

THE AHUWHENUA TROPHY TE KAWERONGO

JULY 2026

»» Leading Māori kiwifruit grower wins Ahuwhenua Trophy

AHUWHENUA TROPHY
EXCELLENCE IN
MĀORI HORTICULTURE
AWARD
2026



Mātai Pacific Iwi Collective have been announced as the winner of the coveted Ahuwhenua Trophy for horticulture

The announcement was made by Māori Development Minister, Hon Tama Potaka at an awards dinner in Whangārei attended by over 700 people. Guests included representatives of political parties, diplomats, Māori and primary sector leaders, government officials, competition alumni and whānau of all the finalists, and the evening included an outstanding performance from kapa haka roopu Hātea.

Mātai Pacific are based at Te Puke in the Bay of Plenty with more than 100 hectares of covered kiwifruit on three separate orchards and are the largest Māori supplier of kiwifruit to Zespri. They were established in 2018 and are a strategic collaboration between three groups – Te Arawa Group Holdings, Ngāti Awa Group Holdings, and Rotomā No.1 Incorporation.

Hon Tama Potaka described the event as a showcase of exemplary Māori horticulture and farming and that it highlighted the value that Māori horticulture and agriculture contributes to the NZ economy. He says when people visit orchards such as Mātai Pacific they see best practice in the form of protocols and tikanga that Māori operate within.

“All those who entered this competition are winners and all do Māori proud,” he says.

Others taking part in the awards pre-station were the Associate Minister of Agriculture, Hon Mike Butterick, Te Puni Kōkiri CEO Dave Samuels, and Glenn Webber from the Ministry for Primary Industries.

Mātai Pacific Chair, Tiaki Hunia reflected after receiving the trophy that the road to winning had been a big journey. He said the outcome was a reflection of all Māori in the kiwifruit industry.

“Along with Otama Marere Trust and Ngāti Hine Forestry Trust we are just privileged to be part of the finalist group. Any one of could have won and it's something we all succeed together,” he said.

Tiaki Hunia says winning the trophy was an amazing team effort and he recognises the work of his team invested over a long period of time to achieve what they have. He says all staff sharing the same values was a big part of their success. He also paid tribute to the many people who have helped to make Mātai Pacific the success it is. He singled out in particular the late Homman Tapsell of Otama Marere Trust who generously shared his knowledge and experience with Mātai Pacific.

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Being such a large collective has given Mātai Pacific a high profile and he says they are very humbled when other groups ask for their advice on how to put together such an undertaking.

“We are always very open to that and it’s not something we impose on others. But if people ask for our help we are more than willing to share our experiences about what has worked well and what hasn’t. There is much value in learning about those challenges,” he says.

Tiaka Hunia said Mātai Pacific have been through some challenging times and have had to work through the aftermath of PSA and then Covid-19. He said having good governance and the willingness to seek outside help was critical.

“Being here tonight means a lot to those of us who are here, but also those back home. This is all about the kaupapa – not about winning,” he concluded.

Representatives of each of the finalists were also presented with their historic replica certificates, with Glenn Webber of MPI presenting to Charles Russell of Mātai Pacific Iwi Collective, Hon Mike Butterick to Petera Tapsell of Otama Marere Trust and Hon Tama Potaka to Pita Tipene of Ngāti Hine Forestry Trust.

First experience

It was the first time attending for the new Associate Agriculture Minister Mike Butterick, there representing Agriculture Minister Todd McClay.

In his new role, Hon Mike Butterick has responsibility for Māori agribusiness. He said that it was a great evening and that there was nothing like celebrating success. He said events like this lift the spirits of everyone and provide aspiration for young people.

He noted the tremendous importance of Māori to the Aotearoa economy and the potential to expand their position even further. A key to this he said was unlocking land which will not only add more dollars to the economy but also provide jobs and opportunities in rural areas.

Hon Mike Butterick also noted the fact that the winners, Mātai Pacific were a collective and how this is a proven way of getting scale and profitability.



Praise from the chair

All finalists set a remarkable benchmark according to the Ahuwhenua Trophy Management Committee Chair, Nukuhia Hadfield. She said what they collectively represent for te ao Māori and the sector is something every New Zealander should take pride in.

Nukuhia Hadfield said you could not have separated the standard of operations by passion or purpose but Mātai Pacific Iwi Collective rose to the top.

“What Mātai Pacific have done is aspirational and I think it is going to make other people realise what is possible and can be done. There are many ways to set up partnerships, be it in horticulture or agribusiness. They should take note of what Tiaki Hunia has noted, which is not to be afraid to bring in expertise to help put those partnerships together,” she said.

