

# HORTICENTRE HAPPENINGS

March 2026



## INCLUDED IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE

|                                            |     |
|--------------------------------------------|-----|
| Horticulture Trusts                        |     |
| Industry Support                           | 2-3 |
| Around the Regions                         | 4-6 |
| ○ Hawke's Bay Cropping team visit Pukekohe | 4-5 |
| ○ Congratulations Plant Hawke's Bay        | 5   |
| ○ Feijoas bound for LA                     | 5   |
| Horticulture Exclusive                     | 6   |
| ○ Stim Concentrate                         |     |
| Staff Profile                              | 7   |
| ○ Chris Lees - Pukekohe                    |     |
| Our H&S Focus Point                        | 8   |
| ○ Crop Walking                             |     |

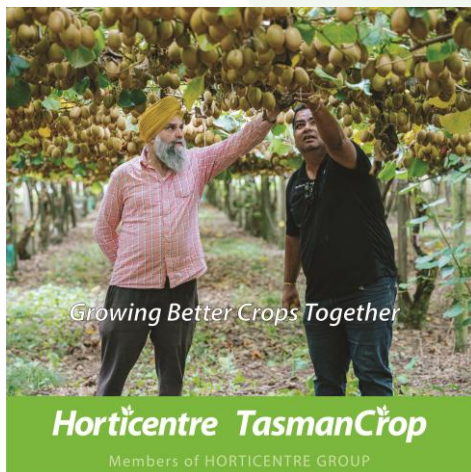
## THE VEGETABLES BIG DAY OUT - PUKEKOHE

Hosted by Te Ahikawariki, the Vegetable Industry Centre of Excellence (VICE) and A Lighter Touch, and supported by the Horticulture Trust as Gold sponsor, this year's Vegetables Big Day Out was a huge success. The event attracted over 400 growers and industry representatives from as far away as Canterbury. A wide selection of indoor and outdoor presentations kept the crowds highly engaged throughout the day, offering opportunities to learn about research taking place on and off the farm, attend panel sessions and watch agtech demonstrations. The event also provided an excellent platform for networking and exploring the future of the vegetable sector.

As part of its commitment to sustainable solutions, the Horticulture Group exhibited a trial of Intra Eco Shield, in conjunction with Intrahorti. Intra Eco Shield is a biostimulant designed to strengthen plant vitality and improve overall yield potential. Intra Eco Shield is based on ortho-silicic acid, the plant-available form of silicon, which has proven itself to strengthen cell walls and improve crop health.



Read more of Hawke's Bay Technical Field Advisor, Shelley Bath's experience of the day, on page 4.



Nutrition and Biostimulant Category Manager, Marco van den Berg, addressed the crowd about Horticulture's Intra Eco Shield Trial, ortho-silicic acid for improved plant resilience and dry matter content.

*Growing Better Crops Together*



## HORTICENTRE TRUST SPONSORSHIPS

### Young Grower of the Year – Canterbury & Central Otago

The Horticulture Trust are returning as sponsors of the Canterbury and Central Otago [Young Grower of the Year](#) competitions. The Trust will also provide the contestant clothing for competition day.

This is the second year the Canterbury Young Grower has returned to the circuit, offering an excellent opportunity for young leaders in Canterbury to upskill and explore the exciting career pathways this event can lead to.



*Horticulture Central Otago Technical Field Advisor, Mariette Morkel, does a fantastic job of running the Central Otago Young Grower of the Year each year.*

### Hawke's Bay Wine Growers Chardonnay Symposium

The Horticulture Trust is again providing ten sponsorships to enable young future leaders of the wine industry to attend the [Hawke's Bay Wine Growers Chardonnay Symposium](#). This is an invaluable development opportunity to further ten viticulture and winemaking professionals for the 2026 Symposium.

This event, in its third iteration, will return in late September and will feature keynote speakers, panel discussions and wine tastings, aiming to deepen the conversation and exploration of Chardonnay both in Aotearoa and internationally.



*Horticulture Hawke's Bay Technical Field Advisor, Blake Herbison, pictured with the recipients of the 2024 Horticulture Trust scholarships.*



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# Horticulture TasmanCrop

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## Young Horticulturalist of the Year

The Hortcentre Trust also returns as Silver Sponsor of the [Young Horticulturalist of the Year](#) 2026, as well as sponsoring the Sustainability Award.

