

# THE AHUWHENUA TROPHY TE KAWERONGO

MARCH 2026

## »» Finalists announced at Parliament



*Hon Todd McClay; Pita Tipene, Chair, Ngāti Hine Forestry Trust; Diane Berghan, Chair, Otama Marere Trust; Nukuhia Hadfield, Chair, Ahuwhenua Trophy; Charles Russell, CEO, Mātai Pacific Iwi Collective; Hon Tama Potaka.*

Politicians, diplomats, primary sector officials and Māori leaders were among the guests who attended the announcement of the finalists in the banquet hall at Parliament in Wellington. The event in Wellington showcases the quality and extent of Māori horticulture and its significant contribution to the Aotearoa economy.

There was an air of excitement in the Beehive leading up to the announcement being made by the Minister for Māori Development Hon Tama Potaka, who spoke alongside Agriculture Minister, Hon Todd McClay.

Representatives of the finalists were presented with a medal recognising their achievements.

### Message from the Chair

*Nukuhia Hadfield*

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the finalists once again in both competitions. In the senior Ahuwhenua Trophy competition we have another three outstanding finalists who do Aotearoa proud. In the Ahuwhenua Young Māori Grower award, we see another excellent cohort of rangatahi



progressing through the ranks of their chosen profession. The success of this award surfaces in the strong networks past finalists have established with each other, and with the industry.

I would also like to note my deep appreciation for the support the Ahuwhenua Trust gets from the sponsors of these awards, who generously and continually support our efforts. We deeply value this and promise to do our best to recognise your contributions.

AHUWHENUA TROPHY  
EXCELLENCE IN  
MĀORI HORTICULTURE  
AWARD  
2026



Agriculture Minister, Hon Todd McClay told the gathering that this year's finalists exemplify excellence in horticulture, driving growth in the food and fibre sector while creating jobs in rural communities. Todd McClay says the expansion of the competition to include horticulture in 2020, recognises the growth of horticulture on whenua Māori, which has increased by 50 per cent since 2017.

"The hard work of Māori growers and their staff will help achieve New Zealand's aspirational goal of doubling the value of exports in 10 years, while meeting the global demand for high-quality, safe and sustainable food and fibre," he says.

The Minister for Māori Development Hon Tama Potaka says Māori orchards and agribusinesses provide employment and vital reinvestment back into marae, papakāinga, kura, and education scholarships.

"The prosperity and wellbeing horticulture generates for iwi and Māori across the motu has far reaching impacts. I tautoko the outstanding work these finalists are doing," he says.

Ahuwhenua Trophy Management Committee Chair, Nukuhia Hadfield says the finalists represent a cohort of Māori growers who are playing an important role in horticulture which is now the fastest growing of all the primary export industries.

"In recent years and months many growers throughout the country have endured some very difficult times due to devastating weather events, but they continue to navigate and respond to these challenges," she says.

Nukuhia Hadfield says by producing high quality bumper crops Māori growers contribute greatly to the success of the sector and the Aotearoa economy.

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# Let the Ahuwhenua field days for horticulture begin

It is only a matter of days before the first of the field days of the finalists in the Ahuwhenua Trophy, Excellence in Māori Horticulture begin.

One of the special features of this competition are the field days, which showcase the finalists' orchards to the public and in particular, to those in the industry who are keen to see what the best of the best looks like. It is an opportunity for each finalist to tell their unique story about their entity, including their commitment to the land, their people and the community.

Each finalist puts a huge amount of work into preparing for their field day, which include presentations and an orchard tour, so come along and see the best in Māori horticulture in action.

The field day dates are:

## Thursday 26 March

### Mātai Pacific Iwi Collective, Te Puke

– a collective of three iwi and who have a total of 158 hectares of kiwifruit spread over three orchards.

## Thursday 2 April

### Otama Marere Trust, Paengaroa

– who have operations including more than 21 hectares of kiwifruit, avocados and native plantings

## Thursday 23 April

### Ngāti Hine Forestry Trust, Kerikeri

– which has six kiwifruit orchards including 32 hectares of Zespri SunGold G3 which is under cover.

