

Student Spotlight: Mitchell Cockburn Numbers in the Field

Growing up on a sheep and beef finishing farm near Christchurch meant agriculture was a part of everyday life for Mitchell. From an early age, he was immersed in farming operations that included cropping peas for processing and contracting work such as haymaking and baleage.

“I’ve always been in the agricultural sector. I grew up on a sheep and beef farm and did a bit of cropping and contracting as well.”

Mitchell attended Lincoln High School, where his interest in agricultural education first began to take shape. He immersed himself in Year 9 agriculture and quickly saw the value of learning that extended beyond the classroom. Farm visits, practical demonstrations, and exposure to different production systems helped him connect theory with industry expectations. While Mitchell had already gained experience from his upbringing, he recognised how valuable these opportunities were for peers with little prior exposure to farm systems. The strong connection between Lincoln High School and Lincoln University offered early insight into what tertiary study in agriculture could entail.

Mitchell progressed to Lincoln University to complete a Bachelor of Commerce majoring in Agriculture and minoring in accounting. Numbers came naturally to him.

“I’ve always liked working with numbers. There is a right and wrong answer, and when you combine that with agriculture you get real world application.”

Through his degree, Mitchell completed multiple farm management reports and visited a range of agribusinesses, gaining essential exposure to different systems and approaches.



“A lot of the early papers were farm management based. We had to write full reports on farms and understand why they were doing things the way they were.”

Subjects such as soil science stood out because they demonstrated how theory connects directly to practical decision-making. Understanding soil fertility and management practices helped Mitchell see how scientific principles influence productivity and farm performance.

After graduating, Mitchell travelled overseas to gain experience before settling into a professional role. He worked on a cropping farm in Australia and later on a sheep and beef farm in Scotland, alongside warehousing work in the United Kingdom.

These experiences broadened his understanding of global farming systems and how environmental conditions, markets, and policy shape agriculture, while also building his independence and confidence.

“We’re heavily reliant on overseas demand and there’s a lot more climate extremes now, so farmers have to adapt.”

He’s motivated by the idea of working in a role that supports farm businesses to remain profitable and resilient in the face of ongoing change.

“I’d like to be in a role where I can help farmers make better business decisions so they are financially better off.”