06 February 2020 – This week’s headlines

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**International**

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[29 January, Linda Nordling, Science Mag]
Scholarship highlights NZ as global leader in ag climate change [03 February, Rural News] A new scholarship which is directed at increasing global scientific expertise in agricultural emissions has been announced by the Government. The New Zealand Global Research Alliance Doctoral Scholarships (NZ-GRADS) programme will assist six science students from developing countries complete their PHD at a New Zealand University. The scholarships are expected to give the world’s brightest minds access to New Zealand’s education system and support the Global Research Alliance on Agricultural Greenhouse Gases (GRA).

Hive demonstrations adding buzz to Arataki Visitor Centre over summer [29 January, Hawke’s Bay Today] Arataki Honey has introduced new “live hive” demonstrations at its Hawke’s Bay visitor centre, which has already had over 10,000 visitors during the summer holidays. Nat Berry runs the hive demonstrations, which allow visitors to get up close to the drone male bee. The drone bee is only produced during spring and summer, and has the sole purpose of finding the perfect match for mating with the new Queen bee. Arataki Honey’s visitor centre has been designed as an educational experience that is free of charge, and the hive demonstrations will be made twice a week until the end of March.

Southern Field Days returns [31 January, Nigel Malthus, Rural News] The Southern Field Days will be on in February near Gore, with 40,000 visitors expected to come to see the 700 exhibitors on show. The biennial event was originally hosted by a local farmer in 1982 and has since grown to occupy a 60 hectare site. The event is run by a volunteer committee made up of 24 past and present members of the Otago/Southland Young Farmers Club. The Tractorpull, Innovation Awards and Fencing competition will be back on this year after a good response in previous awards.

Kiwi dairy and food exporters are cracking the 1.34 billion-strong Indian market [02 February, Anuja Nadkarni, Stuff NZ] Former Black Cap Geoff Allott started up Quality NZ to fill the gap of New Zealand meat, seafood and wine that he saw in India whilst staying at luxurious hotels. Mr Allott’s business partner Geoff Thin spent 18 months researching the Indian market and several years living in the country to set up the supply chain’. Mr Allott reports that due to the diversity of India, it is necessary for his business to treat it as a bunch of micro-countries as India is a hard one to crack, but does have overwhelming opportunity. Trade between India and New Zealand is now worth almost $3 billion and it has been said that companies can continue to grow their relationship with India through collaboration and partnership rather than merely increasing quantities.

A new variety of pear is being developed under the Piqa brand which has known appeal in Asian markets as a “gift fruit”. The pear has visual appeal with a dark red colour, has a lot of flavour and is helping to boost New Zealand’s pear market. Piqa’s two major shareholders are Plant and Food Research as well as Apple and Pears NZ. Breeding new varieties of fruit can take up to 20 years from its original concept to final commercialisation so requires forward thinking to predict trends.

Christchurch free fruit and nut map offers flavour to foragers [01 February, Radio New Zealand]
The Christchurch City Council have released an online food map to help encourage locals to make the most of their abundance of free fruit and nut trees within the city. There are nearly 7,000 fruit or nut-producing trees in Christchurch and Banks Peninsula. They have promoted forage etiquette such as only taking enough for one's own needs to ensure that there is some left for the next person.

**Water**

$12.7m to help ease Northland’s water woes [31 January, Rural News] The Government is giving the Northland Regional Council (NRC) and Kaipara District Council (KDC) $12.7 million for water projects to help the areas become more resilient in extreme weather conditions. NRC will get $12 million for the Northland Water Storage and Use project and KDC $745,000 for their Kai for Kaipara Water project as stability of water is critical for Northland’s economy and wellbeing as the population grows. Parts of the region are currently facing extreme heat and poor grass growth which is forcing some dairy farmers to dry off their cows early.

**Arable**

Pea growing ban nearing an end [31 January, Gianina Schwanecke, Wairarapa Times Age] A pea ban that was placed on the Wairarapa region in April 2016 by the Ministry for Primary Industries may be lifted after this season, if no presence of pea weevil is detected. Pea weevils were found in the region in 2016, however due to the remaining weevils being trapped, none were found last season. Pea growers were eligible for ex-gratia payments to ensure they were not left worse off than if they would have continued to grow peas. Some of the farmers gained access to MPI’s Sustainable Land Management and Climate Change Fund for alternative cropping which allowed them to trial other crops in the interim such as hemp, maize grain and red clover. It is expected most farmers will revert to pea growing however, rebuilding the Wairarapa pea farming industry will not be instant.

