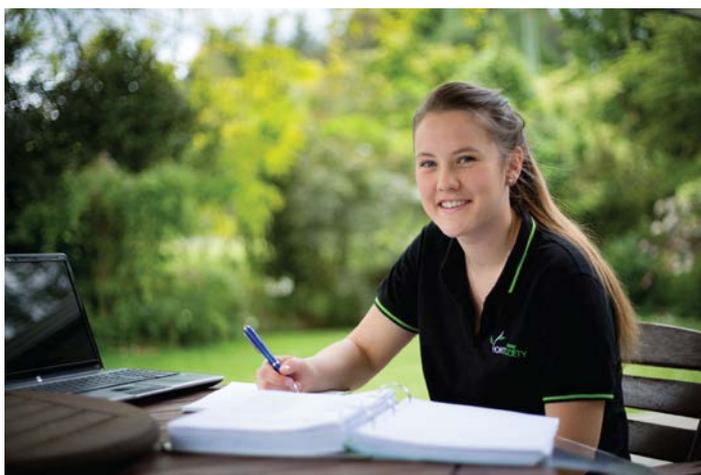


HORTICULTURE IN THE GENES FOR KEEN YOUNG STUDENT



Green thumbs don't really cover Megan Nicholson's horticultural pedigree. The Massey University BSc student is so immersed in plants and plants people, her blood is likely tinged with green.

"My great grandfather had a carnation breeding programme, registering new breeds in the names of his grandchildren," she says. "My parents own a lime and avocado orchard, Nana and Popa grow plants to sell at markets and Granddad grows fresh veggies in glasshouses for the local market. I was that kid who entered heaps of pumpkin growing contests and things and loved helping Mum in the garden, getting dirty."

Megan has been studying horticulture at school since age 13. She is the first female president of Massey University Horticulture Society and recipient of a Zespri scholarship that funded the first year of her tertiary studies.

"Horticulture is familiar to me," she says. "I am very keen to graduate at the end of this year and get into the kiwifruit industry and learn more about it."

KFJ: Why are you interested in the industry?

MN: I am very passionate about horticulture but I see a particularly bright future in the kiwifruit industry. It's such a vast industry, with such a variety of different jobs and aspects. It's going to grow so much and I want to be in there while it's happening. I've started off right on the ground level, with growing and management of the actual plants but I also appreciate studying plants at a molecular and cellular level as well as farm/orchard management practices, packing systems, distribution and export. I would like to sample every aspect of the kiwifruit industry except maybe marketing, everywhere you get your hands a bit dirty.

KFJ: Where do you see the industry heading?

MN: Kiwifruit is the second biggest export industry in New Zealand horticulture but it has the potential to become number one. There is a lot more scope for growth in kiwifruit. Zespri exported to 54 different countries in 2014. However, only 10 countries are importing more than \$20 million worth there so much more market potential out there. We could quite easily take on wine and be the number one export. Kiwifruit is just growing insanely and we can't use up the whole of New Zealand's land for kiwifruit, even though that would be ideal given the excellent returns. There is huge opportunity to go into developing countries, creating job opportunities and increasing their standard of living.

KFJ: How can young people influence the future of the industry?

MN: Traditional practice is really good but we can bring in so much more. New innovations, new technologies that can optimize growth, packing systems, the whole industry. It's exciting.

KFJ: What encouragement have you had to enter the industry?

MN: I had a horticulture teacher at school, Mrs McKoy, who massively influenced my choice of degree. I went right through school with her and she showed me there were so many opportunities in horticulture.

I think people in the kiwifruit industry are a lot smarter than others because they see young people are the future of the industry so they are much more open to offering jobs to undergraduates and new graduates

As a student, it's much easier to get a holiday job in kiwifruit than it is in pipfruit or avocados, where they only seem to want graduates with three years' experience. I have a friend who's just graduated top of her degree, with all the scholarships and prizes and she's just switched and decided to go into kiwifruit because of the great opportunities.