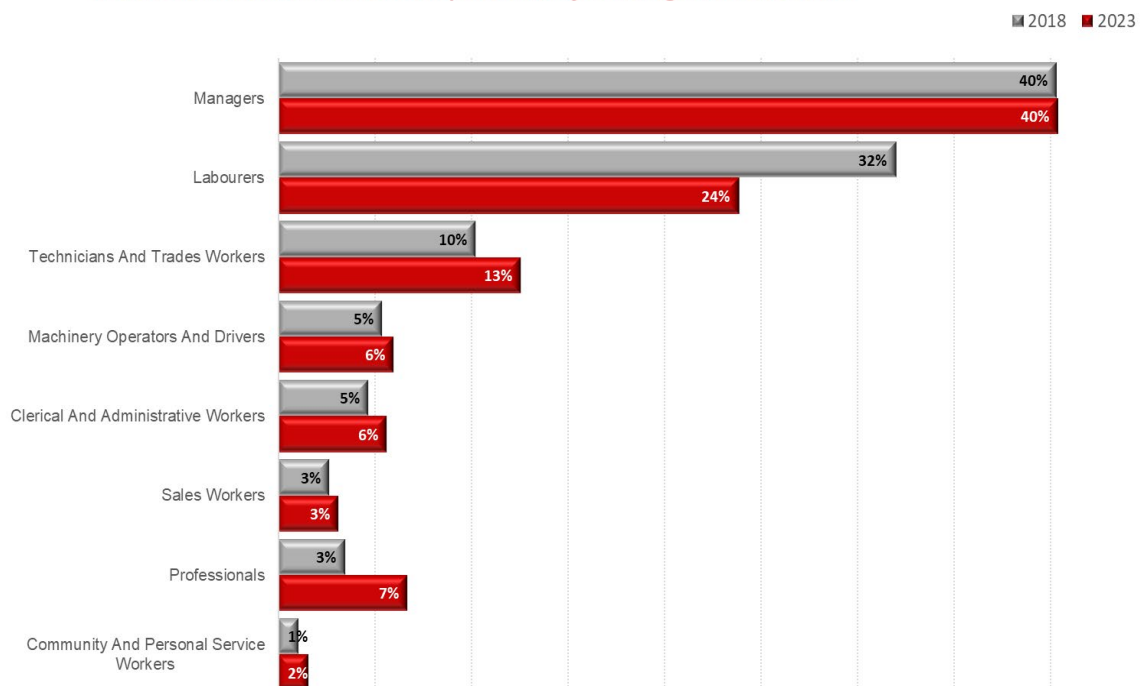
Monitoring trends in the occupations found in our industries is important for understanding how industries are evolving. Census data allows us to do this, however, it only provides a snapshot in time and is not seasonally adjusted.

## Our occupations

### Many types of occupations make up our food and fibre sector

- A wide range of occupations comprise our food and fibre sector, ranging from general occupations, such as Chief Executive or Managing Directors and Office Managers, to the those more specific to our sector, such as Dairy Farmers and Veterinary Nurses. In fact, there were over 300 occupations with at least 20 people working in them in Muka Tangata industries.
- The food and fibre sector in 2023 was comprised primarily of managers<sup>1</sup> (40%) and those that carry out physical work (24%). When compared to the 2018 census, the proportion of Labourers has fallen significantly but a higher proportion of the workforce are working as Technician and Trades Workers and Professionals.

