

Exploring underutilised cohorts in rural New Zealand

Commentary paper

Introduction

MPI and Food and Fibre CoVE recently undertook a small scale study exploring the opportunity to formally recognise the skills and knowledge rural women have acquired informally via living on-farm with their farming spouse. The outcomes from the study were positive and piqued interest in understanding the market potential (e.g. size and demand) for these types of programmes. Scarlatti has been contracted to undertake a two-part analysis to explore this opportunity further. This involves the following activities:

1. **Market size analysis** to estimate the number of rural women in the target cohort and their relevant characteristics / attributes,
2. **Market research** to test the demand for programmes that recognise the skill sets rural women have developed informally.

In addition to rural women, the Food and Fibre CoVE have asked Scarlatti to undertake a market size analysis for two additional underutilised rural cohorts; rangatahi / youth, and people with neurodiverse abilities. These cohorts will not be engaged as part of the market research activity.

The following paper has been prepared to provide commentary on the findings from the first of these two activities for the three underutilised cohorts, along with recommendations for the second activity.

Market size analysis

The market sizes of the three underutilised cohorts have been estimated using data extracted from Statistics NZ's Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI). The data has been visualised in the accompanying dashboard – [accessible here](#) – and is commented on in the following sections.

Rural women cohort

We identified approximately 59,000 women who are currently married to or in a de facto relationship with someone working in the food and fibre sector workforce. Of these women, nearly 15,200 (~25%) are either not employed or are employed casually / part-time in the food and fibre sector workforce themselves (*Figure 1*). While there are additional attributes of rural women that can be used to segment this number further (e.g. area of residence, age of the youngest child¹, husband's/De facto partner's industry of employment – refer to the accompanying dashboard), we propose adopting the 15,200 number as the target cohort as an indication of the market size for an RPL programme targeting rural women.

¹ In general, we assume that if a person's youngest child is over the age of 5 years old then they will be in some form of formal training and the rural women will therefore have more disposable time to spend working. It is worth noting when interpreting this attribute, some rural women will likely choose to home-school their children which is not considered in this analysis.

Figure 1: Size of the underutilised rural women cohort



We consider this number sufficiently large enough to justify exploring the demand for an RPL programme within this cohort further as per the planned second part of this analysis (market research). We have made some high-level recommendations on how this activity could be undertaken at the end of this paper.

Rangatahi / youth cohort

We use the term ‘NEET’ (i.e. those that are Not in Education, Employment or Training) to define rangatahi / youth (15 – 24 years old) who may be underutilised in the food and fibre sector. Through the IDI, we identified approximately 75,200 NEETs across New Zealand and 21,600 NEETs (~30%) who reside in rural, small urban², or medium urban³ settings (Figure 2). In this context, we propose adopting the latter number as an indication of the market size for a training programme targeting rangatahi / youth.

Figure 2: Size of the underutilised rangatahi / youth cohort



The accompanying dashboard includes a demographic breakdown of the target cohort number by gender, age group, region, ethnicity, deprivation index⁴, and the highest qualification they have achieved to date. The extra information provided by this breakdown is intended to support future discussions on the design, targeting and implementation of interventions to engage this cohort in the food and fibre sector workforce.

Neurodiverse cohort

When estimating the size of people with neurodiverse abilities, we found that there was a disconnect between how data sets in the IDI (e.g. Ministry of Health and Census data) define neurodiversity and what society and experts have come to accept as the definition of neurodiversity. In particular, the terminology used to describe specific neurodiverse abilities in society is different to the diagnoses recorded in the IDI making it particularly challenging to reconcile a socially acceptable definition of neurodiversity with IDI data.

In discussions with the Food and Fibre CoVE team, we agreed that it would be appropriate to put a hold on this analysis for now until a larger consultation piece of work involving neurodiversity experts, representatives from neurodiverse communities, and other appropriate stakeholders has been undertaken to clarify what is and isn't considered neurodiverse.

² Examples of small urban areas include Katikati and Te Puke

³ Examples of medium urban areas include Feilding and Pukekohe

⁴ The deprivation index is an area-based measure indicating the socioeconomic status of people living in a particular area. The measure is displayed as deciles from 1 to 10 – 1 being an area of low socioeconomic deprivation, and 10 being an area of high socioeconomic deprivation.

Recommendations for market research

Note: The market research phase is only planned to be undertaken for the rural women cohort.

As highlighted earlier in this paper, we consider the size of the rural women cohort to be sufficiently large enough to justify progressing to the market research part of this analysis. The objective of this activity will be to test the demand for different packages of RPL that recognise the different skill sets rural women have developed informally.

Our previous experience with RPL has not been encouraging given the main issue tends to be a weak value proposition for the person being assessed. In this instance, we don't expect this to be the case as achieving certification leads directly to an income opportunity. It would be necessary to develop a portfolio of RPL programmes that recognise different packages of skills rural women have developed to engage a larger segment of the target cohort. We propose the market research focus on:

1. Identifying the skill sets MPI and Food and Fibre CoVE⁵ would like this process to recognise (i.e. what skill sets are demanded within the farm advisory services network, and the broader food and fibre sector),
2. Testing the cohort's demand for RPL pathways through qualifications / certifications that focus on the skill sets identified by MPI and Food and Fibre CoVE.

The next steps would be to design and develop the market research plan to directly engage with MPI and Food and Fibre CoVE in the first instance, and then with rural women identified in the target cohort.

⁵ We are aware of work being undertaken by FFCoVE to develop a food and fibre skills framework that will likely support the development of the survey testing demand within the rural women cohort. We will work with the FFCoVE early on to identify appropriate links between the two projects.