

Cultivating Success:

Aidan's Journey from School Farm to Rabobank

Aidan's story, which began with his enrolment in an Agricultural and Horticultural Science class at Mount Albert Grammar School in 2018, highlights the pivotal role that Agricultural and Horticultural Science has played in his career so far. Aidan's education led him through the Rabobank Agri-Leadership Programme, to Massey University and ultimately landed him a position as a Rabobank Agribusiness Graduate. We explore Aidan's inspiring journey, with insights from his own words and experiences.

Raised in the heart of Auckland, Aidan had limited connection to the world of agribusiness, however, his family's farming heritage and rural roots were always there, waiting to be unearthed. His journey into the world of agriculture and horticulture commenced after a challenging period of his young life. After facing significant health issues and learning through the Northern Health Correspondence School, Aidan felt that his love for animals, outdoor activities, and wanting to stay healthy through physical engagement, that Agricultural and Horticultural Science was the perfect subject to facilitate his transition back into full-time schooling.



Aidan Bright - Rabobank Hamilton Office

Aidan reminisces of his time at Mt Albert Grammar School and how he was first introduced to the subject. *"For school inductions in Year 9, we were all taken up to the school farm and shown around which really gives the subject great visibility. The farm is hard to miss and some of the new school buildings have even been designed to make the most of the farm view, a welcome distraction from other subjects, I'm sure!"*

His educational journey wasn't limited to the Agricultural and Horticultural Science class; he embraced a mix of subjects, including Media, History, Psychology, English, and Biology. It was a diverse selection driven by his genuine interests and passions, however through his studies in Agricultural and Horticultural Science, he also gained an interest in Agribusiness. Aidan firmly believes that teachers are the backbone of a student's success, as they inspire, motivate, and drive intellectual curiosity, extending their influence beyond the classroom walls.

"Esther Hancock helped us set up a TeenAg club, and a few of us from that club went on to the Young Farmers Raising the Standards course. It was also Esther who encouraged a couple of us to go along to the Rabobank Agri-Leadership Programme in 2019. She was always passing on these opportunities, being encouraging and giving us the confidence to give things a shot".

The 5-day Rabobank Agri-Leadership Programme, a Rabobank Client Council initiative, held at Waikato University was a turning point in Aidan's journey. This experience offered him a tangible insight into the vast and diverse opportunities in the food and fibre sector. It introduced him to the intricacies of supply chain and has connected him with a network of passionate individuals, organisations, and companies. Following the programme, Aidan's path became clear. He decided to

pursue Agribusiness studies at a tertiary level, and went on to gain a degree in Agribusiness, majoring in International Agribusiness Studies at Massey University.

Whilst studying a Sustainable Business Management paper, his lecturer invited guest speakers to engage with the class. One of these speakers was rower Brooke Francis (née Donoghue), a Silver Medal Olympian and Rabobank employee based in the Waikato. During her online talk, Brooke shared her experiences and mentioned that Rabobank's Graduate Programme was opening.

Though he hadn't previously considered rural banking, the course experience and Brooke's insights ignited a spark of curiosity. Rabobank being New Zealand's only food and agri-specialist bank wholly dedicated to the agricultural sector was a significant drawcard. On further investigation, learning about Rabobank's values and the type of support they provided, he decided to apply.

The Rabobank programme offers participants the chance to experience different facets of the banking world through three six-month rotations.

Aidan embarked on his graduate journey last year with a six-month stint in Dunedin as an Agribusiness Analyst, working in support of Agribusiness Managers with new clients or addressing various client needs.

His journey continued up in Hamilton at Head Office with a transition to a more specialised role focused on data analysis for the business development team. This evolution showcases the programme's commitment to nurturing individual strengths and interests, allowing Aidan to explore his skills and passions in a niche area.

One aspect of the agricultural industry that consistently surprises Aidan is the industry's close-knit and supportive nature, which has also been evident in the Rabobank culture. People in the sector share a common interest in agriculture that often transcends a mere job. They are willing to help, guide, and support one another, contributing to a sense of belonging and purpose.

"I knew from my own family and friends how kind, generous, and connected primary sector communities are, but it is special to say that this has only got truer as I've got more involved. It's hard to describe in words just how willing people are to help you, and the genuine care and authenticity people hold."

Outside of his career, Aidan finds time for social engagement and personal interests. He is an active member of New Zealand Young Farmers, enjoying the camaraderie and support it offers. In addition, he values fitness and music, although his work commitments have required some adjustments in his schedule. He believes that to inspire more people like himself into the sector, it is essential to communicate the breadth of opportunities available and the meaningful work that comes with them.



Attending the IFAMA E Tipu conference earlier this year for personal development and meeting other young professionals.



Aidan and his fellow graduates in the Rabobank Hamilton office

In Aidan's own words he goes on to say: "I believe it will require a cross-sector commitment that transcends rivalries, and market share, and one that genuinely considers the interests of young people. To me something people forget or don't fully understand, is that young people are inheriting the world that we are creating, so it should come as no surprise that they should be at the table. We need to give greater platform, voice, and support to our young people already in the sector who are our greatest advocates to the current and future youth".

Aidan's journey from health challenges to a rewarding role in agribusiness highlights the influence that one's secondary school level subjects, and passionate mentorship from skilled teachers can have on their career pathway. Mt Albert Grammar School's Agricultural and Horticultural Science class and the Rabobank Agri-Leadership Programme provided Aidan with the knowledge and connections necessary to embark on his successful journey. His story serves as an example for aspiring young agribusiness leaders to follow, emphasising the importance of pursuing one's passions and embracing opportunities in this exciting industry.

