

## KELLY HACKETT – KEEN YOUNG GROWER



When Kelly Hackett returned from an OE in 2010, she thought she'd 'help out the old man' on her parents' Whangarei kiwifruit orchard. With a double degree in Physical Education and Business, a kiwifruit career wasn't the last thing on her mind – though it was fairly close.

"I enjoyed it so much, I've been here ever since and haven't looked back," Kelly admits.

New Zealand kiwifruit growers aren't typically known for the fresh faces, with the average industry age around 65.

Ambitious primary industries growth targets, driven by MPI's goal of doubling export revenues by 2025, means that one of the big industry challenges is to attract, train and retain young talented people.

So what was the secret mix which pulled Kelly in?

It's a mixture of things including working in the outdoors, networking, opportunities to learn and challenges. When the 32-year-old started working on the orchard, it was all Hayward, with a small Green14 trial site. Kelly enjoyed the new variety trial and she and her parents John and Nesta also grew Gold9 and Gold3 crops, seeing it as a chance to make the orchard more profitable and get stuck into an interesting project. She was hooked.

"The challenging nature of the kiwifruit industry keeps me motivated and interested. My favourite part of the season is spring because it brings lots of challenges and you have to be right on the ball. Every spring is different so you have to be ready to adapt at a moment's notice,

depending on weather conditions," says Kelly, adding wryly she might not feel the same if asked during spring.

She also enjoys all the business relationships she has established with different people. "There is quite a community of people. From Zespri, product suppliers, contractors and neighbours – we all chat to each other about things and share information. It's a collaborative industry."

Mainly, however, she loves to be outdoors. When she's not working on the orchard, Kelly enjoys fishing, throwing a ball about and diving - mainly with a catch bag but she also enjoys the scenery. And she also loves to grow. As well as kiwifruit, the family operation grows tamarillos and avocados. This requires an orchard-wide pest programme and Kelly tries to integrate sprays for all crops to stop pests jumping from one crop to another.

"It takes a lot of planning and we are careful about which sprays we use and the timing of application – for example, whether we can use certain sprays during fruiting," says Kelly. While she loves being on the orchard, Kelly also does the administration which John doesn't enjoy as much. This includes keeping up-to-date with the latest research, attending meetings, placing product orders, maintaining their spray diary records and ensuring they are on top of compliance regulations among other things. Her dad trusts her thoroughness and this allows him to be out on the orchard, which he enjoys.

Kelly has no hesitation in recommending the kiwifruit industry to other young people.

"The industry looks to have a promising future and lends itself to career development for young people wanting to get in. People with passion for the industry can do well – but you need to have that to cope with the challenges and it isn't for indoorsy types."

There's a potential fly in the ointment, however – Kelly wants to stay in the kiwifruit industry but with her parents' orchard for sale, she is assessing her options. Her partner Pete is a third generation sheep and beef farmer and they have just bought another section so she is being pulled in that direction.

The lure of the hairy berry still has Kelly in its grasp, though, and she's keen to explore other options in the industry.

"I'm not ready to hang up my pruning belt just yet. If we were a couple more years down the track, we would probably have invested in the place but we are not quite in a position to do so yet. We will continue to look at options and reassess the situation in the future.