

Growing the next generation of New Zealand's Food Leaders

When Charan Sivakumar joined Tegel as an agriculture graduate in 2024, he had never worked in poultry. Two years on, he's working with broiler farms across the New Plymouth region and preparing to take on a new challenge in hatchery management.

His journey is a practical example of what can happen when people are given the opportunity to learn on the job, take on responsibility and discover where their strengths can take them. Charan is one of the graduates to have come through Tegel's graduate programme, which offers three rotations over 30 months, exposure to different parts of the business and support from experienced colleagues along the way.

A world of possibilities

When you pick up a Tegel product at the supermarket, you see the finished product. Behind it is a much broader business, spanning agriculture, farms, feed mills, food production, sales, marketing and distribution. Making it all work takes people with expertise in engineering, food technology, finance, commercial, quality, sustainability, people and culture, and much more.

Tegel's Head of People, Experience and Talent, Geraldine Seumanu, says many young people don't initially realise just how many career paths exist within the business.

"You might join us having studied one discipline, but that doesn't mean that's where your career has to stay."

Tegel's graduate programme typically welcomes between six and 12 graduates in each intake. Over 30 months, they complete three rotations of approximately 10 months, gaining experience across different areas of the business and discovering where their interests and strengths lie.



For Rosa Pen, now a Brand Manager at Tegel, that opportunity to try different roles made all the difference.

"I wasn't sure about sales before I started, but I ended up loving it. The rotations gave me a chance to try different things and work out where I wanted to take my career."

Learning beyond the day job

The learning extends beyond each rotation. During their first year, graduates take part in monthly development days, visiting farms, feed mills, hatcheries and processing sites while building skills such as presenting and communicating with confidence. For current graduate Paris Barlow, seeing the business from different perspectives has helped connect the dots.

"Seeing the business from farm to fork has shown me how connected everyone's work is. The development days have helped me understand teams I wouldn't otherwise meet in my day-to-day role."



Graduates are also paired with a buddy and a mentor, giving them people to turn to for advice, support and guidance as they find their feet. Time spent together outside work also helps graduates build friendships with others starting out in their careers.

It's an opportunity to learn from people with deep industry knowledge while bringing fresh perspectives of their own.

Graduates bring curiosity, new ideas and different perspectives



Building careers, strengthening the business

The programme gives graduates genuine responsibility and the chance to contribute to the business as they learn. Around 90% of those who complete it move into permanent roles at Tegel. Geraldine says the benefits go both ways. Graduates bring curiosity, new ideas and different perspectives, while learning from experienced people across the business.

"We love what graduates bring into our space. They come in with new ideas, they ask questions and challenge us to look at things differently, while learning from people across the business who have decades of knowledge and experience."

With three cohorts now having completed the programme, Tegel continues to invest in people who can help shape its future.

Charan Sivakumar's progression from graduate to Assistant Hatchery Production Manager is one example of where that investment can lead. His journey reflects the opportunity to build a career, take on responsibility and find a place in an industry that plays an important role in feeding New Zealand.

Because the future of food isn't just about innovation and technology. It's about the people who make it happen.