**Future of Food**

Taranaki backyard vege farmers awarded $100k research grant [03 Feb, Mike Watson, Stuff NZ] Massey University have given a $100,000 grant to a group of Taranaki urban farmers to help more people commercially grow vegetables in their backyards. The grant will fund a partnership between Farm Next Door and Massey University, as urban farming is becoming a global movement. Farm Next Door focuses on crop diversity as well as soil health in order to help provide their local community with sustainable produce. The research will surround finding the best ways to market and set strategies for growing food organically whilst promoting community involvement.

**Biosecurity**

Auckland’s $18 million Queensland fruit fly hunt [30 January, NZ Herald] Auckland’s Queensland fruit fly response has come in under budget at nearly $18 million. With just 14 flies caught, it cost approximately $1.3 million per fly. However, horticulture industry leaders report that if the fly had been left to establish in New Zealand, it would have cost the economy billions. The first fly was found on 14 February last year and the last fly was found on 15 July. Dr Catherine Duthie, Biosecurity New Zealand Spokesperson has reported that the final trap checks will be made next week on the 1300 traps placed across Auckland.

**Forestry**

TDC closes some forest areas as hot, dry weather continues [30
January, Cherie Sivignon, Stuff NZ] Tasman District Council have closed plantation areas at Kingsland Forest, Moturoa/Rabbit Island, Rough Island and Tunnicliff Forest after fire risk has grown in the dry district. The decision was made after Fire and Emergency New Zealand were asked for advice on how to proceed. People are able to still use other places at the sites such as the beach and picnic spots on Moturoa/Rabbit Island, as it is only the plantations that are closed. The council will be assessing the situation weekly, and further closures may be needed.

Agri-Tech

New Zealand is using its own fleet of albatross spies to look for illegal fishing [30 January, Luke Appleby, 1 News] Fisheries New Zealand, along with the Department of Conservation have partnered up to increase their understanding of New Zealand albatross species, especially their foraging range and distribution. Albatrosses have been used by the French to find illegal fishery operations by detecting radar signals from fishing vessels and cross-crediting these against Automatic Identification Systems (AIS). They are ideal for operations like these as they travel long distances and also gravitate towards fishing ships for the chance of accessing food. 20 radar detection tags were placed on New Zealand albatross last month and tracked during their journey to South America. Radar detections will be checked and it is expected that a report will be available next month on the findings.

Red Meat

What about the potential of goat meat exports? [29 January, Garrick Batten, Rural News] Goat Industry Advocate Garrick Batten is asking why New Zealand meat exporters have not capitalised on the inbuilt and growing Northern American demand for goat meat. Mr Batten reports that goat meat prices have been rising over time, and that producing the meat can provide on-farm production advantages.

China overtakes the US as top beef market [30 January, Statistics New Zealand- Press Release, Scoop Independent News] Statistics New Zealand have reported that China overtook the United States as New Zealand’s biggest beef export market during 2019. In 2019, beef exports rose 112 percent to $1.7 billion whilst US exports fell 20 percent to $956 million. China received nearly half of the total value and quantity of beef exports sent from New Zealand, with only a quarter sent to the US. Overall there was a goods trade deficit during the year, with imports rising faster than exports.

Coronavirus starting to impact meat processing [31 January, Rural News] Silver Fern Farms have announced that they will begin to reduce production of meat due to the coronavirus causing disruption in China. Congestions at Chinese ports has resulted in significant stress being placed on cold storage facilities for New Zealand and if the stress continues will result in these stores becoming full.

‘Devastated’: More than 500 lambs have perished in a Mackenzie District fire [02 February, Louisa Steyl, Stuff NZ] Over 500 lambs have died in a fire in the Mackenzie District according to Fire and Emergency New Zealand, after they were stuck in a shed. SPCA Spokesperson Jessie Gilchrist reported that the Ministry of Primary Industries would lead an animal welfare response.

