

MINISTRY FOR PRIMARY INDUSTRIES SCHOLARSHIPS SUPPORTING THE RURAL ECONOMY

writer **SARA CARBERY** // photographer **SANDRA HENDERSON**

KATE SHEEHY was one of six tertiary students to receive an On Farm Support Science Scholarship last year, awarded by the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) to help increase the number of on-farm advisers supporting farmers and growers.

Kate says the \$5000 financial support made a huge difference, freeing her up to focus on her studies. Just as valuable, though, was the mentoring she received from Chris Arbuckle, a specialist adviser with MPI's On Farm Support team in Canterbury.

"They were incredibly supportive and full of knowledge. Talking with them really opened my eyes to the different career paths and specialties out there that I hadn't even considered before. It gave me a whole new sense of direction and motivation for what's possible in the rural sector."

Kate (30) completed a Bachelor of Science (Environmental Science) at Lincoln University last year and now works as a Land Management Officer at the Taranaki Regional Council, working with hill country farmers to help promote sustainable land use.

"I provide advice to farmers on what the best-suited long-term sustainable land use is and then follow through with the funding of projects, if available.

"I enjoy that I get to be outside and chat to people and make a difference in their farming business as well as see the positive environmental outcomes occurring from land use change.

"Every day is different, and I like the challenge that working with lots of different people presents."

Like many young people, Kate had no idea what she wanted to do when she left school. "I went on a few university field trip days to explore my options, but nothing really felt like the right fit."

An outdoor enthusiast (she moved to Mount Aspiring College from Takapuna Grammar School for Year 13), Kate decided to take a gap year, and headed to Camp America for the New Zealand winter. Her time overseas made her realise she wanted to work in the outdoors "doing something active, meaningful and connected to nature" so she enrolled to study Outdoor Education at Tai Poutini Polytechnic in Greymouth on her return to New Zealand.

"That really kickstarted everything," says Kate, who went on to work as a caving, kayaking, climbing, mountain biking and ziplining guide, and as a ski lift operator and ski patroller, here and in Canada.

When the tourism industry was impacted by the Covid pandemic, and border closures, Kate joined WAI Wānaka, a non-profit community organisation which had received funding through Jobs for Nature. Working her way up to become a field team supervisor, she was involved in pest control, wilding pine removal, native planting projects, rabbit fencing and spraying.

"I really enjoyed this role because it played to my strengths – physically fit, outside work, working with people to improve something and achieve a goal.

"As time went on, I realised that I would like to do this kind of work long-term, so I made the decision to move up to Canterbury and start studying at Lincoln University."

Kate took P.E., Outdoor Education, Geography, Chemistry and Biology in Year 13. "Geography and chemistry have definitely come in handy for the environmental science side of my career," she says, "but when it comes to the work I did before university, outdoor education was super useful.

"It gave me the skills, confidence, and people management experience that really set the foundation for all the work I have done since."

Kate's advice for school leavers thinking about following a similar career path? "Just go for it! There is amazing support out there for anyone wanting to get into the rural sector."

Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua



KEY FACTS



- **KATE SHEEHY** WAS ONE OF SIX TERTIARY STUDENTS TO RECEIVE A **MINISTRY FOR PRIMARY INDUSTRIES ON FARM SUPPORT SCIENCE SCHOLARSHIP** LAST YEAR.
- SHE **WORKS** AS A **LAND MANAGEMENT OFFICER** AT THE **TARANAKI REGIONAL COUNCIL** IN **STRATFORD**
- **KATE** COMPLETED A **BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE)** AT **LINCOLN UNIVERSITY** LAST YEAR.

ONLINE



For more information on the Ministry for Primary Industries' On Farm Support science scholarships, visit www.mpi.govt.nz/on-farm-support-science-scholarships