

Zac Hanley

"We've built this industry and its reputation in a hundred years from nothing and we have taken on big challenges, from offshore competition to Psa."

Current position in the kiwifruit industry –

Science Group Leader

Who do you work for?

Plant and Food Research, as part of the New Cultivars Development programme with Zespri.

What does your role involve?

I'm responsible for the science leadership, strategic direction and science delivery for the Kiwifruit Breeding and Genomics Group at Plant and Food Research. Our group develops new kiwifruit cultivars for Zespri and New Zealand. We also gather knowledge, tools and techniques to increase yield while reducing environmental impacts, to improve the appeal to consumers through novelty and benefit, and to maximise disease tolerance.

What was your career path?

I graduated from Sheffield University (UK) with a Bachelor of Science degree with Honours in Biotechnology. I earned a PhD in Plant Molecular Biochemistry at the same institution and carried out postdoctoral research in biotechnological manufacturing and lipid (fat) metabolism in plants. In 2009 I trained for a postgraduate certificate in plant breeding from Massey University.

I came to New Zealand in 2001 to work at ViaLactia, Fonterra's biotechnology subsidiary. At ViaLactia, I carried out research and was also involved in regulatory compliance, business development, and eventually team leadership and strategy. I also managed a multi-year multi-million-dollar primary industry research consortium across dairy, beef, sheep and deer sectors with co-investment from the New Zealand government for eight years.

I became the Science Group Leader for Kiwifruit breeding and genomics at Plant & Food Research about a year ago.

What do you like about working within the kiwifruit industry?

The industry is a great example of teamwork and hard work that has succeeded for New Zealand. Staying competitive in this century will require bringing the best science to bear on new problems and opportunities that will come to us, then joining that up with the great work of thousands of others who make up our industry. I'm pleased, proud, and excited to be a part of that.

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"Zespri Green Kiwifruit can contribute to normal bowel function"

(World's first self-substantiated health claim for fresh fruit – and first ever in NZ – lodged under the Food Standards Australia-New Zealand (FSANZ) Standard for Nutrition, Health and Related Claims)