

SCHOOL STUDENT OCCUPATIONAL CHOICE AND PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

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ABSTRACT

Secondary school students in the Bay of Plenty region were surveyed to obtain information on how they viewed the issue of job choice, and how these views fit in with their general attitudes to a range of primary producing industries, including forestry.

From this data, some comment is made about what the forestry sector will need to introduce and/or emphasise in order to attract people from this segment of the labour market.

INTRODUCTION

Much comment has been made recently about the potential growth of the forest industry and how this might help alleviate the serious problem of unemployment that has plagued New Zealand in recent years. It is important that some credible estimates of the demand for labour be established to facilitate planned growth. Despite this, relatively little effort has been directed to looking at the potential labour supply that the industry will have to compete successfully for over the remainder of this decade, if it is to realise its growth

potential. For this reason, the study is aimed at evaluating high school students' attitudes to, and awareness of, the forestry sector as an opportunity for employment within the context of New Zealand's primary producing industries.

With the maturing and subsequent logging of major exotic forest plantations in New Zealand in the next ten to fifteen years, the forest sector will rely heavily on the availability of an appropriately trained and stable workforce to maximise production opportunities.

Like other industrial sectors, forestry will look in part to high school leavers as a source of labour that may be guided to obtain further appropriate and desirable skills.

Although the indicators are that in a time of high unemployment the potential labour force is there, there are questions as to whether the numbers required will come forward and whether they will have the education, training and motivation required to respond to the needs of the forest industry.

Given that secondary school pupils will be one source of future labour, it would be of value to gauge the general perceptions this

group has of the industry. More specifically, it would be useful to know what aspects in an employment environment students find attractive in exploring a range of job opportunities.

In a competitive skilled labour market, it is necessary to look at the factors which influence the decisions of school leavers in their post-secondary plans and whether these could be used in planning an effective recruitment strategy for the forest industry.

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THE STUDY

Both educationalists and employers are concerned with matching school learning with the skills required in the job market. Of importance also are the attitudes and views school students have of particular sectors of the job market and the way these affect career choices. This latter aspect forms the focus of the study along with an effort to evaluate just what values shape secondary school students' employment and educational plans.

METHOD

A survey of secondary schools students (excluding 3rd forms) in the Bay of Plenty educational district was carried out in the latter half of 1991. A structured self-applied questionnaire was employed resulting in an analysis based on 490 usable responses which gave an errorbound of $\pm 4.5\%$ at the 5% level of confidence.

ANALYSIS

Future Employment Plans

From the responses to the question regarding what they are most likely to do on leaving school, only 1 in 10 replied that they did not yet know. Only 1 in 3 had plans that did not necessarily involve further education, with only 1 in 5 intending to enter the workforce directly upon leaving school.

Some 80% of respondents had started thinking about what they might do on leaving school by the time they had reached the fifth form, with 57% having reached a firm (though not necessarily final) decision by this stage of their schooling. It seems that most pupils have some idea of career options quite early in their school experience. It is, therefore, important that the forest industry puts its case to prospective employees early in the education process.

Long Term Career Plans

Almost 1 in 4 of those sampled (23%) had no clear idea of what they might wish to do long term. Of the remainder, some 33% had their aspirations set on entering a "white collar" non-manual type of work, while 37% were interested in making a living in the "blue collar" manual types of occupation. The balance (29%) were set on entering supervisory, self-employed trade or owner-farmer activities.

Educational Plans

In response to a question regarding educational ambitions beyond secondary school, 13% of students indicated that they planned no further education. In this, there were statistically significant differences between Maori and non-Maori students with 19% of Maori suggesting they would not be pursuing additional education after leaving school compared with 11% for others.

This distinction carries over into aspirations regarding university education where 44% of non-Maori but only 27% of Maori wished to realise their tertiary educational goals. If the forestry sector sees that it is important to attract more Maori graduates, then it may need to provide ways, including targeted grants, to encourage Maori into appropriate training.

Attitudes Influencing their Responses

It is clear the vast majority of students (88%) believed that more education would be necessary for them to obtain a satisfying job. This acceptance of the need for further training was countered by the strong desire of many students (78%) to want to start making money as soon as possible, and for the majority (73%) to want to begin working in their chosen career as quickly as possible.

In terms of a single most important factor which students claim influences their post-school plans, it can be noted that the advice of parents, family, friends, teachers and careers advisors features very little. Students claim a clear independence in coming to their decision about future career plans.

Information on Career Option

While it was noted earlier that parents and family were deemed not to have much influence on decisions about future career options, this source is clearly the one from which most students (95%) gain career information. Of these, 83% judged this information to be useful.

With regard to school careers advisors, some 69% of students had received material or comment from this school-based service. Just over 3 in 4 of these classed the contact as helpful. A similar judgement was given to career displays and programmes (78%) and talks or visits from employers (78% and 62%

respectively), which most students had experienced. Indeed, no one source of information was judged to be any more or less useful than any other. Thus, it is important that the forest industry provides information to schools relating to the broad range of occupations included by the industry.