Alliance joins ex-cricketers to sell premium lamb to India [03 February, Rural News] Alliance Group have purchased a 10.4 percent stake in Quality NZ for an undisclosed sum. QualityNZ supplies India with New Zealand products and Alliance says their newly acquired stake will allow them to capture more value from India. Chief Executive of Alliance David Surveyor states that India has a growing appetite for the
story of grass-fed beef produced naturally and that they are targeting the higher socio-economic category which includes more than 200 million people in it.

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**Viticulture**

Making New Zealand the ‘go to’ country for lighter wines [31 January, Rachel Arthur, Beverage Daily] New Zealand is placing $17 million into a programme coined ‘the Lighter Wines initiative’ to help it become the number one lower alcohol wine country globally. The programme is aimed at building leadership in creating premium quality, naturally lighter in alcohol wines and is a collaboration of both Government and industry bodies. Lower alcohol wines come as a result of growing slower ripening grapes in a cool climate. The programme has a target of reaching $285 million in sales annually by 2023, and is currently on track to achieve this.

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**Farmers & Producers**

New Zealand agriculture set to extend profitable run – Rabobank [30 January, The Country] The latest Agribusiness Outlook report released by Rabobank reports that farmers in New Zealand are set to have a fourth consecutive year of profitability in 2020. The report states that the year will be one of significant transition for farmers due to new regulations and rules. Beef, lamb and dairy’s high prices are underpinned by good demand conditions and limited supply growths. The effect that the coronavirus outbreak will have is not yet clear. Rabobank’s Head of Research Tim Hunt states that staple products such as milk and beef will not likely be largely affected, whilst niche segments such as live crayfish are more likely to suffer significant detriment.

Federated farmers have released the results of their latest Farm Confidence Survey, which had 1500 respondents in January. Overall, farmers are slightly more positive than this time six months ago, however only 4 percent of farmers expect general economic conditions to improve over the next 12 months. 46 percent expected economic conditions to get worse over the next year, and the rest expected the conditions to remain the same. A major concern of farmers that featured surrounded regulation and compliance. The second most popular concern was climate change policy and the ETS. Dairy farmers were the least pessimistic about the future, whilst arable farmers were the most pessimistic.

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**Economics & Trade**

Records all round for dairy and meat exports [30 January, Angie Skerrett, Newshub] Statistics New Zealand have reported that the first quarter of the 2019/2020 dairy export season has resulted in new records being made. 40 percent of New Zealand’s annual goods exports are made up of just dairy products and meat, with dairy export values rising 17 percent during August to December 2019 and volume up 6.7%. The total value has exceeded $6.6 billion so far this season, setting a new record for the August to December quarter. A new record was set for the highest value for any month, with dairy exports reaching $2 billion. Average lamb prices increased to a record $12.18 per kilogram in December.

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**Dairy**

Waikato dairy farm sales surge [30 January, Farmers Weekly] 11 dairy farms were sold in the Waikato in December according to Real Estate data. This was a dramatic change from the two months prior in which only two were sold, however does not counteract the overall trend of declining sales and land values. 23 sales were made in total in
December, comparing to 35 in 2018 and 39 in 2017. “Nationally, the median sale price for dairy farms was $38,152 a hectare for the three months ending to December compared to $40,589 over the same three months in 2018”.

Real Estate Institute Rural Spokesman Brian Peacocke reported that rural morale is mostly positive, however there is an air of caution especially surrounding the approaching dry summer period.

Declining dairy asset values plus high debt place many dairy farms in a pincer, with increasing numbers going equity negative despite being cash flow positive [30 January, Keith Woodford, Interest.co.nz] The market value of dairy land is declining substantially and despite many dairy farmers wanting to sell, there are few buyers. Reserve Bank statistics have revealed that dairy farm bank debt has declined since 2018, sitting at approximately $21.50 of bank debt per kilogram of milk solids. However, sheep and beef-farm bank debt has increased during the same time period, along with horticulture. In the last year market prices for dairy land have dropped around 20 percent. Due to a range of culminating factors have resulted in many dairy farmers with a highly insecure financial position. However, it is expected that most dairy farms will have positive cash flows in the next twelve months which will allow them to make further debt repayments.

