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**CONNIE O'BRIEN**



# PASSIONATE ABOUT FARMING

## FONTERRA GRADUATE PROGRAMMES

writer **PETER WHITE**  
photo **ALAN STEVENS**

“I am committed to the primary sector and passionate about helping farmers to farm efficiently and sustainably,” says **CONNIE O'BRIEN**. The 23-year-old is a sustainable dairying advisor for Farm Source – a subsidiary of Fonterra – covering the North Waikato area.

Earlier this year, Connie completed her two-year Farm Source Agribusiness Graduate programme. It gave her a wide range of invaluable hands-on experience after graduating from Lincoln University with a Bachelor of Commerce (Agriculture) degree.

Connie did four six-month rotations right across the country. She started in Invercargill as a sustainable dairying advisor, helping farmers with regional compliance to ensure they had enough effluent storage. Gore was next, working as a technical sales rep selling and checking crops, doing spray recommendations and checking for pests, weeds and disease.

A move to Hamilton followed to join the marketing team, where she project managed the transition of traditional magazine *Enrich* – that goes out to shareholders monthly – to an on-line digital platform.

“This gave me experience across all aspects of a project – research and development, pitching to key stakeholders, changing the plan and taking on board feedback, developing content, media and launch

plans, analysing vendor and commercial implications with the new offerings, and cost structure.”

Connie finished her programme in Christchurch as part of the on-farm excellence team, working on tools to be rolled out to farms.

“The biggest and most valuable thing for me was gaining experience in four completely different jobs. I didn't know what I wanted to do when I left uni so it was valuable experiencing four completely different roles in different regions of New Zealand.

“The programme allowed me to build a really wide network within and outside Fonterra. A key skill I developed was to nurture key stakeholder relationships through strong communication and influential skills.”

Connie now has her own portfolio of dairy clients. She helps them complete their Farm Environment Plans, working with farmers to manage and minimise all risks relating to the environment.

“My role is to minimise the risk of nutrients entering fresh water. Going forward, we will be focusing on creating and improving on-farm efficiencies.

“I'm lucky I get to fulfil my passion through my career by building strong trusted relationships with farmers through supporting reach efficiencies to improve the performance of their business.”

Connie attended Palmerston North Girls' High School. She took Calculus, Physics, PE, Economics and Business Studies in Year 13. During her school years, Connie became a prominent road cyclist, representing New Zealand for three years, and had a goal to be a pilot, but she always had a passion for farming and business. In the future, she wants to have her own business.

Her advice for school leavers – get as much hands-on experience working on farms as you can and constantly build your networks.

“Keep your papers at uni broad to keep your options open. An agribusiness degree gives you a wide base to work from.”

### KEY FACTS



- **CONNIE O'BRIEN** IS A SUSTAINABLE DAIRYING ADVISOR FOR FARM SOURCE – A SUBSIDIARY OF **FONTERRA** – COVERING THE **NORTH WAIKATO AREA**.
- **EARLIER THIS YEAR, CONNIE** COMPLETED HER TWO-YEAR FARM SOURCE AGRIBUSINESS GRADUATE PROGRAMME.
- **HER ADVICE FOR SCHOOL LEAVERS** – GET AS MUCH HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE WORKING ON FARMS AS YOU CAN AND TO CONSTANTLY BUILD YOUR NETWORK.

### ONLINE



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