

# The diverse experiences and opportunities studying Agriculture.

*Monique Mellow talks of her journey from Morrinsville College to the Fairlight Station.*

*Written by Catherine Bryant, 30th October 2023*

Growing up in the Waikato, what some might consider the dairy farming central of New Zealand, the story of Monique Mellow, a passionate honours student from Lincoln, unfolds. Her journey from secondary school at Morrinsville College to an on-farm internship through the Fairlight Foundation

for women, showcases how early exposure to Agricultural Science can spark a lifelong love for the industry.

23-year-old Monique's story begins at Morrinsville College, and their school farm, where she initially explored the world of

agriculture from Year 9 through to Year 13. In the earlier years of studying agriculture, only unit standards were available. In her Year 12, with the arrival of a new teacher, Jackie Driver, achievement standards were introduced to replace the unit standards offered. This shift transformed the subject into a more science-based class, drawing in students who sought both the academic challenge and practical experiences.

*"Having the farm at Morrinsville College catered for both the practical and academic based learners. With our curriculum, the farm and its' animals played an integral role in every lesson. This involved tasks such as animal weighing and monitoring growth rates."*



*Monique and pup at a training day with local dog trialist, Kerry Chittock.*

One of Monique's assignments at Morrinsville College delved into meat quality, offering insight into what affects the quality of meat and its processing. The class even ventured into the marketing side of the primary sector, exploring the world of wine marketing through a visit to Vilagrad Winery. This broadened perspective helped Monique understand that the primary sector wasn't just about practicality; it had a dynamic, multifaceted aspect that included marketing and innovation.

Growing up herself in the more urban area of Morrinsville, Monique's extended family were dairy farmers. Through this exposure to farming, which she "loved", studying agriculture seemed a no brainer. She had an initial desire to become a veterinarian, however her teacher recognised her true calling, encouraging her to consider studying Agricultural Science. A trip down to a Lincoln University open day with her dad, and the support she received from her family, convinced her that Lincoln University was the best option.

*"My teacher suggested that I probably wouldn't enjoy being a vet as it wasn't who I was. She encouraged me to do Agricultural Science at Lincoln University and I was thankful to her for that. I know now that agricultural science is absolutely what I love."*

In Monique's last year of university, she gained a Prime Minister's Scholarship which allowed her the opportunity to explore overseas markets during a month-long visit to South Korea. The experience expanded her understanding of the industry's international landscape and combined with her academic achievements, set her on a path to success, culminating in her graduating with honours that year.

Monique's next adventure led her to the Fairlight Station in Kingston, located 45 minutes south of Queenstown at the bottom of Lake Wakatipu. This is where she embarked on the Fairlight Foundation internship. The Fairlight Foundation's mission is to support women's career advancement in the New Zealand agricultural industry.

Each year the Fairlight Foundation takes on 3 new female interns, where they learn everything from stock handling and management, to what they call their 'off stock' curriculum, which includes, machinery, general farm, management, forestry, and environmental management and sustainability.



*Monique after University graduation day*

This 2,500-hectare sheep, beef, and deer station with a 2,500ha Douglas fir forestry operation is one of the biggest and highest performing stations in the country. Monique says that everything they do there is from a science based approach, to produce the best results. However, the Fairlight Foundation offers more than just a hands-on experience, it provides a range of professional and personal development opportunities, such as workshops through Beef+Lamb New Zealand and certificates in Land Based Training, two of which Monique has achieved.

<https://landbasedtraining.co.nz>

*"There is also the huge number of professional skills taught, such as networking and public speaking. We do a lot of leadership courses which are hugely beneficial, I have experienced so much personal and professional growth".*

Monique discovered the Fairlight Foundation through social media and a friend who was involved in the programme during her university days. To entice more young people into the field of agriculture, Monique suggests leveraging social media platforms to showcase the beauty of our agricultural landscape and focus on New Zealand's leadership in the industry. She also emphasises the need to promote agricultural science and business in schools, especially through career expos and careers advisors. Monique goes on to say there is a need for more private farms to offer employment opportunities, to people new to the industry.

*"There are so many talented people out there with a huge work ethic and determination who just need one person to give them a chance and they can thrive in the agricultural world."*

After completing her internship, Monique envisions a future beginning with shepherding or working overseas to gain international experience, before diving into a rural professional role. She feels her practical experiences at Fairlight have equipped her to confidently advance her rural career and address real-world challenges effectively. As she continues her journey in the field, it's clear that she is poised for a successful career in the world of agriculture.

<https://www.fairlightfoundation.org>



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