Fonterra ‘closely watching’ China, warns coronavirus could have impact on sales [30 January, Jamie Gray, The Country] Fonterra Cooperative Group have reported that they are closely monitoring the outbreak of Coronavirus in China as it has the possibility of disrupting the industry. Some of New Zealand’s key exports have already been affected, including the live crayfish trade during its busiest period of the year and the meat industry. The Co-operative have reported that if there is a sustained drop of consumption in China, then sales will be impacted. ASB Bank Senior Economist Nathan Penny states that he expects our main export sectors to hold up well, whilst ones such as seafood are a lot more exposed to the risk.

Fonterra snaps up full control of salmon farmer [30 January, Rachel Mutter, IntraFish] Peter and Una Rockliff, the founders of Australian salmon and trout producer Petuna Aquaculture have sold their 50 percent stake in the company to their existing business partner Sealord Group which now have full ownership. Mr and Mrs Rockliff have kept full ownership of their wild fisheries operations. Sealord have mentioned that they plan to place substantial investment in the Australian business, in order to generate more jobs through expansion and stimulate the economy. Sealord has largely been a harvesting and processing operation, but also operates Sealord King Reef, a barramundi farm, in Queensland.

Resistance expressed at whitebaiting reform meeting [31 January, Abbey Palmer, Otago Daily Times] A public consultation meeting was held in Invercargill to discuss proposed changes to whitebait management, with many of the 200 attendees believing that there is no need to amend current fishing regulations. In 2018, the

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Department of Conservation started a review of the whitebait system in order to help restore New Zealand’s whitebait population. Options for change were proposed for fishing practices, season dates, upstream fishing limits, for refuges to be introduced, and international exporting phased out. Online submissions on the proposal close in March, and then recommendations will be made by DoC to Conservation Minister Eugenie Sage before they go to cabinet.

Thousands petition for greater seabird protection from commercial fishing [03 February, Michael Neilson, NZ Herald] Forest & Bird have presented the government with a petition calling for the end of commercial fishing practices that kill more than 14,000 seabirds each year and implement a zero bycatch policy. The petition has over 10,000 signatures and more than 3000 individual submissions. Many of the birds killed are threatened or protected animals such as the Otago shag, Fiordland crested penguin, and Antipodean albatross. Currently it is legal for commercial fishers to kill or harm protected species, as long as they report any bycatch, however a recent report revealed that the catches are going significantly underreported. Also supporting Forest & Bird’s petition and zero bycatch goal were 25 marine and biology scientists.

Environment & Emissions

Fonterra to stop using coal at Te Awamutu dairy plant [30 January, Radio New Zealand, Newsroom] Fonterra Co-operative Group will begin using wood pellets to fuel the milk processing at its Te Awamutu dairy plant by next season. The plant had a successful trial for this process at the end of 2019. The change will result in a reduction of 84,000 tonnes of carbon emissions each year, or the equivalent of taking 32,000 cars off of the road. Fonterra is working towards net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Significant risks highlighted in ETS reform bill [30 January, Federated Farmers- Press Release, Scoop Independent News] Federated Farmers, Beef + Lamb New Zealand and the Meat Industry Association (MIA) have all expressed their concerns surrounding the proposed Emissions Trading Scheme and the risk it bring of accelerating the conversion of productive pasture land into forestry. The three associations state that the Bill will have major unintended consequences for regional New Zealand as it incentivises the planting of pine trees and “allowing fossil fuel emitters to get away with none of the emissions reductions that are required to combat climate change”. All three organisations support the use of the reform bill to introduce the Primary Sector Climate Change Commitment - He Waka Eke Noa - into law.

No more muddying of the waters [30 January, Rural News] An app developed by Agrilink and NIWA will help farmers make decisions surrounding their practices to control erosion. The app will aim at reducing sediment and phosphorus loss, and the four year project was supported by the Ministry for Primary Industries Sustainable Farming Fund. Users will be required to enter data such as soil type, slope and location before being presented with mitigation ideas to help address the impact of practices. The app is coined “Don’t Muddy the Water” and helps farmers to make decisions and reduce
their environmental footprint and will be released in February this year as a free tool for the public.