[Finalist field day flyers available online here](#)



## Ahuwhenua Young Māori Grower finalists announced

Three outstanding rangatahi have been named as finalists for the 2026 Ahuwhenua Young Māori Grower Award. They are:



### Larissa Wooding-Ngata

Ngāti Porou, from Craigmore Sustainables, Gisborne



### Robert John Manuel

Ngāti Kahu, Ngāti Rehia, Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Raakaipaaka, from Ngāti Hine Forestry Trust, Kerikeri



### Te Rina Joe

Ngāti Pāhauwera, Ngāti Kahungunu, from Pakuratahi Orchard for Ngāti Pāhauwera Commercial Development Ltd, Hawke's Bay

Lead Judge Sam Vivian-Greer of Te Tumu Paeroa says the finalists represent the next generation of leaders in New Zealand's fastest-growing primary sector.

"The competition has again attracted a group of fine up-and-coming young Māori leaders in the horticulture sector, which is important because horticulture is now the fastest growing of all the primary sectors," he says.

In the lead-up to the awards ceremony, they will participate in a three-day study tour, designed to provide a range of insights, inspiration and experiences across the horticulture sector.

Winners of both the Ahuwhenua Young Māori Grower Award and the Ahuwhenua Trophy, Excellence in Māori Horticulture Award, will be announced at the awards dinner on Friday 5 June in Whangārei.

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# FINALIST PROFILES



## Mātai Pacific Iwi Collective

**Field Day: Thursday 26 March**

[Full profile available online here](#)

Established in 2018, Mātai Pacific Iwi Collective represents a strategic collaboration between Te Arawa Group Holdings, Ngāti Awa Group Holdings, and Rotomā No.1 Incorporation. The partnership acquired 100+ productive canopy hectares of Te Puke kiwifruit orchards, combining commercial excellence with kaitiakitanga and Māori capability development.

Operating across three properties – Te Mātai (158 hectares), Pacific Gold (28 hectares), and Coachman (38 hectares) – the partnership grows SunGold and Hayward cultivars while advancing biodiversity restoration, soil health, and water resilience through research partnerships.

As Zespri's largest Māori shareholder, Mātai Pacific has grown its combined asset value beyond \$130 million since 2018, exemplifying kotahitanga—iwi collaboration creating intergenerational opportunity and legacy grounded in 'he kai kei aku ringa'.



## Otama Marere Trust

**Field Day: Thursday 2 April**

[Full profile available online here](#)

Otama Marere Trust manages 45 hectares of Māori freehold land in the Bay of Plenty and takes its name from the pā site once occupied by Rangiiwaho and his whānau. Historically a traveller's resting place along the Kaituna River, the land sustained whānau through tikanga-based harvesting of tuna, watercress, and crops such as kūmara, kamokamo and others.

Established as an Ahu Whenua Trust in 1979, the land was leased for a 60-year term to Te Puke Golf Club before orchard development began in the 1980s under Sir Peter Tapsell's leadership. An all-women PEP programme crew built the infrastructure. After managing significant debt, Huia Tapsell restructured operations, establishing a successful Seeka partnership now managed by Owner and Advisory Trustee Homman Tapsell.

Today's operations include 21+ hectares of kiwifruit, avocados, native plantings, and 6.3 hectares of protected wetlands. The Trust diversifies through commercial property investment and Māori partnerships.

Guided by whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, kaitiakitanga, and other core values, Otama Marere Trust honours its tūpuna while building intergenerational prosperity through sustainable enterprise and environmental stewardship.



## Ngāti Hine Forestry Trust

**Field Day: Thursday 23 April**

[Full profile available online here](#)

Established in 1974, Ngāti Hine Forestry Trust manages 6,000 hectares centered around Moerewa and Kawakawa, representing more than 6,000 owners through seven Trustees. Guided by 'He Whenua Hua, He Tangata Ora', the Trust holds interests across forestry, kiwifruit, mānuka honey, dairy, carbon crops, and native nurseries.

Six Kerikeri orchards, acquired 2004-2020, comprise 49 hectares with 32 hectares of Zespri SunGold G3 canopy, demonstrating successful diversification into high-value horticulture. Operating under Seeka lease and supply agreements, the Trust since 2023 employs 13 staff including an orchard manager, building internal capability through horticulture qualifications and Seeka cadetship training.

Operations integrate kaitiakitanga with commercial excellence through sustainable land use, water management, and responsible inputs. Strong governance balances intergenerational outcomes while kiwifruit returns diversify income, buffer commodity cycles, and fund marae, education, and cultural initiatives.

Grounded in 'He Ringa Ahuwhenua, He Hanga Mahi', the Trust cultivates enduring prosperity and capability for future generations.