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Ahuwhenua Young Māori Grower

Celebrating future leaders

Alongside the senior Ahuwhenua Trophy, a special competition is held to recognise and celebrate the success of up and coming young Māori leaders. This competition was first run in 2012 and since then has produced an alumni of outstanding young people in dairy, sheep and beef and horticulture sectors.

This year's winner was Te Rina Joe (Ngāti Pāhauwera, Ngāti Kahungunu), a Supervisor/ Orchard Hand at Pakuratahi Orchard for Ngāti Pāhauwera Commercial Development Ltd at Tangoio, Hawke's Bay. She has worked her way up from picking fruit with her whānau at 15, to being a supervisor at the orchard where she oversees teams of 40–60 workers across a 55 hectare apple operation.

Te Rina said after receiving the award that she felt so proud not only of herself but also her support team. She says she entered the competition because of her whānau who believed in her and saw something in her that she hadn't discovered. She said the competition had opened the floodgates for her future in horticulture.

"Horticulture is such a big part of my life, and just having the chance to be part of the competition has been an amazing experience. To my peers, Larissa and Rob who were also finalists, it has been a pleasure going through this journey with you," Joe said.

The award was presented by Sonya Rimene of Te Tumu Paeroa, representing the Māori Trustee, Dr Charlotte Severne.

Sonya Rimene noted that all the finalists were enhancing the mana of not just their employers but of their whānau



and walking in the footsteps of their tīpuna. She said Māori descend from a long line of innovators, entrepreneurs, horticulturalists, agriculturalists and ancestors who worked the whenua, and with growers of this calibre the horticultural sector is in good hands for the future.

"These emerging leaders, motivated by a deep connection to the whenua, whānau, hapū and iwi, truly represent the best of what it means to be Māori," she said.

Each of the finalists receives generous cash prizes and scholarships from Te Tumu Paeroa. The other finalists Larissa Wooding-Ngata (Ngāti Porou), of Craigmore Sustainables and Robert John Manuel, (Ngāti Kahu, Ngāti Rehia, Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Raakaipaaka) of Ngāti Hine Forestry Trust, were also presented with a taonga recognising their achievements in the competition.

Ahuwhenua Trophy Management Committee Chair Nukuhia Hadfield says Te Rina's story is one of real purpose.

"She had the opportunity to work for her iwi, on their land, and she took it. The connection between a person, their people, and place is exactly what this award is about.

"This competition continues to show us is that the talent is there, young Māori who are grounded in who they are, serious about their craft, and ready to lead, quietly shaping what Māori horticulture looks like for the generations ahead," Hadfield says.



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Field days showcase finalists

A feature of the Ahuwhenua Trophy competition are the field days at the properties of the finalists. It's a chance for members of the public to see the orchards firsthand and for the Trustees and staff to tell the story about their history and how they got to where they are today.

The day before the field days the judges visit each finalist to gain a greater insight into their operations and to look at the property. The finalist judges for 2026 were Nick Bullen (BNZ), Nicole Nepe (Te Puni Kōkiri), Dr Bruce Campbell (Chief Judge) and Pou Māori judge Rito Tapuke.



Mātai Pacific Iwi Collective

Field Day: Thursday 26 March

Unfortunately, the first of the field days at Mātai Pacific Iwi Collective's orchard at Te Puke in the Bay of Plenty had to be cancelled just hours before the event due to a large storm bringing heavy rain and strong winds. There were concerns that conditions could deteriorate and pose a risk to those coming to the event and also at the orchard itself.

Despite the huge effort that had gone into preparing for the day, Chair Tiaki Hunia says it was the right call to cancel.



He said the reason was based on their values of kaitiakitanga and they did not want people to be travelling in the dangerous weather.

"We wanted to be sure that people who came to the event could get home safely

and given the orange weather warning and the experience we have had with weather events in the Bay of Plenty it was a no brainer to call off the event," he said.

Otama Marere Trust

Field Day: Thursday 2 April

The following week however more than 200 people turned out for the event at the Otama Marere Trust orchard at Paengaroa in the Bay of Plenty.

"It was fortunate weather made for a great turnout and the positive feedback from people was welcomed especially about the wetland area," Otama Marere Advisory Trustee Diane Berghan says.

"People were able to see that we are not just about growing kiwifruit but also about how we restore the land and what we give back to the land.