This event brings together the winners of the six sectors including viticulture, plant production, arboriculture, fruit & vegetable growers, florists & flower growers and amenity horticulture. Winners from these sector competitions will meet and compete in a two-day event held in Auckland on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> November.



*Hortcentre Pukekohe Technical Field Advisor, Chris Lowe, presenting the winner of the Hortcentre Trust Sustainability Award (and overall winner) of the 2025 Competition, Jake Linklater (Canterbury Young Plant Producer).*

## New Zealand Ethical Employers Conference

The Hortcentre Trust will again be Platinum Sponsors of the NZEE 2026 Conference. This year the conference will take place in Tauranga on 2<sup>nd</sup> July.

From AI and economic trends to human rights due diligence, workforce capability and regulatory reform, this year's conference looks ahead. They'll bring together industry voices and employers to explore the issues shaping the future of ethical employment.

Find details on registration [here](#).



*Mike Chapman, Chairman of NZEE, on stage at the 2023 meet also held in Tauranga.*

## Fresh Facts 2026

The Hortcentre Trust will again be supporting this valuable industry publication in 2026.

[Fresh Facts](#) is an in-depth resource created to provide our industry with the key data and insights required to succeed. This information plays an essential role in enabling both the sector and its partners to effectively plan, support and expand domestic and export value chains.

As a practical tool, Fresh Facts helps unlock the full potential of our industry. By drawing on accurate data, we are better positioned to make meaningful contributions to national economic growth including supporting the objectives of the Aotearoa Horticulture Action Plan.



## AROUND THE REGIONS

### Hawkes Bay Cropping Team visit Pukekohe - with Shelley Bath

On Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> March, Hawke's Bay Technical Field Advisors, Rob Nichol and Shelley Bath attended the Vegetables Big Day Out 2026, a premier national event for the New Zealand vegetable industry, held in Pukekohe. The event provides a platform for growers, researchers, and industry professionals to exchange knowledge on innovation, sustainability, and productivity in horticulture.



*Chris Lowe speaking on behalf of the Horticulture Charitable Trust.*



*Horticulture trial site - Use of Intra Eco Shield (ortho-silic acid) for improved plant resilience and dry matter content.*



*Drone Dog in-field demonstration.*

Organised by Te Ahikawariki/Vegetable Industry Centre of Excellence (VICE) and A Lighter Touch, the Horticulture Charitable Trust was the Platinum sponsor for the event

The event was well attended by industry professionals and growers from throughout New Zealand and was a good opportunity for Rob and I to build industry connections with growers, suppliers and research organisations.

At the Welcome Session, Chris Lowe (Technical Field Advisor, Pukekohe), spoke on behalf of the Horticulture Charitable Trust, highlighting the role Horticulture plays within the industry not just from a business standpoint, but also from his perspective as both an Advisor and a grower navigating the current growing conditions and economic environment. Chris' speech was very well received and there were numerous comments on how well he spoke.

Throughout the day we were able to pick and choose multiple indoor or outdoor sessions that piqued our interest.

Marco van den Berg (Nutrition and Biostimulant Product Category Manager, Horticulture), presented a potato trial demonstrating the **Use of Intra Eco Shield (ortho-silic acid) for improved plant resilience and dry matter content**. The session was very well attended and generated a lot of interest from both growers and industry professionals. Horticulture will be looking at conducting more trial work this coming season with this product.

A few of the other sessions Rob and I attended were:

**Carbon Robotics** – their Laserweeder is already in use in New Zealand and was featured on Country Calendar (where it was utilised in carrot crops) in 2025.

**Keeping the Moth Out** – presented by Daniel Sutton (Vegetables NZ) and Paula Lleras (Potatoes NZ). This trial focuses on maintaining the integrity of potato mounds to reduce the risk of Potato Tuber Moth accessing potatoes by demonstrating different cultural control methods.

**Understanding Adjuvant Use** – presented by Teresa Lewis and Pieter van der Westhuizen from UPL. This brassica trial examines the use of adjuvants while maximising crop safety and performance.

