

KEEP YOUR OPTIONS OPEN

A PASSION FOR FARMING by **EMMA DANGAN**,
NEW ZEALAND YOUNG FARMER OF THE YEAR 2023



THROUGHOUT MY SCHOOL YEARS I KNEW EXACTLY WHAT I WANTED TO BE – I WAS GOING TO BE A VET, NO MATTER WHAT. WHAT I DID NOT REALISE, WAS THAT ALTHOUGH YOUR INITIAL VISION MAY START YOU DOWN ONE PATH, YOUR EVENTUAL DESTINATION MAY BE SOMETHING QUITE DIFFERENT.

The important thing is to start somewhere – even if you do not know where you are heading yet – because starting somewhere will expose you to things you did not know you were interested in.

This is exactly what happened for me.

After finishing my high school studies at Massey High School, I enrolled at university hoping to become a vet. Before I could achieve this dream, I had to make it through a six-month selection period where I would need the best grades I could possibly achieve to make it through. After months of studying night and day – the results came out.

I will never forget the feeling of opening the email that said – “we regret to inform you; you have not been accepted into the Veterinary Science programme of study”. At that point, my world felt like it came crashing down. All I had ever wanted to be was a vet – there was no Plan B.

After the devastation wore off, I decided the best thing I could do was enrol in an Agricultural Science degree – and see where that led me. I packed my bags and moved to Massey University in Palmerston North. It did not take long before I was immersed in university life.

I felt like I had finally found my people – and with farming being the point of connection, the friendships blossomed.

But that was not the only thing that blossomed – my grades also improved remarkably.

When I initially completed the pre-veterinary course, I had given up everything that made me Emma. I thought this was the only way to achieve good grades. I stopped playing sport, I sold my horse, I stopped catching up with friends – all in the name of fitting more hours of study into a day.

When I moved to Palmerston North, I did the opposite. I spent time with friends and enrolled in social sports teams. My grades improved so much that I was eventually offered a place in the veterinary programme while I was still studying for an Agricultural Science degree – I was going to become a vet after all.

“ THE LESSON FOR ME WAS PRETTY CLEAR – PRIORITISE THINGS THAT MAKE YOU HAPPY AND THE REST WILL FALL INTO PLACE. ”

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2023 FMG YOUNG FARMER OF THE YEAR

The lesson for me was pretty clear – prioritise things that make you happy and the rest will fall into place. I also learnt a second valuable lesson – you can have more than one passion and direction.

Although I ended up completing the Veterinary degree, agriculture became the real passion and is what I largely fill my days with now. If I had not failed the first time – and attempted to get into vet school – I would never have known how deep my passion for agriculture ran.

I am proud to say that I am now a farmer and a vet but I am sure that one day I will add to that list – as I navigate through life’s challenges and uncover more hidden opportunities.

My advice to students as they prepare to finish their high school studies – keep all your options open and if at first you do not succeed, do not give up on your dreams.

EMMA DANGAN is the 2023 FMG Young Farmer of the Year. She runs a dairy farm in Pirongia, in the Waikato, with her husband, Chris.