"The day was also about acknowledging the owners of Otama Marere and the support they give the trustees, and the decisions they are making now for future generations."

Otama Marere Trust manages 45 hectares of Māori freehold land at Paengaroa and takes its name from the pā site once occupied by Rangiiwaho and his whānau. Established as an Ahu Whenua Trust in 1979, the land was leased for a 60-year term to Te Puke Golf Club before orchard development began in the 1980s under Sir Peter Tapsell's leadership.

Today's operations include more than 21 hectares of kiwifruit, avocados, native plantings, and 6.3 hectares

of protected wetlands. The Trust diversifies through commercial property investment and Māori partnerships.

Guests heard presentations about the Trust's history, operations and aspirations before being taken on a tour of the orchard to see some of the developments taking place.

Ahuwhenua Trophy Chair Nukuhia Hadfield praised Otama Marere Trust for running an enjoyable field day.

"Otama Marere has worked hard in establishing a diversity of crops on orchard with an improving productivity trajectory, and they have taken a leading role in growing SunGold G3 - as one of the first Māori owned orchards to grow this crop.

"They first entered kiwifruit production in the early 1980s, accepting the challenge of developing a new horticultural venture that has since grown into one of the region's most successful operations.

"This gave attendees a picture of what they have achieved by hard work and determination over many years," Hadfield says.



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Field days showcase finalists

Ngāti Hine Forestry Trust

Field Day: Thursday 23 April

The final field day was held by Ngāti Hine Forestry Trust, which operates six kiwifruit orchards near Kerikeri in Te Tai Tokerau.

The Trust's kiwifruit operation comprises 49 hectares, with 32 hectares planted in covered G3 SunGold, operated under a lease agreement with Seeka.

"We're incredibly proud to have hosted the Ahuwhenua Trophy field day and to have welcomed so many manuhiri onto our orchard," Ngāti Hine Forestry Trust Chairman Pita Tipene says.

"We hope visitors take away a deeper understanding of how we operate - balancing commercial outcomes with our responsibilities as kaitiaki."

Guests were welcomed at the Turner Centre in Kerikeri, where they heard presentations from representatives including Chairperson Pita Tipene and CEO Heidi Mackey. They discussed the Trust's decision to move into high-value horticulture, proving that kiwifruit can be grown successfully outside traditional growing regions.

"I'm really proud of our team. This is more than just a job. It's about the vision that we

are all working towards, 'he whenua hua, he tangata ora', which means 'productive lands, people, and wellbeing', Heidi Mackey says.

Guests were then taken to visit one of the orchards for a closer look at operations.

Ahuwhenua Trophy Management Committee Chair Nukuhia Hadfield says the field day was another example of how Māori growers continue to demonstrate innovation and add value to the growing sector.

"What stands out about Ngāti Hine is their clear strategic vision that honours kaitiakitanga while delivering consistent productivity gains.

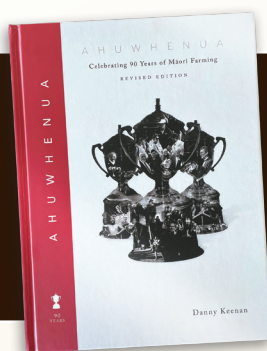
"Their commitment to growing employment opportunities for their people combined with strong partnerships demonstrates their vision and approach to horticulture. They're commercially successful while staying true to their values and responsibilities to whānau and whenua," she says.



Looking forward

With another successful competition round complete, planning is already under way for the 2027 competition for Māori dairy farmers. Now is the time for Māori entities that have dairy operations to enter the competition and rural professionals who who support such entities to get in touch.

Entries close Wednesday 2nd December 2026. Check the Ahuwhenua Trophy website for more information.



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Study Tour sets up finalists for the future

Following an Ahuwhenua Trophy event around 2010 the late Hon Parekura Horomia, Minister of Māori Affairs, asked “but where are the future Ahuwhenua Trophy winners?” Shortly after in 2012 the inaugural Ahuwhenua Young Māori Farmer competition took place.

The purpose of the award is to build the Māori primary sector leaders of tomorrow by supporting rangatahi annually as representatives in their field.

The judges for the 2026 competition are Lead Judge Sam Vivian-Greer, Peter MacGregor and Erin Simpson, who were also joined by alumni mentor Maatutaera Akonga, Peter MacGregor

As part of the judging process to determine the winner of the 2026 award, the finalists were assessed on three Pou Uara (values)



Judges (left-right): Sam Vivian Greer, Erin Simpson, alumni mentor Maatutaera Akonga, Peter MacGregor

- Manaakitanga, Whanaungatanga, and Mana Motuhake, during the Study Tour, which is a programme which occurs in the lead up to the awards dinner. This year, the event included presentations by guest speakers and visits to various operations in the Whangārei district.