#### The food and fibre workforce is comprised mainly of Manager and Labourers

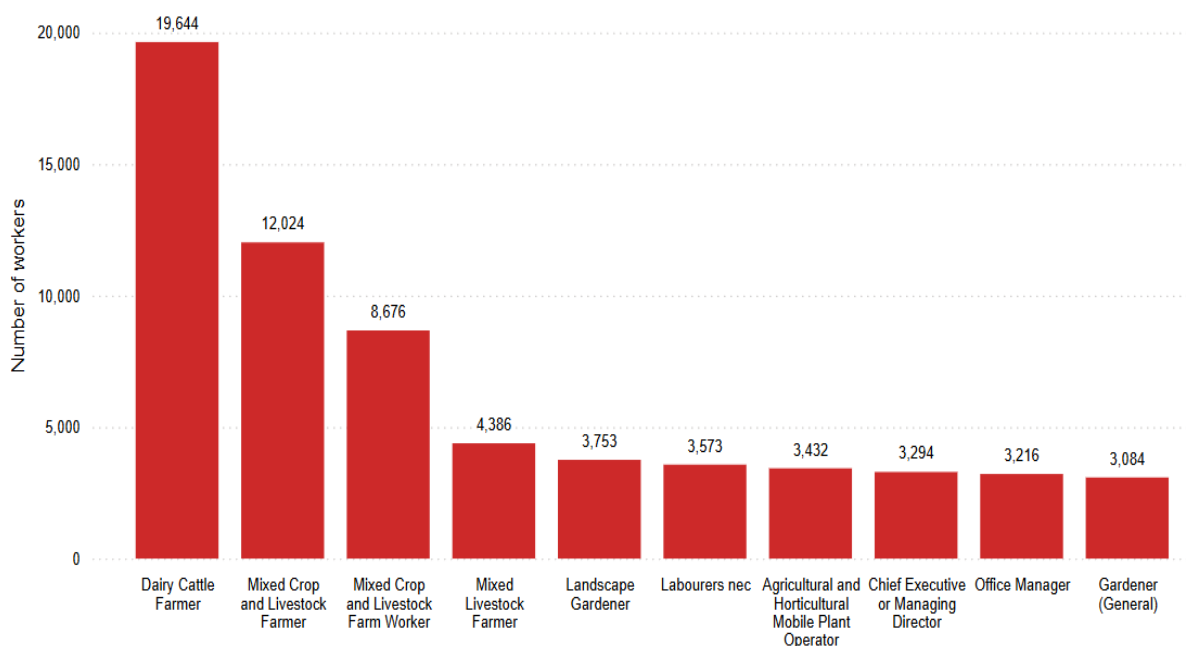


<sup>1</sup> As identified by the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO)

## Occupations that support our largest industry of dairy farming dominate the workforce

- Our largest single occupation by far is Dairy Cattle Farmer, which is expected given the size of the dairy industry. The second and third most common occupations are Mixed Crop and Livestock Farmer and Farm Workers, both of which are crucial roles not only in the dairy industry but also in sheep and beef cattle farming.

Number of workers in the top 10 occupations present within all Muka Tangata industry groups



## The distribution of occupations reflects industry specificity and employment practices

- Occupations highly specific to an industry are mainly found in that industry, e.g. most Forestry Workers are found within the Forestry industry group. However, they can be found in other industries depending on the primary business activity of the employer.
- Less industry-specific roles or those involving contracted services can be spread across multiple industry groups or found under Support Services. Roles, such as Office Manager, are found in most of our industries and those generally undertaken by contractors, such as Agricultural and Horticultural Mobile Plant Operator, are mainly found in Support Services which captures services that support the wider food and fibre sector.
- Many occupations common to our industries can also be found in industries outside of Muka Tangata. For example, around a third of Agricultural and Horticultural Mobile Plant Operators work in jobs such as mowing (using tractors) lawns or berms and are employed by business entities or organisations such as councils or road maintenance contractors.

## Our changing occupations

- One of the most significant changes within our industries is for Fruit or Nut Farm Workers, where numbers more than doubled between 2006 and 2023, with further increases forecasted<sup>2</sup>, especially for Pacific peoples. This aligns with the regular increase by Immigration NZ to the annual cap on Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) workers driven by their importance to the fruit workforce.
- Within our largest industry group, Dairy Farming, there were significant increases in the number of Dairy Cattle Farm Workers and Dairy Cattle Farmers between 2006 and 2018 as the industry's GDP grew. While the number of those working in these occupations fell in 2023, forecasting predicts they will continue to increase at a moderate rate until 2027 as the contribution to GDP from Dairy Farming continues to increase.

