

RACHEL DURIE

This profile looks at the life and career of Rachel Durie, Senior Consultant at Perrin Ag based in South Waikato.

Early life

Rachel Durie's connection to the primary sector began well before she chose it as a career. Growing up on her family's dairy farms in the South Waikato, initially established by her Dutch grandparents and then run by her four uncles, dairy farming was a consistent backdrop to everyday life, though not always in the conventional sense.

Both her parent's had full-time off-farm roles. Her dad worked in forestry as a harvest planner and her mum worked as a travel agent, although she was also managing much of the administrative side of the 1800-cow dairy business. Watching their work shaped her own work ethic and sense of responsibility. It also gave her an appreciation for what it took to manage the farm business behind the scenes. While she did not fully recognise it at the time, this early exposure has influenced her interest in business and management-level decision-making today.

Through Rachel's final years at school in Tokoroa she participated in the TeenAg competition (now known as Junior Young Farmer of the Year) getting through to the grand final in both years. It was through this competition, and a passionate agricultural teacher, that she began to realise the breadth of opportunities the primary sector could offer.

Lincoln University

With an emerging interest in science-based study, she attended open days at both Massey and Lincoln University before enrolling in a Bachelor of Agricultural Science degree at Lincoln, a decision she describes as one she never looked back from.

Rachel developed a strong interest in whole-farm systems thinking at Lincoln. While the foundational animal, plant and soil sciences were critical, it was the management papers that particularly resonated. These papers focused on integrating individual components into cohesive farm systems, an approach that would later underpin her consulting work.

She was also a DairyNZ scholar during her time at Lincoln, which created opportunities to engage with industry professionals and explore diverse career pathways. It was through these connections, and again a passionate DairyNZ education facilitator, that the concept of farm consultancy first took shape as a potential career.

Her academic journey culminated in completing a Bachelor of Agricultural Science with First Class Honours. Her Honours research focused on composting shelters within dairy farms, combining systems thinking with environmental and financial modelling. This research set her on a pathway that she would continue to develop within her professional work.

Perrin Ag career

Rachel joined Perrin Ag as a graduate consultant in 2019, beginning what has become a varied and evolving role within the firm. From the outset, she was drawn to the diversity of consultancy work and the ability to engage across a range of farm systems, business types and projects. Over time, and with the support of exceptional senior members within the business, she has developed a portfolio that spans work both within the farm gate and beyond it.

Within the farm gate, she primarily works with dairy farming businesses, including owner-operators and Māori-owned farming entities. She feels particularly privileged to work with Māori trusts in a supervisory capacity, where she contributes across both governance and operational levels of the business and is entrusted with a high level of responsibility.

This includes full visibility of the business and the ability to contribute to and make decisions in a way that carries real accountability. Her role spans supporting trustees with strategic decision-making through to working alongside the managers and sharemilkers on the operational and tactical aspects of the farm operations.

Beyond the farm gate, she has contributed to a range of project-based work, including initiatives related to freshwater management, forestry, and more recently generative artificial intelligence (GenAI).

Building a specialist body of work

A key area of specialisation for Rachel is composting shelters.

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Her Honours dissertation sparked an ongoing interest that has produced practical industry outputs and conference presentations. In 2022, she undertook an Our Land and Water Rural Professionals Fund project to complete farmer interviews and case study modelling of a composting shelter system on a commercial farm.

This work has since expanded into supporting clients to better understand the physical, environmental and financial implications of incorporating shelters into their farming systems. It reflects her interest in practical, systems-based solutions that address both productivity and sustainability outcomes.

Environmental and regulatory compliance has been another growing area of focus. Rachel led the development of Perrin Ag's Empowering Farmer Compliance resources and workshops, a Ministry for Primary Industries Accelerator Fund-supported initiative that took a practical, farmer-first approach to helping land and business owners navigate an increasingly complex regulatory environment spanning everything from freshwater to animal welfare, people management, biodiversity and more.

The workshops reached over 240 farmers and rural professionals with overwhelmingly positive feedback. Farmers are not opposed to accountability, but the pace and complexity of change has left many overwhelmed and uncertain. The workshops were designed to build confidence and capability, helping farmers identify what they could manage themselves and where they needed support. Translating technical and regulatory information into practical, usable tools and summaries for farmers was a core part of her approach.

More recently, she has been at the forefront of research into GenAI in agriculture. A project funded by DairyNZ and led by Rachel explored how New Zealand dairy farmers are currently using tools like ChatGPT and what the near-future might look like. The work was published in *The Journal* in 2026 and has since taken her to events and conferences across New Zealand and Australia as a speaker on the topic.

Grounded in practice

In parallel with her consulting work at Perrin Ag, Rachel and her partner are contract milking 800 cows on the family's home farm. This provides a direct connection back to the land and the farming system she grew up around, as well as a practical lens through which to view the challenges and opportunities facing farmers.



Professional development

Her development within the sector has been shaped by a combination of formal opportunities and influential individuals. During her time at university, she received academic recognition including the New Zealand Institute of Agricultural and Horticultural Science Prize and a Prime Minister's Scholarship for Asia, which provided exposure to international agricultural systems.

In 2023, she was highly commended in the Emerging Rural Professional of the Year awards, reflecting her view that rural professionals play a critical role in building farmer capability, not just providing technical advice.

Throughout her education and early career a number of informal mentors also influenced her pathway. From her school agriculture teacher who inspired her to study agriculture at university, through to her lecturer and Honours supervisor who sparked her interest in composting shelters, and her early years at Perrin Ag working alongside senior consultants, these experiences helped shape both her direction and approach.

Rachel continues to engage actively with the Institute through *The Journal*, the national conference, branch events and webinars. She values these forums as important opportunities to stay up-to-date with industry information, learn and contribute to ongoing sector discussions and strengthen professional networks.

Reflections on the sector

Like many in the rural sector, she sees the pace and complexity of change as one of the defining features of farming in today's environment. Farmers are increasingly required to balance a wide range of competing priorities from regulatory requirements and environmental expectations, through to financial performance, people management, and day-to-day operational demands. In many cases, it is not any single issue that creates pressure, but the cumulative effect of multiple demands converging at once.

At the same time, the volume of information available to farmers continues to grow. Industry updates, events, tools, and messaging come from many directions, making it increasingly difficult to know what is relevant, where to focus and what to act on. The risk we are seeing is not a lack of information, but that the volume becomes overwhelming, leading farmers to disengage or struggle to identify what really matters.

From Rachel's perspective, this is where rural professionals play a critical role. There is an opportunity to help cut through the noise, to disseminate what is relevant, and share what is working in practice. By doing so, she believes we can provide farmers with the clarity and confidence to move forward and continue progressing, rather than feeling stalled by uncertainty or competing priorities.

Equally, there is a role for rural professionals to challenge farmer thinking, encourage engagement with the wider industry, and support ongoing capability development. Currently, the emergence of GenAI tools would appear to be the most significant technological advancement available to the sector.

While artificial intelligence may feel confronting to many, she believes it holds real opportunity to support farmers in tackling many of the challenges they face. However, realising this potential will not be straightforward. As rural professionals, we need to become comfortable using these tools ourselves and within our own businesses if we are to effectively support farmers to do the same.

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