

YOUNGSTOCK

A New Zealand adventure for young UK farmworkers

Work, play and travel are the three aims of Richard Houston's seasonal farm work agency, which aims to offer young UK farmworkers experience on farms throughout New Zealand. **Danusia Osiowy** reports.



New Zealand-born Richard Houston set up Hanzon Jobs to help UK farmworkers gain work experience abroad.

Richard's contracting idea snowballs into a business

After spending four years working for a number of farm contractors in the UK, United States and Australia, 25-year-old Richard Houston launched Hanzon Jobs in 2005 – matching young farmworkers with contractors in New Zealand who require help through the summer.

"I have worked all over England and met people that were keen to combine farm work with travelling," says Richard, whose parents run a dairy farm in New Zealand milking 800 cows. "I had contacts in New Zealand and my idea to set up a business incorporating the two just snowballed from there."

With significant experience driving tractors and working

harvesters and foragers, Richard applied for a job in the UK to drive a silage chopper on a farm in Devon four years ago before coming up with the idea for Hanzon Jobs.

He now spends five months each year in Devon working through the British summer before returning home in September to pursue his other agricultural contracting business and helping the new intake of young farmers from the UK settle into their work placements.

While past workers have been primarily based in Devon, he hopes the scheme will appear to young farmworkers nationwide. Last year, he recruited 12 people to complete a full work placement with some of the 15 contractors he has secured back home.



David Pidsley in transport mode and ready to leave farm.



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Name: Mark Cottey, Age: 22
Lives: Yarcombe, Devon
Occupation: Working for a contractor

real home-made NZ stuff that was developed for special jobs, something that would not necessarily be used in the UK.

David: Queenstown and Wanaka, just over a hill from Queenstown, were amazing. We just sat on the water's edge drinking beer and watching people waterskiing. Driving from town to town was an adventure as the scenery is forever changing. One minute you're beside the sea, half an hour goes by and you're climbing over some mountain range.

Sid: Everywhere you go is amazing weather – it's in the mountains, out on the lake or down by the sea and all just so different to anything that I had seen in the UK.

The good thing about it all is it never takes too long to get to any of it. We did a two-week road trip up and around the North Island. There were some very nice beaches and lakes and the farmland seemed to be rather steep in places, those Kiwis are crazy where they drive their tractors.

What did you do in your spare time?

Mark: If we weren't working we caught up on some good sleep. The local pub was not far and a good place to meet new people. The first night we went in there we stood out like sore thumbs but by the end of the night we had made new friends and even met some nice Kiwi ladies.

David: We use to travel around and get to see more of the country. We would always run into other English people traveling around and it was good to ask them what they had seen to get some ideas on where was good to go.

The local pub served nice big meals, it's always handy to have a good feed and a few pints. I also managed a few holes of golf and the local school had a pool that we could swim in.

Sid: I worked for a contractor that employed quite a few English drivers, so when we had a wet weekend we would just all hop in a few cars and head away for a couple of days. We went to the west coast one weekend and went to a wild food festival and ate all sorts of crazy food like crocodile and possum. We also became quite regular down at the

How to apply

- The summer season in New Zealand runs from October and finishes around mid-April.
- Ideally workers need to be able to commit to working the full summer season within this period and be aged between 18-26 years old (however, anyone outside this age still

- may also be considered).
- Applicants should have some tractor driving experience or experience of driving other farm machinery and be able to adapt and work co-operatively as part of a team.
- For details contact Richard Houston on 07870 458070.

you have a good camera. Don't use your UK mobile over there as I did and it cost me a fortune. You can get prepaid phones for next to nothing. Try and save some money before going for the little extras such as bungee jumping or a skydive.

David: Just go out there expecting one big adventure, back yourself and, most of all, just enjoy it because before you know it you will be back on the plane and home.

Try and see as much of the country as you can as it is a long way to go back if you miss something. Be social as the people out there are very welcoming and will help in any way they can.

Sid: Don't worry about missing out on anything back home as when I got back it felt as if I had only been gone a week. The only thing I did miss was the shooting season, but we did try and make up for it by spotlighting some possums and hares on the back of the quad.

David: It was very nice and somewhere I could call home. It was close to work and the pub. Come home from a hard day, kick your boots off and twist the top off a beer and just relax.

Sid: We all lived in a house that was owned by the contractor we worked for. They had a few houses close to the yard but still far enough away to get away and switch off. They had arranged for a lady to cook us an evening meal and clean the house once a week. Everyone seemed to end up there most weekends and it was a real laugh. It cost £35 a week.

David: I have started my own small contracting business, which includes hauling trailers for the local contractor, baling and muckspreading.

Sid: I just went straight back into work at home, busy on hauling fertiliser and getting things ready for the summer season.

