

From setbacks to success:

Harry's story of education in agriculture, resilience, and the power of goal setting.

Written by Catherine Bryant, 30th October 2023

Harry's journey from a serious rugby injury to a successful role in Agribusiness is a remarkable example of how education, determination, and the importance of goal setting, can have a profound influence on the pathway to one's career.

His story highlights the role that the Agricultural and Horticultural Science class at Rathkeale College played in shaping his career and the constant pursuit of learning and personal growth.

Harry's life took an unexpected turn during his time at Rathkeale College in Year 13 when he suffered a life-threatening injury whilst playing rugby.

The accident left him with severe physical and mental challenges, including concussion, neuro-physical issues, and the need to relearn basic motor skills. At one point, unable to feel his limbs, he faced the terrifying possibility of tetraplegia, however he has made a miraculous full recovery.

Harry's resilience and determination to recover were fuelled by the support of organisations like the Rugby Foundation and Life Light, as well as the unwavering encouragement of his family, teachers, and friends.

Despite the adversity he faced, Harry's passion for agriculture never waned. Born and raised in Wellington, he developed an early fascination with tractors, animals, and the farming way of life. Weekend visits to a friend's farm nurtured this interest, making it clear that agriculture was his calling.

His decision to pursue a career in the Primary Industries was further solidified when he joined Rathkeale's Agricultural and Horticultural Science class in Year 9, taking it right through to Year 13. The focus was not just on learning basic farming practices but gave insights into export markets and the different complexities of agribusinesses.

With his teacher, Coadette Low's encouragement and guidance, Harry's passion for agriculture grew, revealing the myriad of opportunities within the sector, extending well beyond traditional farming and manual labour.



Harry and his working dogs

Harry was not one to sit still at school and always made the most out of every opportunity. On a promise from his father, to help buy him a new ute, (if he achieved good grades), Harry dutifully went on to achieve those grades and transformed the back of his ute into a makeshift BBQ station and grilled steaks for morning tea!

During his lunch hours he indulged another passion, training dogs - all whilst managing to become Sports Prefect, Head of House and stock managing a 550-hectare property!

"I knew that I learned differently but if I could turn it into my language, I learned a lot better. I always thought of myself as doing wood technologies, all the dropout classes by stereotype, but in my year 13 before I broke my neck, I was still doing English, Biology and Agricultural and Horticultural Science, as I saw the value of making sure I was still doing those basics and fundamentals well".

Harry's educational journey didn't conclude at Rathkeale College. Despite ongoing cognitive symptoms from his injury, which prevented him from accepting his invitation to attend the Smedley Station and Cadet Training course, Harry remained committed to his learning. When university was also not an option, he sought out alternative academic opportunities and dedicated himself to training whilst on the job, embarking on the Primary ITO level 4 courses for Beef+Lamb New Zealand and later, in his role as a ZIC on a dairy farm, he completed the Primary ITO level 4 DairyNZ course.

These experiences enabled him to gain valuable knowledge and skills, which he continues to use in his career today. He eventually, made his way to his current role as a sales agronomist for HnT Agronomics. Through this role, Harry has come to recognise the importance of the relationship between soil health and prosperous farming. He is passionate about helping farmers optimise their land and produce higher-quality crops and livestock.

His goal is to eventually own his own farm, adopting a holistic approach to farming and utilising every resource efficiently. When it comes to goal setting Harry has this to say.

"Tell your tightest 2-3 people that can keep you accountable. My goals have never shifted but my pathways drifted quite dramatically. I have been trying to build a business the past 2 years whilst working for HnT and with the economic, climate, and weather conditions, have been very discouraged, but it's all part of your journey and the skills you learn and develop now, will hold you in good stead for the future, although it may not seem worth it at the time".

When talking about the future of the Primary Industries, Harry stresses the need for diverse talents, including scientists, IT experts, and individuals with fresh ideas and solutions. He emphasises the need for professionals in human resources, mental health, marketing, and law, to contribute to the agricultural sector.

Organisations like the Rural Support Trust, led by individuals like Sarah Donaldson, play a vital role in providing essential support to those in the agricultural industry, particularly in addressing mental health challenges.

Harry challenges those outside the sector with unique skill sets to consider agriculture as a viable and fulfilling career option. He believes that farmers on the ground can deliver incredible products, but there's a need for a whole team of individuals with varying expertise to support them. From scientists specialising in soil and microbiology to IT experts and innovators, agriculture welcomes contributions from all walks of life.

"If I could inspire at least 2 or 3 people, that weren't originally in agriculture, to join the sector and they bring 5 or 6 fresh new ideas or innovations into the industry, changing it for the better, then I feel I would have made my mark and that is the kind of legacy I would like to leave".

Harry's story serves as a powerful reminder that when life throws unexpected curveballs and plans don't unfold as anticipated, with determination, a commitment to continuous education, and the resilience to overcome life's challenges, one can achieve their goals and make a significant impact in their chosen field. As Harry looks forward to the future with excitement, his journey serves as an inspiration to all aspiring agricultural professionals.