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A special thanks to all our sponsors which make the Ahuwhenua Trophy Competition and the Ahuwhenua Young Māori Farmer/Grower award. It is with their generous support we are able to stage the competition and all the amazing events which make up this prestigious award.

### International Women's Day: Give Flexibility to Gain Results in Horticulture

With International Women's Day on Sunday 8 March focused on the global theme "Give To Gain", Women in Horticulture is urging businesses to embrace workplace flexibility to strengthen teams and lift productivity.

"Give To Gain is about recognising that when we invest in women, we all benefit," explains Stephanie Wrathall, Project Manager for Women in Horticulture. "In horticulture, which can be as simple and as powerful as offering flexibility so women can build meaningful careers while managing family life."



Helen Scott

For Helen Scott, Orchard Manager for Māori Investments Limited's Whiritoa Orchards in the Eastern Bay of Plenty, flexibility has been central to both her own career journey and the way she now leads her team.

Helen began fruit picking 20 years ago after a neighbour knocked on her door and asked if she wanted work. A solo mother at the time, she was supported by a family-friendly employer who allowed her to work around her children's needs. Today, she offers that same flexibility to her own staff.

"We have 'mummy hours'. I'm very lenient and understanding," Helen says. "When I first started out, I worked for an orchardist who was very family orientated. Allowing my current workers that same flexibility enables me to give back in that sense."

[Read more here.](#) [Join Women in Horticulture here.](#)

### BNZ Perspective: Momentum Building in Māori Horticulture

Horticulture continues to be a standout performer in New Zealand's primary sector, with export revenue projected to a record \$8 billion this year. From a BNZ perspective, this milestone reflects both strong market demand and the sector's shift toward highvalue production. The latest lift represents a 12% increase on the previous year, driven primarily by kiwifruit exports expected to exceed \$3 billion for the first time, alongside apple and pear exports surpassing \$1 billion. These gains highlight the strength of New Zealand's premium positioning in global fresh food markets.

Looking ahead, the outlook remains positive. Sector projections indicate exports could continue to grow, rising toward \$9.2 billion later this decade, supported by productivity improvements, market diversification and sustained demand for highquality, sustainably produced food. While challenges remain, including climate volatility, labour availability and cost pressures, the longterm fundamentals remain sound.

Māori horticulture is a key contributor to this growth story. Māori entities now hold over \$1 billion in horticultural assets, investing with an intergenerational lens grounded in kaitiakitanga and connection to whenua. This approach aligns strongly with evolving consumer expectations around sustainability, provenance and social value.

At BNZ, we see Māori led horticulture as central to building a resilient, highvalue export future. The Ahuwhenua Trophy awards celebrate this leadership, and the role Māori growers play in shaping the next chapter of New Zealand horticulture.

### Ecolab Strengthens Commitment to Māori Excellence Through Ahuwhenua Trophy Sponsorship

Ecolab is proud to continue its longstanding support of the Ahuwhenua Trophy Māori Excellence Awards, celebrating Māori leadership, innovation, and stewardship across New Zealand's primary industries. For more than 20 years, Ecolab has been a committed sponsor of the Ahuwhenua Trophy dairy competition, supporting excellence in farm management, animal health, and sustainable production systems.

Building on this legacy, Ecolab is excited to now sponsor the horticulture round of the Ahuwhenua Trophy, recognising the growing importance of Māori led horticultural enterprises and their contribution to resilient, futurefocused food systems.

Biosecurity is a shared priority across dairy and horticulture, and a critical focus of Ecolab's work in the primary sector. Through science-based solutions and on-farm expertise, Ecolab supports producers to protect their animals, crops, people, and whenua from biosecurity risks while maintaining high standards of hygiene and productivity.

By sponsoring both the dairy and horticulture rounds of the Ahuwhenua Trophy, Ecolab is proud to stand alongside the Ahuwhenua whānau in celebrating Māori excellence and supporting strong, sustainable primary industries for generations to come.

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New Zealand Apples and Pears (NZAPI) is the apples and pears industry body and presents the vision and provides the voice for the Aotearoa apples and pears industry, enabling our members to prosper. NZAPI provides programmes and essential systems to support members to maintain and grow market access, manage biosecurity risks, and build a skilled workforce, and advocating for members with central and local government. New Zealand's apples and pears industry is a Tier 1 horticulture industry, with an ambition to be a thriving \$2 billion industry by 2035.



