WAIRARAPA FOOD & FIBRE – CAPABILITY BOOST DISCOVERY PHASE INSIGHTS

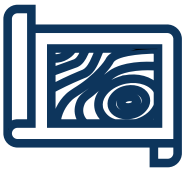
Purpose of the Pilot

The Capability Boost pilot has been designed to support Wairarapa primary sector businesses to move from ambition to action - strengthening capability, improving resilience and unlocking growth opportunities.

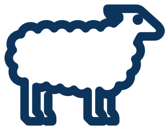
The Discovery Phase focused on understanding where participating businesses are now, where they want to go and what capability gaps may limit progress.

Participating Businesses (a snapshot)

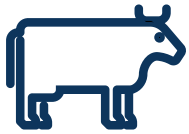
The pilot engaged a diverse cohort of ten established and emerging businesses across Wairarapa. Nine businesses completed the Discovery Phase, while one business was unable to participate due to health circumstances. These are strong family-ownership and are intergenerational businesses.



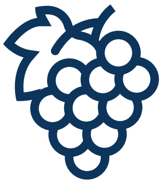
Landholdings ranged from
40ha to 1,200+ha
(collectively more than **7,200ha**)



5 sheep & beef farms



2 dairy farms



3 horticulture/viticulture systems

Many mixed operations, including forestry and carbon-related, food & beverage value-add processing and tourism.

Several businesses employ
15-25 seasonally

The pilot was delivered as a co-funded initiative, with participating businesses investing their own time, expertise and commitment alongside programme funding.

Development stage

- 40% growth and scaling
- ~50% are exploring diversification / new revenue streams
- ~60% are focused on succession and transition
- A strategic reset after achieving prior goals is an emerging theme across several businesses.

Why the businesses wanted to participate?

Across the cohort:

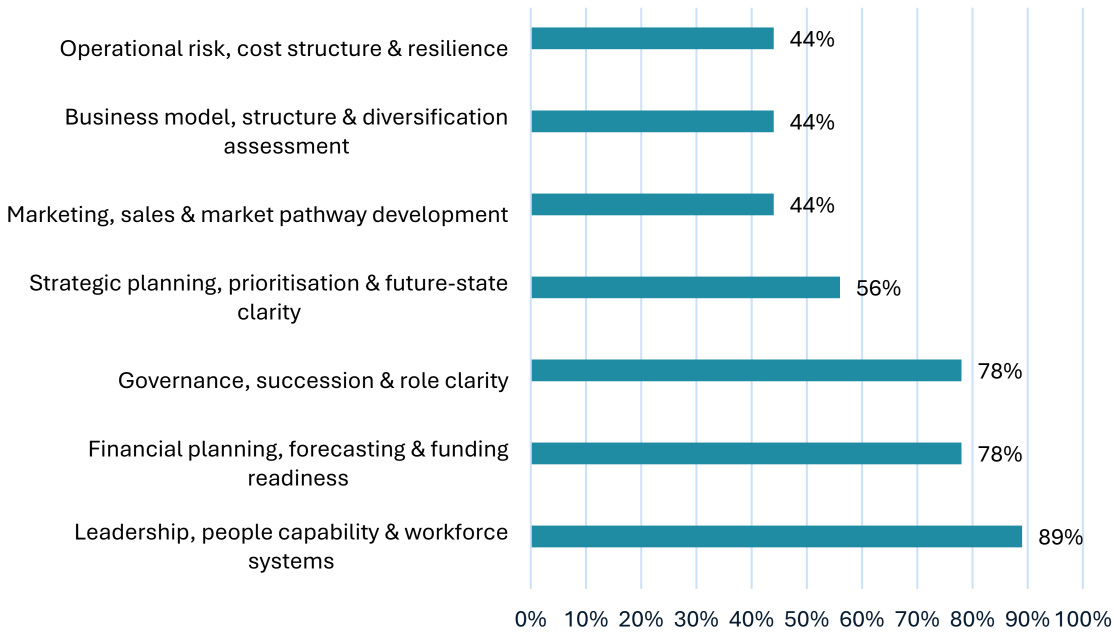
- 90%+ identified multiple competing opportunities (growth, diversification, or investment)
- 70%+ are already engaging advisors (informally or formally)
- Most businesses are investment-aware, but need stronger planning and prioritisation

Common triggers for engagement:

- Expansion or land acquisition decisions
- Diversification into tourism, processing or carbon
- Succession and ownership transition
- Managing increased complexity in multi-enterprise businesses

Key Capability Gaps Identified

The pilot engaged a diverse cohort of ten businesses, with nine completing the Discovery Phase. One additional business was unable to participate due to health circumstances. Seven consistent capability themes emerged across the participating businesses:



Key Insights from the Discovery Phase

Opportunity-rich, but priority-poor

- Most businesses have 3–5 major strategic opportunities in play simultaneously
- Few have a clear prioritised roadmap or sequencing plan

Key insight: The issue is not lack of ideas—it is focus and execution discipline.