Demand for perfect fruit is ending in environmental waste [03 February, Debrin Foxcraft, Stuff NZ] New Zealanders have eaten 500 tonnes of imperfect produce after the launch of Countdown’s initiative The Odd Bunch in 2017 which promotes a reduction in food waste. Australia has recently launched a similar initiative at Coles and Woolworths, in an effort to support local farmers effected by drought or fires. Odd Bunch produce allows the sale of slightly damaged or misshapen produce. It helps make produce more affordable for customers and challenges the notion that produce must be perfect despite growing in ever-changing conditions.

Climate case includes dairy firms [03 February, Farmers Weekly] Lawyers representing a number of New Zealand corporate businesses attended High Court in Auckland to fight a claim brought by Climate Activist and Chairman of the Climate Change Iwi Leaders Group Mike Smith. Mr Smith argues that the corporates are liable for public nuisance or negligence surrounding climate change. The seven corporate involved in the claim are Fonterra Co-operative Group, Genesis Energy, Dairy Holdings, NZ Steel, Z Energy, NZ Refining and BT Mining. The seven corporates have sought to strike out the claim early, saying that there is no viable case worth even going to trial. Proceedings are continuing.

International

Finistere Ventures: $150 Million Closed For New Agtech Fund [29 January, Dan Anderson, Pulse 2.0] Finistere Ventures has announced the first closing of its USD$150 million (approx. NZD$231 million) Agtech Fund. The fund looks at new technology solutions in food productivity, sustainability and nutrition to address climate change and changing population demographics. The fund will be used to create a “Green Revolution” in agriculture. Finistere have an international network of partners including Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Israel who all have an interest in AgTech related research and development.

South Africa’s move to allow farming of lions and other wildlife is a bad idea, scientists say [29 January, Linda Nordling, Science Mag] South Africa’s government have decided to include more than 30 wild species on a list of animals that can be enhanced through breeding and genetic research, however scientists are reporting that this could cause damage to their genetic diversity. Zoologist Graham Kerley states that it provides “a legal mechanism to domesticate wildlife”. Animals now included on the list are rhinos, lions and cheetahs and it is expected that selective breeding could have severe genetic consequences for the animals.

Gates Foundation To Build Crop Technology Nonprofit In St. Louis [29 January, Eli Chen, St Louis Public Radio] There are plans to build a non-profit organisation coined Gates Ag One in St. Louis to advance agriculture technology to help small farms in developing countries by The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The foundation will also help growers adapt to extreme weather events as these will only become more common due to climate change.

Balancing safety and innovation to drive insect protein market: ‘Have you read of anyone dying from insects?’ [29 January, Flora Southey, Food Navigator] Nick Rousseau from the Woven Network reports that the economic opportunities surrounding the growing industry of using insects for sustenance are on the rise. Insects are increasingly placed in finished food products such as sports nutrition powders, pet food and restaurant menus. This is because they have a small ecological footprint, making them a sustainable choice. In the UK, insects are currently unauthorised novel foods. Mr Rousseau reports that because insect protein is not well understood, it is important to gather more evidence supporting it and the safe consumption of insects.
Hoads Farm: Supermarkets boycott farm over welfare claims [29 January, BBC News] Tesco, Asda and Sainsbury supermarkets are boycotting eggs from free-range egg farm Hoads Farm in the UK whilst claims are investigating surrounding the allegations of hens living in unsanitary conditions. RSPCA Assured has reported that it is investigating the claims made by activists.

France to ban culling of unwanted male chicks by end of 2021 [29 January, BBC News] France is making animal welfare reforms and has pledged to outlaw the practice of killing unwanted male chicks by the end of 2021. Globally, an estimated seven billion male chicks are culled each year, usually in shredding machines or by gas. The government reported that soon new methods will allow for the sex of an embryo to be tested. Some activists are saying that the reforms are still not going far enough and do not touch on slaughter conditions or how to exit from intensive farming.

Scientists modify honey bee gut bacterium to fight colony collapse-causing Varroa mite and deformed-wing virus [31 January, NZ City] Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) devastates hives, and caused the loss of around 40 percent of honey bee colonies in the US last year. Researchers have genetically modified a bacterium, to help honey bees to fight off the pathogens that are frequently accountable for colony collapse. Two key pathogens that are thought to be responsible for CCD are the parasitic Varroa mite and deformed wing virus (DWV). Researchers from the University of Texas have genetically modified a beneficial gut bacterium that suppresses the expression of DWV, and also kills the Varroa mite. The research is still in early stages and needs to be tested. As it is a specific bacterium for honey bees, it is thought that it is unlikely to transfer to other bees.