## Who works in these occupations?

Due to the very high number of workers in our top three occupations - Dairy Cattle Farm Worker, Mixed Crop and Livestock Farm Worker and Mixed Crop and Livestock Farmer - we can see these consistently represented across various demographic categories, including women, Māori, and Pacific peoples.

There are, however, some notable differences in the most common occupations across different demographic groups, and the composition of specific occupations can also vary significantly based on gender, ethnicity, and age.

### There are distinct gender disparities in many occupations

- Women make up nearly a third<sup>3</sup> of our workforce. The top occupations for women are Dairy Cattle Farmer, Mixed Crop and Livestock Farm Worker, and Office Manager. However, some occupations, such as Veterinary Nurse and Office Manager, are comprised almost entirely of women.
- Men tend to be more prevalent in physically demanding and operational occupations, such as Agricultural and Horticultural Mobile Plant Operator, Landscape Gardener, and Forestry Worker. Women are significantly underrepresented in these occupations.

### Māori and Pacific peoples are well represented in farming, fruit and forestry industries occupations

- Mixed Crop and Livestock Farm Worker, Dairy Cattle Farmer, Forestry Worker, and Fruit and Nut Worker are some of the most common occupations for Māori.
- Māori are also strongly represented in the roles of Forestry Worker, Shearer, Wool Handler, and Sheep Farm Worker — with around 40% of Shearers identifying as Māori.
- Among Pacific peoples, the most common occupations are Fruit or Nut Farm Worker and Fruit or Nut Picker.

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<sup>2</sup> GDP and Occupation Forecasting tool [GDP and Occupation Forecasting tool » Workforce Development Council](#)

<sup>3</sup> This is roughly the same as for the IDI workforce data (35%) [Workforce » Workforce Development Council \(workforceskills.nz\)](#).



- In 2023, Pacific peoples made up over a third of all workers in Fruit and Nut Picking roles. Between 2006 and 2023, the number of Pacific peoples in these occupations tripled, reflecting the growth in RSE workers coming to New Zealand.

**Younger workers tend to be better represented in physical occupations, whereas a greater proportion of managerial roles are held by older workers**

- Younger workers are better represented in physical occupations, such as Arborist and Forestry Worker, as well as across farm worker roles. There has been a significant increase in the number of younger Sheep Farm Workers between 2006 and 2023, with nearly half of all workers aged under 25.
- Older workers tend to be better represented in managerial roles, such as farmers, growers, and chief executives or managing directors. For workers aged 65 and over, there is a return to practical but less physically demanding roles such as Agricultural and Horticultural Mobile Plant Operator.
- There is an ageing of the workforce within some occupations, particularly amongst farmers and growers which tend to have a higher proportion of owner operators. For example, the number of Mixed Crop and Livestock Farmers aged 65 and over more than doubled between 2006 and 2023, with three quarters of all workers aged 45 and over.

## The nature of occupations

Across the 90+ occupations most relevant to Muka Tangata industries, there are notable trends in how people work, the level of qualifications held, and income. These trends reveal differences not only in the nature of the work but also in who is doing the work, with distinct demographic patterns by age, gender, and ethnicity. Over time, we also see trends in the dynamics of workforce composition, qualifications, and income reflecting broader changes.

## Overall trends in qualifications, employment, and income across our occupations

**Workers are becoming more qualified**

- The proportion of workers without a formal qualification has nearly halved since 2006 (from 30% in 2006 to 17% in 2023) and the proportion of workers holding a Level 7+ qualification has doubled (from 10% in 2006 to 21% in 2023).
- Some occupations have seen a significant increase in workers holding qualifications, which in part has been driven by health and safety requirements. For example, the proportion of Forestry Workers, Logging Assistant and Tree Fallers holding Level 4 forestry qualifications has doubled since 2006. Arborists have also seen a significant increase, mainly as a direct result of council's contracting only qualified arborists (i.e. those with at least a Level 4 arboriculture qualification).
- In our largest industry, Dairy Farming, the proportion of Dairy Farmers holding a Level 4 or higher qualification has steadily increased from 27% in 2006 to 40% in 2023.
- There has been a significant increase in workers in lower skilled occupations holding a formal qualification. For example, only around a quarter (24%) of Fruit and Nut Farm Workers held no formal qualification in 2023 compared to 39% in 2006. Similarly, the proportion of Dairy Cattle Farm Workers holding no formal qualification halved between



2006 to 2023 to 17%, which corresponded with a doubling of the proportion of workers holding a Level 3 certificate between 2006 and 2018 to 18%.