Source of Information on Primary Industries

The media clearly plays a persuasive role with regard to making students aware of various industrial activity. In the case of each of the primary producing industries included in the survey, an average of 57% of those in the sample had received information from this source. The next most frequently quoted source was parents (37%).

In terms of school-based information, some 32% and 21% of students had received material from "the curriculum" and from careers advisors respectively. In this, there was variation between the industries with regard to the acquisition of information. For example, the curriculum was credited with the provision of material by only 9% of students in respect of fishing, but up to 38% in respect of tourism. Between these extremes lay farming (27%) forestry (28%) and horticulture (31%). The situation may change with respect to forestry when the "Forestry Insights" programme is fully operational in schools.

A similar range is noted with regard to the careers advisor where fishing scores only 7%, while tourism sits at the other extreme with 34%.

Of the remaining industries (horticulture, farming and forestry) the careers advisor was credited as a source in 15%, 16% and 17% of cases respectively.

Friends, as a source of information, scored

better than careers advisors but not as well as parents. Individual industry organisations also scored better than careers advisors, but this does not take into account that the latter may well have been responsible for these opportunities on behalf of their students.

As far as those who claimed they had received no information from any source, horticulture fares worst with 30% followed by fishing with 27%, followed by forestry, farming and tourism with 14%, 12% and 12% of cases respectively.

Work Exploration, Work Shadowing and Link Courses

Only about a third of those questioned had had experience of work exploration and Link course activity. While a high 82% of these students assessed these opportunities as useful, only 60% viewed them as important in influencing their views on future career options.

Factors Important in Occupational Choice

Using a 1 to 7 Likert scale, students were asked to rate certain work characteristics in terms of their importance in helping them decide upon various job possibilities. The four factors which were accorded greatest importance were the opportunity to do what one is good at, job security, having pleasant colleagues to work with and the opportunity to learn new skills. Of least importance was finding a job in one's own district, opportunities for promotion and the concept of a career as opposed to a job.

Clearly, industries that will successfully attract school leavers will be those that can promote factors such as good working environments, job stability and flexibility, and the provision of effective training.

Dimension	Tourism	Forestry	Farming	Horticulture	Fishing
Importance to the NZ economy	6.29	6.13	6.30	5.61	4.97
Importance to regional economy	6.14	6.09	6.06	5.59	4.96
Growth over next ten years	6.00	5.26	4.88	4.91	4.16
Treats its employees fairly	4.94	4.63	4.30	4.42	4.15
Offers good long term opportunities	5.51	4.83	4.86	4.72	3.91
Industry has strong worker unions	4.60	4.94	4.63	4.30	4.18
Employees are well paid	5.32	4.88	4.27	4.38	4.15
Large amount of foreign ownership	4.83	4.72	3.63	4.17	4.32
Offers wide range of job opportunities	5.81	4.97	4.56	4.93	3.91
Industry is well thought of in the region	5.75	5.63	5.55	5.14	4.73
Good training opportunities available	5.64	5.16	4.95	5.01	3.83
Likelihood of work accidents	3.45	5.85	4.80	4.07	4.55
Opportunities to gain new qualifications	5.55	4.92	4.48	4.78	3.79
Industry has a high regional profile	5.70	5.52	5.38	5.15	4.55
Industry offers good job security	4.77	4.43	4.09	4.18	3.66
Industry has good concern for environment	4.49	4.13	4.84	4.81	3.65
There is good information on job opportunities	5.46	4.84	4.29	4.56	3.60

Table 1 - Attitudes to specific primary industries

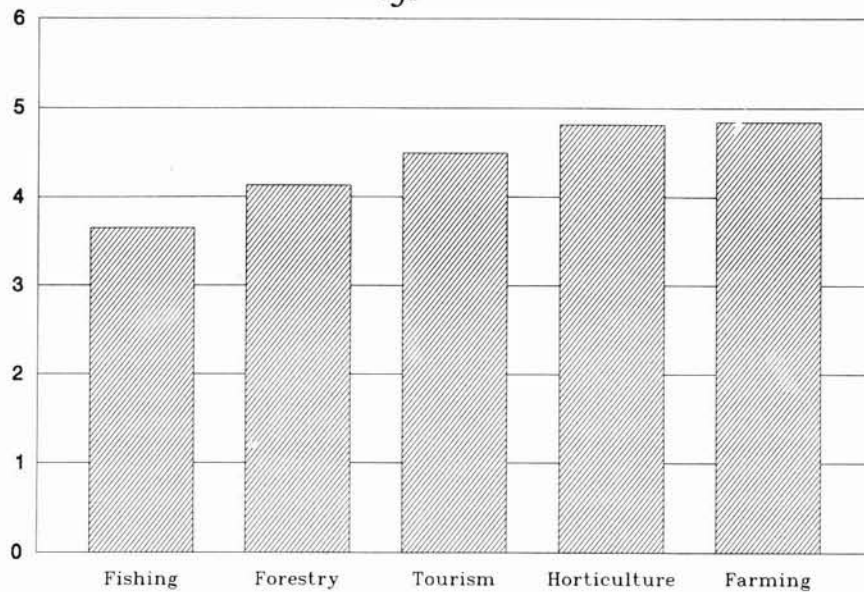


Figure 1 - Perception of industry concern for the environment

Attitudes to Having a Job

An attempt was made to evaluate the way school students feel about having a job and the way they feel about work generally.