From milkshakes to fries: Confusion reigns over what counts towards your five-a-day [31 January, Katy Askew, Food Navigator] Healthy snacking group Fruit Bowl have released the results from their consumer research in the UK which suggests that around 90 percent of under 10’s in the area are not consuming five or more portions of fruit and veg a day. It also revealed that parents were unsure about what constituted a portion of fruit and vegetables, with one in five parents suggesting that strawberry milkshakes count as a portion and one in ten thinking that chips count. Fruit Bowl suggested that one way of increasing portions consumed could be through snacks as it was found children typically ate up to 15 snacks a week.

Genetically engineered male MOTHS developed to stop pest populations ravaging crops by killing female offspring have been released into the wild [31 January, Jonathan Chadwick, Daily Mail] A new genetically engineered moth has been designed to stop the diamondback moth from breeding is expected to reduce billions of dollars of damage to vegetable crops. This works when the new moth mates with females, the resulting offspring cannot reproduce, meaning that eventually the entire diamondback moth population may die out. The diamondback causes damage to brassica genus crops such as broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower.

China detects outbreak of bird flu near epicentre of deadly coronavirus [03 February, NZ Herald] An outbreak of bird flu has been detected near the epicentre of coronavirus in China. The outbreak has occurred at a farm, with 4500 of the 7850 chickens dying from the illness. Bird Flu, although hard to pass on to humans is highly deadly to humans and kills approximately 60 percent of those who catch it.

Food tech entrepreneurs eye growth in functional ingredients trend [03 February, Oliver Morrison, Food Navigator] Global network of food entrepreneurs, Forward Fooding has reported that they expect the functional ingredients trend to experience accelerated growth in the near future. In particular they highlighted the trends of nanoencapsulation (small amounts of nutrients being placed into
foods to enhance faster absorption), gut health and probiotics as well as alternative functional ingredients. They also noted an increased in companies who are able to take food surplus and turn it into products as well as bio-materials.

**Spray planes combat the huge locust outbreak in East Africa** [05 February, Joe Mwihia, Josphat Kasi and Ben Curtis, Stuff NZ] Billions of locusts have descended on parts of Kenya in the worst outbreak for 70 years. Only five small planes are currently spraying pesticides to try and stop them from spreading to neighbouring countries. The United Nations has reported that USD$76 million (approx. NZD$116 million) is needed to immediately increase these efforts across East Africa, and this is desperately needed as experts have predicted that the number of locusts could otherwise grow by 500 times by June, before the drier weather will help to bring the outbreak under control. Locusts consume and decimate crops in mere hours, which is putting millions of already vulnerable people at risk of a hunger crisis.
Organisations referenced in this week’s Field Notes include:

Agrilink
Alliance Group
Apple and Pears NZ
Arataki Honey
ASB
Asda
Beef + Lamb New Zealand
Biosecurity New Zealand
BT Mining
Christchurch City Council
Coles
Countdown
Dairy Holdings
Department of Conservation
Department of Conservation
Farm Next Door
Federated Farmers
Finistere Ventures
Fire and Emergency New Zealand
Fisheries New Zealand
Fonterra Co-operative Group
Fonterra Co-operative Group
Forest & Bird
Forward Fooding
Fruit Bowl
Gates Ag One
Genesis Energy
Hoads Farm
Kaipara District Council
Massey University
Meat Industry Association
Ministry for Primary Industries
New Zealand Rock Lobster Industry Council
NIWA
Northland Regional Council
NZ Refining
NZ Steel
Petuna Aquaculture
Piqa
Plant and Food Research
QualityNZ
Rabobank
Real Estate Institute
Reserve Bank
RSPCA Assured
Sainsburys
Sealord Group
Silver Fern Farms
SPCA
Statistics New Zealand
Tasman District Council
Tesco
The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
United Nations
University of Texas
Woolworths
Z Energy
Field Notes presents a summary of some of the media comment on the Agribusiness sector in the last week. The views expressed do not necessarily represent the views of KPMG but are summaries of the articles published.

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