**Drone Dog** – presentation and demonstration of drone technology in the field.



*Kathryn Wells, Ohakune Horowhenua Territory Manager, Terranova with Ingrid Ennis (Terranova), Chris Lees (Horticulture) and Rob Nichol (Horticulture) in the background.*

**What Your Neighbours Are Doing About Energy (Panel Discussion)** – facilitated by Kev O’Reilly (Vegetables NZ). Real-world examples were shared of how growers are improving efficiency and cutting costs.

**Agronomic Solutions to Stemphylium Leaf Blight** – presented by Daniel Sutton (Vegetables NZ) and Brooke Cheyne (Seed & Field).

The following day, Chris Lees, Technical Field Advisor, Pukekohe, had organised for us to travel to the Terranova seed trial site for a tour with Kathryn Wells (Ohakune/Horowhenua Territory Manager, Terranova) and Ingrid Ennis (Protected Crop Sales, Terranova). Both Kathryn and Ingrid are incredibly knowledgeable and passionate about the New Zealand vegetable industry and the varieties of plants that Terranova are bringing to the market. It was a great opportunity for us to view and discuss the attributes of spinach, lettuce and pumpkin variety trials in the field.

We then spent time out in the field with Chris Lees looking at cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli and pea crops which was a good opportunity to share technical knowledge and discuss crop pest and disease issues and IPM from our regional focuses.

### Horticulture Customer Celebrates Excellence

Congratulations to Marie Taylor and Rob and Coral Buddo of [Plant Hawke’s Bay](#), who have achieved outstanding success at the East Coast Balance Farm Environment Awards.

The team was recognised with three major accolades: the Hill Labs Agri-Science Award, the Bayleys People in Primary Sector Award, and the FMG Risk Management Award.

These awards celebrate farmers and growers who are making a meaningful difference for land, water and community. To be recognised across multiple categories is a testament to the dedication and vision shown by Marie, Rob, and Coral in their work at Plant Hawke’s Bay. Read more about their success [here](#).



*Marie Taylor of Plant Hawke’s Bay on a recent visit to the Whakatū branch, pictured with Customer Services Representative, Graeme Campbell.*

### From the orchard in Gisborne to the markets in Los Angeles within the week

These feijoas, grown in orchards in Gisborne and Tolaga Bay, are packed and ready for export at a Gisborne packhouse, bound for Los Angeles via air freight.

They are picked fresh on Monday and on the market floor in Los Angeles just seven days later, ensuring perfect flavour and quality straight from New Zealand orchards to international customers.



*Gisborne Regional Manager, Gerard McDiarmid, captured these images during a recent packhouse visit.*

# HORTICENTRE EXCLUSIVE PRODUCT FEATURE

Speak to one our Technical Field Advisors about *Stim Concentrate*



## SEAWEED & STIM NUTRITION

# Stim Concentrate Liquid

Stim Concentrate Liquid is a pure and highly concentrated liquid seaweed based on *Ascophyllum nodosum*. Our product is a stable solution and is recommended at different phenological stages. *Ascophyllum nodosum* is continuously exposed to ebb and flood and survives in a high salinity environment. Our Canadian *Ascophyllum nodosum* passes its stress resistance properties on to the plant. It is known for its high consistency independent of the harvesting season and for its unique way of processing.



- Maximizes plant potential during periods of abiotic stress, increases root growth and establishment of the crop and improves plant vigor and nutritional health
- Easy to handle and apply
- Developed for fertigation in open field and greenhouses. Also suitable for foliar application and root-dipping
- Soft for leaf tissue

### Composition (%w/w)

|                  |            |
|------------------|------------|
| Total Nitrogen   | 0.1 - 0.6% |
| Potassium Oxide  | 5 - 7%     |
| Organic Matter   | 13 - 16%   |
| Organic Nitrogen | 0.1 - 0.6% |
| Seaweed extract  | 100%       |

### Compatibility

Compatible with other fertilizers, with the exception of Calcium and Potassium Chloride fertilizers. Therefore, a separate tank is needed or fertilizers should be applied on different times. The pH of the tank solution should be above 4.