### Trends in hours worked depends on the occupation and industry

- The proportion of part-time workers overall has remained relatively stable between 2006 and 2023, with around one fifth of the workforce working part-time (<30 hours per week). However, some occupations have a high proportion of part-time workers. For example, half of all Gardeners (General) and Kennel Hands work 30 hours or less.
- Some occupations tend to have a high proportion of workers who work more than 40 hours per week, particularly farmers, growers and those working in logging. For example, two thirds of Dairy Cattle Farmers and Logging Assistants work more than 40 hours per week, which has remained consistent since 2006.
- Overall, there has been a decrease in the proportion of people working over 50 hours per week between 2006 and 2023. For Dairy Cattle Farm Workers this was significant, with the proportion halving over this time to 22%, with no reduction in their annual average personal income.

### We are seeing an increase in the number of employees, and unpaid family members continue to play an important role in our workforce

- Most (60%) workers in the 90+ occupations are employees, which has increased from around half in 2006. However, this can vary between occupations. For example, over half of all Beef Cattle Farmers, Dairy Cattle Farmers and Mixed Cattle and Sheep Farmers are either self-employed workers or an employer, reflecting the owner-operator nature of these roles.
- Unpaid family members play a vital role in the functioning of our food and fibre industries, making up around 8% of workers in the 90+ occupations—well above the national average of 1%. The proportion is even higher for some farmers, likely reflecting the involvement of spouses or partners in owner-operated farms. Around on quarter of all Beef Cattle Farmers reported being unpaid family members, followed closely by Sheep Farmers and Mixed Crop and Livestock Farmers.

### Average annual income varies between occupations, with some experiencing significant changes

- The average self-reported annual personal income (adjusted for inflation) across many occupations has generally remained relatively stable or increased slightly since 2006. However, farmers tended to experience a drop in their average annual personal income between 2018 and 2023, despite similar average weekly hours worked. In contrast, Arborists have had a significant increase in both their average annual personal income and the number of hours worked per week over this period.
- Within our largest industry, Dairy Farming, around a third of workers have an annual reported income of more than \$60,000. The average personal income (inflation adjusted) for Dairy Cattle Farmers had steadily decreased since 2013 to around \$63,000 in 2023. However, with half of all farmers either self-employed or an employer, income will be influenced by business profitability. However, the average reported personal income (inflation adjusted) for Dairy Cattle Farm Workers, has fluctuated slightly since 2006, which has reflected in part, similar trends in the proportion who work part-time, and the average hours worked per week.
- The Fruit and Vegetable industry groups have the highest proportion of low-income earners, with around one third of all workers reporting earning a personal income of



\$20,000 or less. In part, this reflects the part-time and seasonal nature of occupations in this industry, where around a quarter or more of Fruit and Nut Pickers and Fruit and Vegetable Packers work part-time.

- The Forestry industry group has the highest proportion (40%) of workers reporting earning over \$60,000, especially Production Managers (Forestry), Logging Assistants and Logging Plant Operators, as well as Truck Drivers. Very few worked part-time and on average worked more than 40 hours per week, with Logging Assistants and Logging Plant Operators working more than 45 hours per week overall.

### Vocational education and training could help unlock the potential for everyone

There are likely to be many reasons for the apparent disparities among some demographic groups in the occupations they hold and how they work in them, the highest qualification held, and their annual personal income levels. This presents our industries and the vocational and educational training sector with the challenge of creating opportunities to ensure that current and potential workers have the opportunity and ability to hold higher-skilled occupations if they choose.

Muka Tangata is working alongside of our industries to develop qualifications that provide more flexibility and are fit for purpose, e.g. replacing some qualifications with shorter and more targeted micro-credentials, which maybe more attractive to workers in seasonal or part-time work, and those not wishing to commit to long-term study.

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