

PEOPLE AND POLICY

writer **PETER WHITE**

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HELPING FARMERS MAKE SUSTAINABLE CHANGES

Growing up in urban Palmerston North meant ASHLEIGH VAN UFFELEN did not have much exposure to the farming community – but that all changed at the end of her time at Freyberg High School.

"I didn't have any family involved in agriculture and didn't really know much about it at all. I'd always been interested in the outdoors, animals and the environment so I started looking at environmental degrees. One night watching the news, I saw a story on the environmental management of agriculture, and I thought that combines everything I am really passionate about," says Ashleigh.

"I called up some local rural professionals and farmers and just volunteered to get some experience to see if it was something that could be right for me, and I really enjoyed it."

Now, the 23-year-old is an environmental consultant with the AgriBusiness Group based at Lincoln in Canterbury. Ashleigh joined the group last February after graduating from Lincoln University with a Bachelor of Agricultural Science (First Class Honours), majoring in Environmental Management.

She says it is a role with plenty of variety and no two days are the same.

"You can be on a farm helping dairy farmers to implement sustainable land use change or improve water quality – and then you could be working in the office on research projects to find innovative solutions to environmental constraints or assisting with the implementation of policy frameworks.

"I work about half the time one-on-one with farmers and the remainder working with local and central government, as well as industry bodies in the agricultural industry. People are a huge component of the job, and it is definitely quite rewarding working with farmers and regulatory authorities within that environmental space."

Ashleigh says her degree gave her many of the tools she needed to hit the ground running in her role, but she has also completed further study to advance her understanding of sustainable land management and greenhouse gases. She was also proud to present her honours dissertation as a published paper at the New Zealand Grassland Association conference held in Rotorua last November.

In Year 13, Ashleigh took Chemistry, Biology, Statistics, Economics, English and Food Technology. She says there are opportunities for school leavers available across a wide variety of positions – including scientists, economists, journalists and accountants, plus advisory, marketing and engineering roles.

"There is something just about for everyone."

DairyNZ supported Ashleigh through her university studies which opened up excellent mentoring and networking opportunities.

"The agricultural industry also offers a tremendous number of scholarships, so I recommend students keep an eye on those university scholarship websites. It is not just about great grades at high school. A lot of them put strong value on your involvement in the community, degree choices, and sport and cultural activities.

"Not being from a farm may well have provided an advantage rather than disadvantage as it helps to highlight your commitment and drive to grow your knowledge in agriculture."



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ASHLEIGH VAN UFFELEN

KEY FACTS



- **ASHLEIGH VAN UFFELEN** WORKS AS AN ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANT WITH THE **AGRIBUSINESS GROUP** IN CANTERBURY.
- SHE COMPLETED A **BACHELOR OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE (FIRST CLASS HONOURS)** MAJORING IN ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT AT **LINCOLN UNIVERSITY**.
- **DAIRYNZ** SUPPORTED **ASHLEIGH** THROUGH HER STUDIES WHICH OPENED UP EXCELLENT MENTORING AND NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES.



For more information on career options within the dairy sector, visit www.godairy.co.nz

For more information on agricultural study options at Lincoln University, visit www.lincoln.ac.nz