

VARIED CAREER OPTIONS

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THE POTATO SUPPLY CHAIN

BRIDGETT JAMES is an assistant seed manager at the Potato Seed Co-Op in Ashburton – part of the potato supply chain that eventually reaches McDonald's restaurants.

The purpose-built facility specialises in storing, cutting and grading seed potatoes for McCain's process growers.

Bridgett (28) says the best way to explain what is involved is to go through a typical season.

"It starts late February, early March for us, when seed potatoes will come in from our growers. It is a busy time through until the end of April, beginning of May, but this year stretched on a bit longer with the weather challenges.

"Those potatoes are then stored over winter. We have seven cool stores. We get about 1,400 bins to a

chiller and each bin weighs roughly a ton, with 9,000 tons coming in every season. They are stacked about six metres high. Quality samples are taken from every load we receive so we can ensure identification of any problems and check the sizing.

"The next busy period is the cutting and planting season, which starts in August and can run through until the end of October, early November. That is grading, sizing, cutting and treating seed potatoes, that then go to McCain's process growers who plant them. When the potatoes are harvested, they will go to the McCain's factory in Timaru."

Bridgett is into her third season with the Potato Seed Co-Op. She says she accidentally ended up in the industry while completing a Bachelor of Arts degree – majoring in History – from Massey University.

"I started grading potatoes part-time while I was studying and was offered a job as a crop inspection

assistant at Eurogrow. After one season there, I was offered a job at the Potato Seed Co-Op and thought, guess I'm in potatoes now."

Bridgett recently became part of Potatoes New Zealand's Youth Council, which has been great for her to find people her own age within the industry. She says the role Potatoes New Zealand plays in the industry is massively important.

"They do a great deal of really good work. With the growers, they regulate the quality of potato seed, and certification of seed is done through them or Potatoes New Zealand – qualified inspectors.

"They support a lot of research and development projects, and gather feedback from within the industry about studies they'd like to see done. Potatoes New Zealand also try and help out as much as they can with engagement activities like workshops and organising conferences."

In Year 13 at St Kevin's College in Oamaru, Bridgett took History, Classics, Biology, Geography, English and Religious Studies. She wanted to use her love of history to move into archives as a career but working with potatoes has put an end to that.

"I am happy where I am now. It's always different every season, with new challenges, so it keeps things interesting."

Bridgett's advice to school leavers – if you have a good work ethic and a willingness to learn, you can make it pretty much anywhere in the industry.

"It does depend on where you want to go and what your focus is, from the processing to seed side of things, or more of the scientific, research and development side, or even engineering.

"It is simply not true that the potato industry is just about farming. Potatoes New Zealand is trying to redress that actually we are an industry that people can actively come in to – and there are lots of opportunities across a lot of different areas."



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KEY FACTS



- **BRIDGETT JAMES** IS AN ASSISTANT SEED MANAGER AT THE **POTATO SEED CO-OP** IN **ASHBURTON**.
- SHE JOINED THE INDUSTRY WHILE COMPLETING A **BACHELOR OF ARTS DEGREE** – MAJORING IN **HISTORY** – FROM **MASSEY UNIVERSITY**.
- **BRIDGETT** TOOK **HISTORY, CLASSICS, BIOLOGY, GEOGRAPHY, ENGLISH AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES** IN **YEAR 13** AT **ST KEVIN'S COLLEGE** IN **OAMARU**.



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