### Packaging



### Product Characteristics

- Highly concentrated solution
- 100% of high quality Canadian seaweed (*Ascophyllum Nodosum*)
- Dark brown liquid
- Processing of seaweed according to unique method, guaranteeing optimal effect



## HORTICENTRE STAFF PROFILE OF THE MONTH

Meet the Team: Chris Lees, Technical Field Advisor, Pukekohe

### How long have you been with Horticulture?

*I have been with Horticulture for 18 months.*

### What crops are you passionate about?

*I am interested in all crops; I primarily work with vegetable producers but also walk soft fruit and herbs. In the past I have had involvement in supplying Kiwifruit and Avocado growers.*

### What inspired you to join the horticulture industry?

*It happened through serendipity. I studied an environmental biology degree with a thought of going into a freshwater conservation role. On graduation I was unable to find a job, I had taken a couple of entomology courses at university and found a terrestrial ecotoxicology role at Syngenta's International Research Centre at Jealott's Hill in the UK. I then moved into crop protection field trials and enjoyed demonstrating the results to farmers. Wanting a commercial role, I moved into technical sales of glasshouse biologicals with Koppert. I returned to Syngenta a few years later and became the leafy salad portfolio specialist (crop protection and seeds) for the UK and then for Northern Europe (Scandinavia, Benelux and the UK). In 2015 my family wanted to return to New Zealand, and I found work in Pukekohe, I spent 3 years with AS Wilcox in an agronomy role and the rest of my time here in technical sales roles.*

### What do you like most about your work?

*I like the opportunity to keep learning both technically and commercially. It is impossible to know everything and the continual changes in environment, market and technology keeps things interesting. I also enjoy the people within the industry, especially the Pukekohe community of growers.*

### What's a common challenge in your role, and how do you handle it?

*I think the challenges we face as suppliers are nothing compared to those faced by growers. I focus on where I can add value to a grower's business, I enjoy finding solutions to challenges.*

### What do you enjoy doing outside work?

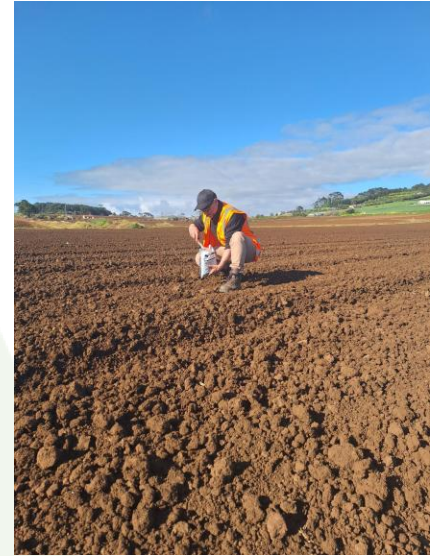
*Outside of work I enjoy spending time with my family and pretending to be a farmer on my lifestyle block. I also enjoy fishing if time allows.*

### If you weren't in Horticulture, what would you be doing?

*I would be a freshwater ecologist.*

### What's a fun fact people might not know about you?

*I try to plant as many native trees on my lifestyle block as I can afford each Winter. I love hearing the Morepork at night and taking a torch down to the wetland with my kids to see the crayfish in the stream.*



*"It all starts with the soil." Chris at work soil testing in Pukekohe.*



*Chris amongst one of his speciality crops, potatoes.*

*Thank you for sharing your story, Chris, your depth of knowledge and dedication make a real difference for our growers.*

## HORTICENTRE HEALTH & SAFETY FOCUS POINT



### Crop Walking

#### Zero Skin Contact

Company policy for crop walking where there is the likelihood that foliage that will touch the skin on a repeated basis is 'zero skin contact' with crop foliage. This is particularly relevant when there is low growing foliage, e.g. in the outdoor vegetables sector.

Anybody conducting a crop inspection in this scenario must wear long pants to ensure there is not a repeated exposure to agrichemicals.

#### Recent spraying

If the crop shows recent signs of spraying (wet or smell) then the crop walk must be postponed immediately, grower contacted and relevant re-entry point established. If not confident of status, the crop inspection must also be postponed.

#### Washing work clothing

All staff should also ensure that any PPE and work clothing that has been exposed to pesticides is to be washed separately from other items.

#### Greenhouse entry

Company policy states that entry to greenhouses is strictly prohibited when the own/operator is not present, staff may only enter a greenhouse when accompanied by the owner/operator.

Safety starts with awareness—take simple precautions, follow guidelines, and look after yourself and those around you. For further information please see the relevant advice from [Worksafe](#).



*Pictured is Horticulture Pukekohe Regional Manager, Steven Dass, crop walking alongside Howe Young of Balle Bros.*



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# Horticulture TasmanCrop

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