High dependence on owners

- Most participating businesses identified a high reliance on one or two key individuals for strategic decision-making, operational delivery and key relationships.
- Common pattern:
  - Owners leading strategy
  - Owners running operations
  - Owners holding key relationships

Key insight: This creates constraints in: Growth execution, time for strategic thinking and succession readiness.

Financial capability lagging business complexity

- ~70% of businesses need stronger financial modelling and forecasting
- Common gaps:
  - Rolling cashflow forecasting
  - Scenario/testing capability
  - Investment and funding readiness

Key insight: Particularly critical for businesses: Taking on new debt, diversifying into new revenue streams and scaling production or infrastructure.

Marketing is a major constraint in value-add growth

Among diversified/value-add businesses:

- 100% had a strong product or story
- 44% participating businesses identified marketing execution, sales systems and market development as key capability gaps.

Key insight: The challenge: Converting great products into consistent revenue streams.

Succession is an immediate or emerging issue

- 60–70% of businesses identified succession as a current or near-term issue
- Several businesses have:
    - No formal plan
    - No clear successor
    - Increasing urgency (age, scale, complexity)

Key insight: This represents both a risk and a major opportunity for structured support.

Workforce and leadership constraints

- Most businesses employ staff but lack formal people systems
- Challenges include:
    - Recruitment (especially rural roles)
    - Delegation and leadership capability
    - Over-reliance on owners

Key insight: Scaling is limited by people capability, not just capital.

Early Value of the Pilot Programme

"The Discovery Phase helped us confirm our priorities, identify areas for improvement, and put structure around some of the challenges and opportunities we already knew existed. The independent review provided valuable perspective and a clear foundation for the next stage of development." - Discovery Phase participant, June 2026

For participating businesses:

- 100% of participating businesses identified clear next steps through the Discovery Phase
- Clear identification of 2–4 key capability gaps per business

For Wairarapa:

- Identification of high-potential businesses ready to grow
- Evidence of strong demand for structured capability support
- Clear opportunity to accelerate diversification and value-add activity

Through targeted capability support, the programme has the potential to:

- Unlock investment decisions
- Accelerate growth ambitions
- Strengthen long-term business resilience

While access to capital, debt servicing, market conditions and profitability remain important challenges for many businesses, the Discovery Phase found that stronger capability in areas such as strategic planning, governance, financial management, leadership and market development would significantly improve businesses' ability to navigate these challenges and take advantage of future opportunities.

Why the Discovery Phase matters

The Discovery Phase has demonstrated that relatively modest investment in structured business diagnostics can quickly identify the highest-value opportunities for capability development.

Rather than applying generic support across a diverse group of businesses, the pilot has established a clear understanding of the specific challenges, opportunities and capability needs within each participating enterprise.

This approach provides greater confidence that future investment can be targeted where it is most likely to deliver measurable outcomes - whether that is supporting business growth, diversification, succession planning, workforce capability, governance development or improved financial performance.

Importantly, the Discovery Phase has also highlighted common themes across the cohort, creating opportunities for shared capability initiatives while still maintaining a business-specific approach.

Where to next?

The Capability Boost pilot is now moving from discovery into action. We are currently engaging participating businesses to gather structured feedback on:

- The value of the discovery process
- Priority areas for capability investment
- Preferred types of support

In parallel, we are working to:

- Identify priority support pathways for each business
- Assess where shared support approaches can deliver scale (e.g. workshops, advisory programmes)
- Refining the design of the next phase of the pilot

This next stage will focus on translating insights into measurable business change and outcomes.

The Discovery Phase has confirmed there is no shortage of ambition, innovation or opportunity within the Wairarapa primary sector.

What many businesses need is targeted capability support to help transform opportunity into action.

The pilot has successfully identified where that support is likely to have the greatest impact and is now informing the design of the next phase of capability development, with participating businesses currently providing feedback on priorities and future support requirements.

This programme is about accelerating high potential businesses by helping them make better decisions, build capability and unlock their next stage of growth. We’ve completed the discovery work, now we want to work with businesses to shape the next phase of support and ensure it delivers real, measurable impact.