The factor deemed most important about a job by 95% of those sampled was "liking the work". Only 1 in 7 students suggested they would accept a high unemployment benefit in place of work. Indeed, 86% of those in the study agreed that they would be bored if they had no work to do, while very nearly the same proportion indicated they would want to work somewhere even if they had won a lot of money.

The results suggest that peer attitudes are not so important with regard to the idea of having a job. Only 27% agreed with the statement that "my friends would not think much of me if I did not have a job".

Students were divided on the importance of status and pay as factors in job choice.

Paid Employment Outside the Home and Previous Work Experience

Nearly 3 out of every 4 secondary school students in the sample had had a paying job at some time, with some 56% holding paying jobs at the time of the survey. The

most popular type of job involved shop assistant/sales service activities (20%), followed by orchard work (15%) and a paper and pamphlet run (10%).

Some 22% of students had had up to 3 different part-time jobs (not necessarily different types of job).

Attitudes to Specific Primary Industries

Using a 1-7 scale ("strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"), students' attitudes towards various primary industries, namely fishing, farming, tourism, forestry and horticulture, were gauged.

The results are summarised in Table 1 where the figures given are arithmetic means.

In the main, forestry fares quite well in the eyes of secondary school students but always trails tourism. The specific reasons for this will require further research. However, it is clear that there is concern being expressed in terms of the way forestry "cares" for the environment and the propensity of forestry workers to experience work related accidents. In these two areas, forestry can be said to have a relatively poor image (Figures 1 and 2).

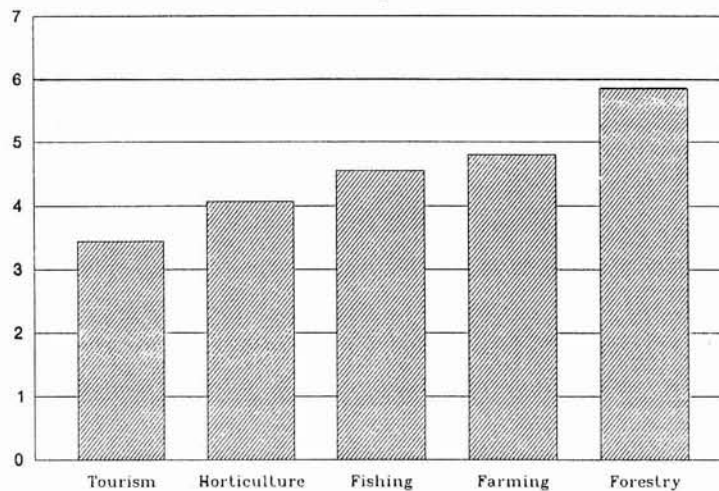


Figure 2 - Perception as to the likelihood of accidents

IMPLICATIONS FOR RECRUITMENT IN THE FOREST INDUSTRY

The results of this survey point to several opportunities for the primary sectors and particularly forestry, to develop effective recruitment strategies.

- (1) Most students plan for further education and only one-fifth intend to enter the work force immediately. There is therefore a clear need to push the opportunity for further education and training in the forest industry and to promote the structures that have been developed to deliver this.
- (2) It would seem that higher visibility of forestry in schools is needed via a willingness to make school visits and to provide materials both for career advisor and curriculum use.
- (3) A serious effort needs to be made to update and improve the quantity and quality of materials provided about primary industries - particularly in respect of the curriculum. It is hoped that the Forestry Insights programme should have a positive impact in this regard.
- (4) Specific industries will need to work on particular problems that

are associated with them in the eyes of students. In respect of forestry, particular effort must be made in the area of improved perception of safety and the reduction in accidents, and in improved environmental consciousness.

- (5) All of the industries under focus should be aware of the uncertainty in student perceptions about the treatment of employees, the availability of long term career opportunities and job security. Due to its diverse nature and long term growth and importance to both regional and national economies, forestry could be in a good position to alter students' perceptions of forestry as a career.
- (6) The forest industry can assume the ready availability of a required workforce in times of high unemployment. However, the forest industry needs to play an active role in generating an interest in its activities with a segment of society which could be a source of a better skilled and more highly motivated workforce.

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