The Study Tour is built around Tā Āpirana Ngata's korero “E tipu e rea mō ngā rā o tō ao – Grow and branch forth for the days destined to you”, with a schedule tailored around the aspirations of the finalists.

Finalists Te Rina Joe, Larisssa Wooding-Ngata, and Robert John Manuel were hosted at Northport; a multispecies subtropical horticulture operation (Kotare Farms); and a post settlement entity establishing an avocado orchard (Te Uri o Hau Settlement Trust). During their trip to the latter, they were fortunate enough to be there on their first ever harvest. Finalists also heard from a number of experts covering the whakapapa of Ahuwhenua, whenua Māori governance, leadership in horticulture, media training and purpose aligned financial management.

These site visits and specialist speakers are intended to expose them to learning opportunities they may not encounter otherwise, providing them with some new skills to take home and to help realise their own aspirations.

DairyNZ

Bringing together farming best practices and mātauranga Māori

A growing number of Māori agribusinesses and farmers across the motu are incorporating mātauranga Māori alongside western science and conventional practices to improve farm management practices and environmental outcomes.

A recent research partnership between DairyNZ and the Bioeconomy Science Institute Maiangi Taiao (formerly AgResearch) into how tikanga and mātauranga Māori shape farming practices, shows the importance placed on whenua (land), whakapapa (kinship), and whanaungatanga (relationships). Participating farms highlighted how they combine mātauranga and tikanaga Māori with western science, including restoring waterways using cultural frameworks, and reducing nitrogen leaching through improved farm systems.

“We know our farmers take their role as kaitiaki (guardians) seriously,” said DairyNZ's Pou Ārahi (Head of Māori Engagement) Julian Reti Kaukau.

“The insights from this research will inform our ongoing engagement with Māori agribusinesses across a range of research projects and activities, including our Resilient Pastures

programme and the recently announced Responsible Dairy programme,” he said.

Māori internship programme: Whakamana (empowerment) in action

“Another kaupapa we are committed to is empowering our rangatahi to find pathways in the primary sector,” Julian said.

DairyNZ's Māori intern programme, which started in 2019, has supported taura (students) looking to build on their interest in science and dairy farming. Eleven rangatahi Māori have been mentored under the programme, which provides technical skill progression and networking to support career guidance including pursuing further studies and employment.

These student internships are advertised from August each year on the DairyNZ website:

[Māori internships and opportunities | DairyNZ.](#)

Interested students can contact Pounamu Anaru, DairyNZ's Kaiaiki, Māori Development Advisor to find out more about the programme at pounamu.anaru@dairynz.co.nz.

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Supporting Māori horticulture *Growing together, season after season*

Congratulations to this year's Ahuwhenua Trophy winner, Mātai Pacific Iwi Collective, and to the finalists, Otama Marere Trust and Ngāti Hine Forestry Trust. The hard work and dedication behind Māori horticulture is something worth celebrating.

PGG Wrightson has been a proud sponsor of the Ahuwhenua Trophy for many years. Māori growers play a vital role in rural communities and in the primary sector across Aotearoa, and this competition is a chance to recognise that.

Through Fruitfed Supplies, our horticulture business, we work alongside orchardists and growers every season. Our people are out in the orchards, getting to know each operation and finding the technical know-how that makes a practical difference on the ground.

The field days earlier this year were a great reminder of what Māori horticulture is achieving. At Otama Marere Trust near Paengaroa, around 200 people came to see a working orchard in action, including a wetland redevelopment that's bringing unproductive land back to life. As the Trust put it: look after the whenua, and the whenua will look after the people.



At Ngāti Hine Forestry Trust near Kerikeri, a Fruitfed Supplies customer, we saw SunGold kiwifruit grown well outside its traditional regions, creating jobs for local people along the way. Their philosophy, "He Whenua Hua, He Tangata Ora" (productive lands, people and wellbeing), came through in everything they showed us.

Our Māori Agribusiness team connects you with the right people and specialist knowledge from across the PGG Wrightson network. We're here to make sure Māori growers and agribusinesses have the practical support they need.

To learn more about our Māori Agribusiness services, talk to your local PGG Wrightson representative.

Ahuwhenua Trophy proudly on show at this years National Fieldays



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