



## Agribusiness in Schools

DELIVERING AGRIBUSINESS TO NZ SECONDARY SCHOOLS

# From classroom to global marketplace

## How Agribusiness at Secondary School paved the way

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In the ever-evolving world of New Zealand's primary industries, one young man's journey is a testament to the power of education. Meet Sam Howard, a twenty-three-year-old Silver Fern Farms Graduate, in his second year whose path to success was paved by a crucial steppingstone: Agribusiness in Schools.

Sam, who grew up in the centre of Wanaka, first began working on Bendigo Station during his holidays at the age of 15. He was operating heavy equipment, engaging in stock work, and worked two summers silage contracting. Although not from a farming background, he embraced a rural lifestyle, and his weekends were filled with dirt biking and hunting.

In his earlier years, Sam admitted that he was not the most committed student, but everything changed when he discovered the subject of Agribusiness. The turning point came in Year 12 in 2017 when Roy Gawn, a Science teacher at Mt Aspiring College, who had a

passion for the primary industries, introduced the new course. Sam and his mother attended an information evening and were intrigued by the possibilities Agribusiness offered. Roy had high expectations and encouraged those who wanted to excel, and this was the motivational spark that Sam needed.

*"Our will to impress a knowledgeable, and passionate teacher led to our output being maximised and a realisation that when I actually enjoyed something, I worked really hard at it. I started to get grades at Excellence level, which acted as a momentum booster for my other subjects and helped with my overall schooling".*

An Agribusiness fieldtrip, visiting Mt. Burke Station (a generational

sheep and beef farm), with stunning views of Lake Wanaka, left a lasting impression on Sam. This was in support of an assignment around business operations, where the owners had diversified their income by offering weddings, heli-biking and other events.

Having been given this unique perspective on the agricultural sector beyond the boundaries of traditional farming, Sam soon realised that a lifetime on the farm was not for him. He decided to pursue a degree in Agribusiness and Food Marketing at Lincoln University in 2019, where he gained insights into the broad range of careers available in the agricultural sector. Sam's fellow graduates all work in diverse fields, from rural banking to exportation logistics showcasing the industry's vast opportunities.

*"Attending Lincoln University fully convinced me of my passion to fulfil a career contributing to*

*the future success of New Zealand agriculture on the world stage. Our hard-working producers create some of the most superior food products globally, with an extremely unique origin story. Going forward, I have a hunger to contribute to selling the distinctive production story, gaining the greatest value and rewarding Kiwi producers and companies in a vast global setting”.*

PHOTOS: SAM ON GRANDPARENTS FARM, SOUTH ISLAND

After completing his degree, Sam joined the Silver Fern Farms Graduate Career Programme, which involves three one-year rotations across various business areas to provide a holistic understanding of the industry. In his current year on a “Sales” rotation, Sam manages the Australian market and customers who export into smaller niche markets, (that Silver Fern Farms does not directly supply into) such as the Pacific and Indian Ocean Islands, and parts of the Caribbean. He handles inquiries about eligibility and specific country requirements, selling a diverse range of beef, lamb, and venison products. In his

first year, he worked in the corporate and logistical side of livestock management, focusing on the initial supply chain and incorporating the values of He Waka Eke Noa - a partnership supporting environmental preservation and well-being for current and future generations.

In his daily work, Sam is continually amazed by the substantial impact of external factors that impact New Zealand’s primary export markets such as the Ukrainian war and its effect on energy prices in Europe, post COVID-19, consumer confidence in China, worldwide inflation and changing weather patterns. However, Sam views these challenges as opportunities for the industry to adapt and innovate in response to changing conditions.

*“It surprised me just how strong and volatile our position can become due to global factors such as economic wellbeing, geopolitical tensions, and large-scale production in other nations flooding the markets. This can all happen in the matter of a year’s quarter. It can be quite a rollercoaster, but you gain invaluable insights when navigating a downward market.”*

Silver Fern Farms are extremely proud of the young people in their company. A highlight last year was being invited to attend a sustainable, entrepreneurial dinner at the ‘Beehive’ called “Festival for the Future,” sponsored by Silver Fern Farms. It marked a



significant milestone as it was the first time their Net Carbon Zero beef had been consumed in New Zealand, making it a truly special opportunity. Sam emphasises the importance of gaining exposure to different facets of a multibillion-dollar business like Silver Fern Farms. This exposure, he believes, is critical for acquiring an in-depth understanding, especially during the development phase of one's career, setting the duration of the programme apart from others available in the red meat industry.

*"Working in such a complex environment, it typically takes around four to six months to truly develop the confidence and expertise required to excel in a specific role or rotation".*

When it comes to promoting Agribusiness to future generations, Sam believes Year 11 students, at the threshold of making crucial career decisions should be our main target. While social media is a great tool for creating awareness, parents remain pivotal in influencing their children's subject choices. Sam advocates for highlighting the exciting aspects of agricultural careers, such as extensive travel opportunities, job security, and the unique blend of practicality with corporate-style work.



*"In a volatile market there may be restructuring, but when you're involved in food production, global population growth and the demand for our top-quality products, a large percentage of jobs will remain and won't be replaced by technology, more so than other sectors."*

Sam is committed to paying it forward by sharing his insights and experiences. He believes that consistent positive messaging will encourage more young people

to explore rewarding careers in the primary industries. The vital role played by programmes such as Agribusiness in Schools and the passionate teachers that drive them is evident in Sam's career making decisions. The Agribusiness in Schools programme demonstrates the profound influence of education on young minds within a sector integral to the prosperity of New Zealand.