Mark: Friendly, easy going and a very



Name: David Pidsley, Age: 22
Lives: Dunkeswell, Devon
Occupation: Runs a contracting business



Name: Sid Tucker, Age: 24
Lives: Luppitt, Devon
Occupation: Works on the family farm

Deere dealership always made you feel included, even though he had a very large company.

Sid: From the pub owner Toad to Big John the oldest lorry driver that worked there, people were great to have a chat to. Driving the McHale I often towed the rake behind the baler for farmers to use. I think this was sometimes more hassle than good as they quite often wrapped it round a telegraph pole or ended up in a heap at the bottom of a hill.

Did your experience fulfill your ambitions?

Mark: I have grown up a little having to fend for myself. I have broadened my horizons and overall I have made the world a smaller place in my eyes.

David: Between travel and NZ farming methods of growing maize I have definitely ticked all the boxes I wanted to. Different methods of farming were also interesting as they have very intensive pasture management methods that seem to be very efficient.

The best thing about all of this was I got paid while doing it all. The first day out baling straw was a real highlight. I was like a little kid all excited sat up in my big 8120 pulling a Freeman 1592.

Sid: I think my main goal for my trip was to just get away for a while and enjoy myself. I also wanted to try and observe and learn some methods of doing things that I could possibly use in my own family's contracting business.

CASE STUDY: Around 40 young farmworkers have completed placements in New Zealand and combined the experience with an opportunity to travel. We catch up with three who gave the scheme a go.

What were you doing before you went to New Zealand?

Mark Cottey: I live on a farm so I was working there and also working for my local contractor. He was keen for me to get away and learn new ideas.

David Pidsley: I was working for a contractor full-time doing a lot of baling. I also worked for my family's

straw business during the harvest season.

Sid Tucker: My family runs a contracting business and so I was working there and sorting the lorries for hauling fertiliser and straw.

Why did you decide to go over to New Zealand?

Mark: I'd heard a lot about the country through working with Kiwis that had come to the UK and I also had some friends that had been over before. It was a chance to broaden my experience on bigger machinery, something which I felt I couldn't do in the UK. I thought it would be a good chance to do some traveling before I get too many commitments in the UK.

David: I wanted to get away from England for the winter, learn new skills and see some of the world. I had a friend that had been there before and just talking about what he had done excited

me. The Kiwis I met in the UK were always having fun and I just thought what would it be like if you were in a country full of them?

Sid: I had got to know Richard from his time in Devon and he told me a contractor he knew had brought a new JD6920 and a McHale Fusion baler and needed someone who had experience to drive it for the summer. I was always keen to do some traveling.

What were the main differences between the UK and New Zealand?

Mark: The scenery was the first major thing we noticed, the landscape just changes so much. The machinery is similar, if not a bit bigger, and their farmers seem to cut the grass a lot more often, which means you don't get the heavy seedy crops we cut in the UK.

David: The people are just so friendly, nothing was ever a trouble. The fields are all much bigger and

there is much more of an open farm layout, not many hedges or small lanes.

Sid: I found the machinery very similar to what we use at home, the only difference being that things are not so cramped, for example the farms yards were well laid out and there where no tight lanes, this meant the machinery that was used was just larger.

You could get a wagon and drag in and turn whereas over here you would have to load bales on the roadside. The milk lorries all pull trailers, no backing down between sheds and around corners to get to the parlour.

What did your day involve and what were you responsible for?

Mark: I drove a Fendt 926 with Pottinger triple mowers. I did all the mowing for the balers and the chopper. I would turn up in the morning, service the mowers and get instructions on what was to be mown then I was just

left alone and expected to get the job done. The boss was very trusting and relaxed, which made it easy to work well.

David: I drove a John Deere 8120 and both balers, big square and a round combi baler. When the maize started I buckraked. I would turn up and find out what was on, sort what I needed and just get on with it. I used to get a good feeling of doing your own thing, having to think for myself. Mobile phone coverage is poor when you get into the hills so you are really on your own.

Sid: They had just brought a McHale Fusion baler, which was handy as I have one at home. When I turned up they were just getting it started so I got stuck in and helped as they didn't know much about it.

Once the silage had finished I drove a Massey. I was responsible for maintenance and repair on anything that I drove. I would also help in the workshop as not everyone had lots of experience, and I guess we all

learned a bit of each other as the summer went on.

What were you paid?

Mark: Pay was \$20 per hour, which turned into around £8 an hour. I never really went with the plan to earn loads of money, it was more about the experience. We got paid enough to live a nice life while we were over there.

David: It was \$20 an hour when I remembered to hand in my timesheets. I earned more than I could drink, which was good, as we needed a new car after coming unstuck on a gravel road.

Sid: I was paid \$17.50 an hour and also received a bonus at the end of the season. When I travelled back for a holiday this winter there was enough money for me to travel some more of New Zealand and also spend three weeks in a campervan touring around Australia.

Just go out there expecting one big adventure, back yourself and, most of all, just enjoy it

DAVID