### New Zealand growers deliver fantastic 2026 crop to global markets

New Zealand's apple and pear harvest is underway, with early forecasts pointing to a standout season marked by exceptional fruit quality and high pack-out rates. A largely quintessential growing season across key regions has delivered a significant boost to productivity, across both traditional and new IP varieties.

It is a welcome return to form for the industry after several challenging years, which included Covid19 disruptions and extreme weather events, says NZAPI Acting General Manager Danielle Adsett.

"It's incredibly heartening to see," says Adsett. "The fruit looks and, most importantly, tastes fantastic. Growers are reporting excellent quality, early pack-outs are tracking really well and there's a real sense of optimism across the industry."

"While we are still building toward previous pre-Covid peaks, this year's improved productivity numbers are the real gamechanger for growers. After an excellent 2025 harvest, this season is also tracking in the right direction."

"The new IP varieties deliver higher yields and attract stronger returns in global markets, however some of these orchards are still relatively young," says Adsett. "They need time in the ground before they reach full production, which suggests further growth and improved productivity is in the pipeline."

New Zealand's apple and pear industry is a major contributor to national export earnings as well as regional economies and supports New Zealand's reputation as a leading producer of premium, safe and sustainably grown food. As the 2026 harvest gathers momentum, growers are focused on delivering consistent quality to customers around the world, while continuing to invest for the future.

### Historic deal includes radically improved access for New Zealand pipfruit

The New Zealand apple and pear sector is delighted with the announcement of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with India, which includes a world-first reduction on apple and pear access to India. The milestone achievement includes a quota for New Zealand apples to receive a 50 percent reduction on tariff (from 50 percent to 25 percent), during the window from 1 April to 31 August, focusing access on counter seasonal supply to India's own apple industry. The reasonable quota allows for significant growth over the next six years. Pear access into India also received a 50 percent to reduction on tariffs, with no quota limitations.

The deal is linked to a cooperation plan and further collaboration between the New Zealand and Indian apple industries, which will see technical experts continue New Zealand's longstanding history of supporting Indian growers with productivity and profitability improvements.

The agreement holds unprecedented opportunities for New Zealand's premium apple and pears in one of the world's fastest-growing markets, says Danielle Adsett, NZAPI Acting General Manager.



"Christmas has come early for our growers with this announcement.

India is currently the fifth-largest economy globally and this agreement holds untold potential for New Zealand's pipfruit sector. It will play a pivotal role in achieving NZAPI's ambition of becoming a \$2 billion export sector by 2035.

Premium New Zealand apples will now enjoy increased access to India, opening doors to a market of 1.4 billion people and a rapidly expanding middle class. India, already the world's largest population, is projected to become the third-largest economy by 2030, offering immense potential for exporters.

Adsett says, the entire New Zealand apple and pear industry is grateful to the New Zealand Government, The New Zealand High Commission in Delhi, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Ministry for Primary Industries or their tireless efforts in securing this agreement.

"Their collaboration with industry has been second to none and this landmark deal will only strengthen New Zealand's position as a world-leading producer of apples and pears."

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## Celebrating Our Growing Community of Young Māori Leaders in Agriculture and Horticulture

Te Tumu Paeroa recently hosted the first ever wānanga for past winners and finalists of the Ahuwhenua Young Māori Farmer/ Grower Award.

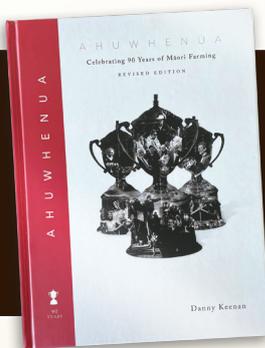
“Over the two-day event we had speakers who challenged them to think beyond the farm or orchard gate, and to look more widely at the world around them,” explains Dr Charlotte Severne, Māori Trustee.

“Whakawhangaungatanga was also a key focus, with opportunities for the alumni to network and build connections.”

There were a range of high-profile and insightful speakers, including the inspirational Dave Latele, and influential Louis Davis (both of whom everyone in the room wanted a selfie with).

Sam Vivian-Greer from Whenua Services, and Lead Judge of the Award, says those who attended found it a valuable two days.

“These young leaders want to stay connected, and they want us alongside them as they shape what comes next, equipping them with the skills to pay it forward to the next generation and it’s a real privilege for Te Tumu Paeroa to play a role in that story.”



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