

23 September 2021

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Primary Production Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

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RURAL WOMEN NEW ZEALAND (INC) SUBMISSION

Inquiry into the future of the workforce needs in the primary industries of New Zealand

Rural Women New Zealand welcomes the opportunity to submit our thoughts on the above inquiry. We are surveying our Members and the responses to date have given us indicative feedback. Given we are still receiving feedback, we would like the opportunity to update the Select Committee with an oral submission at a later date.

General Comments:

- RWNZ has been supporting the food and fibre industry since 1925 and welcome this opportunity to provide our thoughts on issues about the future of workforce needs in the growing food and fibre industries, and what they will look like in the short, medium and long-term future, as we continue to innovate and develop new technologies.
- Some of the future workforce issues can be determined by current issues and our indicative results from the survey are that the three top challenges which currently have a negative impact on employment in rural Aotearoa New Zealand are: working conditions, hours of work and the urban/rural divide. Pay/income, low perception of rural New Zealand, and distance from town/school/health services are a very tight follow.
- Other factors which have a significant impact on food and fibre employment were the lack of support, quality of candidates, quality of employers, distance from family, and the type of work offered and available.
- Existing issues in the workforce are exacerbated by current immigration settings and gaps in the worker pipeline caused by the inability to use migrant workers.
- Short term solutions are based around the need for the positive promotion of the benefits of living and working rurally.
- Women were the most adversely impacted by the covid19 pandemic in regards to their employment, among other things, and there is a general indicative understanding from the respondents to our survey that there is an opportunity to have a positive impact on the food and fibre workforce by increasing the number of women in it. However, the industry needs to be made more attractive by: flexible hours for those with young children, provision of child care, raising hourly rates, supplying the gear required, support for those that are feeling isolated, pay equity, EEO policies, change in attitudes (some still see women and girls

as liabilities), and removing gender bias. Women need to be treated differently - more positively - in the media, by rural service organisations and professionals and by their rural peers to overcome the generational and gender prejudices that still exist.

Recommendations:

1. Identify good working conditions in each part of the food and fibre industry and promote the use of these so that workers coming into the industry are aware of what awaits them and employers understand good employment practice including good employee health and wellbeing
2. Facilitate a social provision ecosystem in rural New Zealand that encompasses child care, early childhood education, maternity care, work and education opportunities for family members, access to health and well-being support, decent housing, good quality digital support, and support networks for family members.
3. Invest in education programmes for New Zealanders which encourage young people to consider opportunities in rural New Zealand, equip school career advisors and/or counsellors with the information they need to have informed discussions with all school leavers to ensure they understand the possibilities of a career in the food and fibre sector, and include apprenticeship training along the lines of the current trade training for school leavers.
4. Fund and resource the improvement of internet connections so that the use of innovative technology is available to all food and fibre producers, their families and their employees.
5. We strongly urge immediate consideration be given to a programme which improves the perception of rural New Zealand and reducing the urban/rural divide including:
 - a. Promotion of the food and fibre industry in a positive light through schools, media and other forums via media outlets, politicians and other commentators who speak in a positive manner about the food and fibre industry. Whilst understanding that there are a few who fall behind expectation, the food and fibre industry is full of examples of good behaviour and career opportunities.
 - b. Consider the provision of holistic live, work and play train-to-work programmes which also link jobs and training to research and new technology.
 - c. Increase interaction between town and country through programmes and projects that increase understanding so that urban New Zealanders can cross the divide into rural New Zealand and vice versa.
6. Understand that innovations for the long term sustainability of the food and fibre workforce include youth and women regardless of any growth in new technology and automation.
7. Lead a turnaround from the current low perception of rural New Zealand alongside research into new technology, the use of automation in some roles, increasing the number of and supporting women in rural New Zealand, and encouraging more youth into rural career opportunities.
8. Facilitate programmes for increasing the number of women in the food and fibre paid workforce.

About RWNZ:

9. Rural Women New Zealand (RWNZ) is a not-for-profit, member-based organisation that reaches into all rural communities and has an authoritative voice on rural environment, health, education, technology, business and social issues.
10. RWNZ strives to ensure that all rural residents, workers and families have equitable access to services, inequalities are addressed by Government, and the wellbeing of rural communities is considered from the beginning of all policy and legislative development.

11. RWNZ is affiliated to the Associated Country Women of the World and as such upholds all United Nations, ILO, FAO and WHO conventions and outcome statements as they relate to women and rural women in particular.
12. We would like to draw your attention to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and in particular Goal 5, Gender Equality, Goal 8, Decent Work and Economic Growth, and Goal 10, Reduced Inequalities, for your deliberations on this inquiry.

Nāku noa, nā



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