

Foodstuffs North Island

INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

MEDIUM-LARGE ORGANISATION WINNER



THE STORY

Giving young team members a voice at Board and senior leadership level is allowing a leading supermarket operator to better serve its customers and community while nurturing the careers of its future leaders.

Foodstuffs North Island is a 100 per cent New Zealand owned co-operative, with 323 owner-operated stores in communities across Te Ika-a-Maui operating under Four Square, New World, PAK'nSAVE, and Gilmours brands.

In 2019, CEO Chris Quin challenged the team to bring diverse thinking to senior leadership decision-making and ensure the co-operative thrives into the future.

Inclusion Manager José Taiapa says more than a quarter of Foodstuffs' workforce is under 30 and this group typically does not have a voice at senior levels.

“Consulting firm Korn Ferry has recognised that, globally, the average age of a C-suite member is 56. These are the people who are making critical strategic decisions for the short, medium and long-term and their views may not always align with the views of younger generations.”

Conscious that this hierarchy existed at Foodstuffs, the co-operative established its Future Leaders Advocacy Group (FLAG) in November 2019. Now onto its fourth cohort, the group consists of nine

to 14 'Foodies' under 35, from the support centre, store and supply chain teams, who are given the opportunity to bring fresh perspectives to the Board room.

The group is self-governing, guided by the executive team and sponsored by the CEO. It provides a monthly CEO update, giving its unedited perspective on relevant topics, has input to Board papers, is invited to senior leadership events and has a fortnightly slot at the executive team meeting.

Group members receive one-to-one mentoring from a senior leader, training and development and work proactively on FLAG projects.

"FLAG represents our customers of the future, their changing shopping behaviours and what future generations need from our business to ensure we thrive for years to come. It challenges the status quo and brings diverse thought on key strategic and non-strategic issues the business faces," Chris says.

The initiative is also an opportunity for young people across the co-op to develop. "Young people are keen to progress their career. We know that with the ageing population, the war on young talent is only going to increase so we want to attract, retain, and engage younger employees."

The initiative has not been without challenges. FLAG members do not always have visibility over existing work programmes and sometimes raise ideas or solutions that are already being worked on, and it can be hard to find ways for the group to have input.

"There can be a perception amongst older generations that young people have opinions that aren't backed by data. On the flipside, leaders don't always know the struggles and challenges that young people face."

It can be hard for senior leaders to hear that sometimes younger team members struggle financially or wouldn't hesitate to change their shopping behaviours for better price or sustainability practices. But that proves the need for FLAG to exist, says previous FLAG member and Emerging Talent Manager Ruawai Te Rata.

FLAG has weighed in on topics such as parental leave, sustainability practices, employee value proposition, youth career development and talent mobility. It's raised concerns about cost-of-living impacts and the co-operative has made big commitments in this area including its Price Rollback programme following Covid-19 and subsidised lunches for teams at some sites.

FLAG has also led its own project, Volunteers @ Foodies. Supported by the co-op's Environmental Social Governance (ESG) Strategy, this provides opportunities for team members to undertake meaningful volunteer work. The programme demonstrates Foodstuffs commitment to ESG and will help attract younger employees.

Previous FLAG member Tim Paton, Head of Transaction Service, says, "I'm proud of how we earned the right to have our voice at the Board table. I was instantly connected with peers across the co-op who stretched my thinking and gave me a wider view of Foodstuffs, which has been invaluable."

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Ruawai says, “Being part of FLAG gave me opportunities I never thought I’d get. As a young person in a large organisation, there aren’t many opportunities to see the inner workings of senior decision-making and have one-on-one relationships with executive team members. I believe FLAG played a critical part in accelerating my career.”

THE CHALLENGE

Foodstuffs North Island wanted to bring diverse thinking to senior leadership decision-making.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- Establish a Future Leaders Advocacy Group (FLAG) to give young team members a voice at senior levels through:
 - A monthly update to the CEO
 - Input to Board papers
 - Mentoring from senior leaders and invitations to senior leadership events
 - Opportunity to present at executive team meetings
 - Special FLAG-led projects
 - Acting as a sounding board for critical business projects as required

RESULTS AND BENEFITS

- FLAG has provided a youth perspective on important topics affecting the co-op and its people
- FLAG has led the Volunteer @ Foodies initiative, highlighting Foodstuffs’ commitment to its Environmental Social Governance Strategy
- Membership of the group has provided career growth for future leaders through skill development and networking opportunities
- Foodstuffs has created safe spaces for everyone to be heard



KEY LEARNING

Being brave enough to listen to and value perspectives from an age group not normally visible in senior decision-making can help position an organisation for future success.