

Chair's Report 2026

I hope this report finds you all well and able to take a well-deserved break after what has been another challenging growing season. Continued rain throughout November made managing beds and planting quite difficult. A relatively good growing season was followed by a difficult and costly harvest for many, as late March and April soil conditions and weather were not in our favour. Added to this was the Iran conflict driving fuel prices through the roof causing growers more pain, let's hope the diesel prices continue their downward trend of late before next season!

From what I am hearing, volumes of kumara sold are up on this time last year, with somewhat better grower returns, and we can only hope this trend continues. It is still very concerning, as both a grower and an industry representative, to see what can only be described as stock-food grade kumara making its way onto the retail shelf. Most growers and packhouses are doing a great job, and I commend them for it, but it only takes one to erode consumer confidence and shrink the dollar value spent on kumara. For the sake of everyone in the kumara industry and out of respect for our customers, please look past a quick financial gain and consider long-term stability and growth. I am tired of a small number of people making our industry look unprofessional, rather than reflecting the great custodians of the land that most of us are.

MPI

MPI continues to work on the Import Health Standards (IHS), which will provide a pathway for future importation of seedstock of new varieties of kumara. Alex Bisson from Horticulture New Zealand is working on this with MPI on our behalf.

Louisiana State University Varieties Imported (April 2024)

Of the three varieties imported, two are showing promise. The third variety, which has poor shape and skin colour, low plant propagation numbers in beds, and storage issues, will likely not be continued in trials this season. For a full update please come along to the AGM. There may also be a small sample to taste.

Nutrient Uptake Project

This project has been replicated this season, which will support more robust data over two different growing seasons. We are hoping to have some initial findings collated in time to present a report at the AGM. Thank you to everyone who has been involved in this project.

Cricket Project

This continues, with an update to be presented at the AGM, including findings from trials over the last season.

Plastic and Chemical

Like fuel, growers will again face higher plastic costs as a result of the Iran conflict. Such was the uncertainty that two suppliers declined to submit a tender due to instability in shipping and resin supply. We have, however, secured this season's plastic order, albeit at a price 15% higher than last year. As you will see in our financial report, we are in good shape, and the committee has decided to tighten our margin to help offset some of the additional cost to growers.

Industry Representatives

As many of you will know, Warwick resigned from the VNZI board earlier this year. Having a representative of our association and industry at that level of governance has been of real value over the years. Thank you, Warwick.

A&P Show and Association Events

The Agri Kids competition was held again at the Arapohue A&P show, where we once again ran the Horticulture module. Thank you to those who helped; I think we had as much fun as the kids.

We also hosted Dr Katie Jennings, a weed specialist from North Carolina State University; held a workshop with Jeremy Thompson and Subha Das of MPI's Plant Health and Environment Laboratory on the detection of Feathery Mottle Virus; and participated in the Vegetable Research Roadshow organised by Daniel Sutton from Vegetables NZ.

Kerry Perreau has served as our patron for many years and has indicated he will be stepping down from this role. On behalf of all of us, I would like to thank Kerry for his tireless contribution to our association, the kumara industry, and the vegetable sector as a whole. Thank you, Kerry.

I would also like to thank the committee for their time and effort over the past year. If you would like to get involved, please reach out.

Finally, I would like to thank FMG and Horticulture New Zealand for their financial support of our AGM.

All the best for the upcoming season,

Doug Nilsson

Chair

Northern Wairoa Vegetable Growers Association