



Rabobank

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Six young NZ farmers heading to global master class for 'agricultural leaders of tomorrow'

Six young New Zealand farmers have been invited to join a group of 40 emerging farm leaders from around the world at the first **Rabobank Young Farmers Master Class**.

To be held in the Netherlands in the first week of June, the gathering will bring together forward-thinking young primary producers, from a range of countries, who have been identified to be among the next generation of 'agricultural leaders of tomorrow'.

Staged by global agricultural banking specialist Rabobank, the Young Farmers Master Class is an initiative which recognises the important shared role the coming generation of farmers will play in the future challenges of global agriculture and feeding the world.

Rabobank New Zealand CEO Ben Russell said it was vital to support and develop this next generation of farmers, who face increasing challenges in agriculture. These issues include farm succession, environmental sustainability, the increasing need for innovation and the challenges of operating in an increasingly complex and sophisticated market.

"The next generation of farmers coming through are crucially important to the future. The world will be relying on these young farmers – and those who come after them – to play a vital shared role in providing food security for a growing global population," Mr Russell said.

"Much of the success in achieving a food-secure future for the world will depend on the development of those younger farmers – their abilities to innovate, their farming skills and their capability to produce more sustainably, with less impact on the environment."

Following on from the success of the world's first Global Farmers Master Class, staged in 2012, the Rabobank Young Farmers Master Class (YFMC) will focus on some key topics impacting young farmers in the sector, including innovation, 'big data' and the role of technology, succession, social media and best farm practices.

The master class will encompass an intensive program, including presentations from food and agriculture researchers and leading global innovators, interactive professional and personal development sessions and visits to flagship agricultural companies.

Sessions will include visits to the world-renowned Wageningen University Research food and agri knowledge centre to learn about successful agricultural innovations, to a global dairy company's state-of-the-art dairy research centre to review developments in the dairy value chain and to a flagship sustainable, diversified dairy farm. In addition, participants will learn from global social media expert Danny Mekic on the potential and significance of social and online media for the agricultural sector, while soil and crop research entrepreneur Henri Hekman will share his experience in leveraging 'big data'.



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Participants also have the option of a farm stay, to learn from, and network with, other leading young farmers in the Netherlands.

The six participants selected to attend from New Zealand are:

- Ashburton dairy farmer Will Grayling
- Grasslands CEO Gareth van der Heyden
- Blenheim sheep and beef producer, and vineyard operator Richard Laugesen
- New Plymouth dairy farmer Jacques Le Prou
- Masterton sheep and beef producer George Tatham and
- Rotorua dairy farmer Kirsten Watson.

They will join other leading young farmers from across Europe, North America, Africa, Asia and Australia.

Will Grayling, who is equity partner in share-milking operation Ashpouri, in Canterbury, says he is particularly looking forward to the opportunity to learn from, and share knowledge with, his counterparts in other parts of the world.

“It will be really beneficial to know and understand what our equivalents are doing and how they are dealing with the challenges they are facing, because even though we are all from different countries, so many of the challenges in agriculture are the same throughout the world,” he said.

Mr Grayling said he hoped to gain insights from both the Master Class program and the other international participants that would help him with the further development of his expanding farm business.

“As a young farmer, it’s important that you are informed about the direction of agriculture so you can make decisions now about how you set up your business for the future. You can’t be waiting until you get to 40 before you think about what you are going to do, because then you will have missed so many good years of growing your operations. You don’t have to do everything all at once, but you need to get an understanding of what you want to do and start working towards how you will develop your own business and the wider sector.”

Mr Grayling, 28, grew up on his family’s dairy farming operation on the North Island, near Hamilton, before completing a Masters of Applied Science in Agriculture at Lincoln University, and beginning his own venture in dairying on the South Island in Canterbury in 2009.

Ashpouri has now grown to a 3200 cow sharemilking operation run over two farms and employing 12 permanent and three casual employees.

Mr Grayling recognises the importance of succession in family farming, but says the onus is also on young people to take responsibility for their own career path in the industry.



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“There are definitely opportunities out there for young farmers, but it’s a matter of finding out what is applicable and how you can take advantage of them. That’s where initiatives like the Young Farmers Master Class are so useful in giving you different ideas, so you can look at your options and work out a clearer pathway of what you can achieve and how to create that change,” he said.

Mr Russell said, as a global specialist agricultural bank, Rabobank believed farm succession and the issue of retaining and attracting talented farmers to agriculture was one of the most important challenges facing farming today throughout the world.

“We need more young people helping to map out the future of farming and agribusiness, and we are very excited at the calibre of the New Zealand participants in the Young Farmers Master Class, and what ideas they will develop over the course of this program,” he said.

Rabobank New Zealand is a part of the international Rabobank Group, the world's leading specialist in food and agribusiness banking. Rabobank has more than 110 years' experience providing customised banking and finance solutions to businesses involved in all aspects of food and agribusiness. Rabobank is structured as a cooperative and operates in 42 countries, servicing the needs of approximately 10 million clients worldwide through a network of more than 1600 offices and branches. Rabobank New Zealand is one of New Zealand's leading rural lenders and a significant provider of business and corporate banking and financial services to country's food and agribusiness sector. The bank has 32 branches throughout New Zealand. Rabobank also operates RaboDirect, New Zealand's first internet-only bank specialising in savings and deposits.

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