NUFFIELD
Farming Scholarships

Young People in Farming: A Story of Land and Sea

Written by:

Andrew Richardson NSch

June 2026

A NUFFIELD FARMING SCHOLARSHIPS REPORT

KINDLY SPONSORED BY:

Elizabeth Creak Charitable Trust

ELIZABETH CREAK
CHARITABLE TRUST

NUFFIELD FARMING SCHOLARSHIPS TRUST (UK)

Awarding life changing Scholarships that unlock individual potential and broaden horizons through study and travel overseas, with a view to developing farming and agricultural industries.

"Leading positive change in agriculture"

"Nuffield Farming" study awards give a unique opportunity to stand back from your day-to-day occupation and to research a subject of interest to you. Academic qualifications are not essential, but you will need to persuade the Selection Committee that you have the qualities to make the best use of an opportunity that is given to only a few – approximately 20 each year.

Scholarships are open to those who work in farming, food, horticulture, rural and associated industries or are in a position to influence these industries. You must be a resident in the UK. Applicants must be aged between 25 and 45 years (the upper age limit is 45 on 31st July in the year of application).

There is no requirement for academic qualifications, but applicants will already be well established in their career and demonstrate a passion for the industry they work in and be three years post tertiary education. Scholarships are not awarded to anyone in full-time education or to further research projects.

Full details of the Nuffield Farming Scholarships can be seen on the Trust's website: www.nuffieldscholar.org. Application forms can be downloaded and only online submission is accepted.

Closing date for completed applications is the 31st July each year.

Copyright @ Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust

ISBN: 978-1-916850-88-0

Published by The Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust
Bullbrook, West Charlton, Charlton Mackrell, Somerset, TA11 7AL
Email: office@nuffieldscholar.org
www.nuffieldscholar.org

A NUFFIELD FARMING SCHOLARSHIPS REPORT (UK)

NUFFIELD Farming Scholarships

"Leading positive change in agriculture. Inspiring passion and potential in people."

Date of report: June 2026

Title	Young People in Farming: A Story of Land and Sea
Scholar	Andrew Richardson
Sponsor	Elizabeth Creak Charitable Trust
Objectives of Study Tour	To explore and compare the role of young professional networks and youth organisations in agriculture and aquaculture
Countries Visited	Norway, Canada, New Zealand, Iceland, Chile, Brazil, USA, Greece, Italy
Messages	1. Social licence must be operational, not rhetorical 2. Youth engagement must start earlier and be social in nature 3. Succession planning must be formal and protected 4. Youth organisations need stable, blended funding 5. Aquaculture must actively design its identity

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores how young people are engaged, supported, and represented within agriculture and aquaculture through youth organisations (YOs) and young professional networks (YPNs). While both sectors are food-producing and rural in nature, they differ significantly in maturity, structure, cultural embeddedness, and ownership models. These differences shape how young people enter, experience, and progress within each sector.

Agriculture benefits from centuries of cultural familiarity, geographic spread, and family ownership. These factors have enabled the development of deeply embedded youth structures that engage individuals from a very young age, often before career intent is formed. Organisations such as Young Farmers' Clubs and 4H provide social identity, community, and skills development, supported by strong parental involvement and, in many cases, public funding. These youth pathways play an important role in succession planning, sectoral pride, and long-term resilience.

Aquaculture, by contrast, is a young and highly consolidated sector, often dominated by large, internationally financed businesses operating in geographically limited areas. Youth engagement typically begins later and is closely tied to employment, with YPNs focusing on skills, networking, and career progression rather than community or identity building. While these networks can be highly effective at accelerating individual careers, they often operate with limited resources, public recognition, and societal support.

Through case studies spanning the UK, Norway, New Zealand, Canada, Chile, Iceland, and Brazil, this report highlights how limited cultural visibility and weak social licence have tangible consequences for aquaculture. These include challenges in talent attraction, political vulnerability, and insufficient focus on succession. In contrast, agriculture's embedded youth culture provides resilience, even as public funding for youth organisations comes under increasing pressure.

Aquaculture must become more intentional in designing its youth engagement ecosystem. This includes starting engagement earlier, placing greater emphasis on community and social connection, formalising succession planning, and securing blended, long-term funding models. Agriculture, meanwhile, can learn from aquaculture's professionalism, clarity of career pathways, and strong alignment between young professionals and industry leadership.

Ultimately, youth organisations and professional networks are not optional extras; they are strategic infrastructure. If agriculture and aquaculture are to remain competitive, sustainable, and socially legitimate, both sectors must invest deliberately in the next generation—not only as workers, but as future leaders, advocates, and custodians of food systems on land and at sea.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary ii

Chapter 1: Introduction 1

Chapter 2: Background to My Study Subject 2

2.1 Youth Organisations and Young Professional Networks in Agriculture and Aquaculture 3

Chapter 3: My Study Tour 4

Chapter 4: A Tale of Two Sectors 5

4.1 Introduction 5

4.2 Sector Maturity 5

4.2.1 Hearts and Minds 5

4.2.2 Case Study: Young Salmon Farmers of BC [aquaculture] 5

4.3 Geographic Spread 7

4.3.1 Case Study: Chilean Salmon Industry [aquaculture] 7

4.3.2 A Focus on Succession 7

4.3.3 Case Study: Young Fish Aotearoa [aquaculture] 8

4.4 Sector Structure 8

4.4.1 Aquaculture's Journey to Consolidation 8

4.4.2 Case Study: Young Aquaculture Network Iceland [aquaculture] 9

4.4.3 Ownership 9

4.4.4 Case Study: 4H Canada [agriculture] 9

4.4.5 Career Pipeline 10

4.4.6 Case Study: Young Fish [aquaculture] 11

4.4.7 Public Finance 11

4.4.8 Case Study: BC Agriculture in the Classroom Foundation [agriculture] 12

4.4.9 Case Study: Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs & National Association of Young Farmers Clubs [agriculture] 12

4.5 Youth Structure 13

4.5.1 Embedded vs Emerging 13

4.5.2 Case study: UK Food and Farming Forum [agriculture] 13

Chapter 5: Primary Functions 14

5.1 Introduction 14

5.2 Community And Identity 14

5.2.1 Community First 14

5.2.2 Case study: Young Farmers New Zealand [agriculture] 14

5.2.3 Farming Fashion and Identity 15

5.2.4 Case study: Brazilian Farmers and Identity [agriculture] 15

5.3 Skills and Representation 16

5.3.1 Building 16

5.3.2 Case study: Young Aquaculture Society [aquaculture] 17

5.3.3 Sharing 17

5.3.4 Case study: Next Generation Seafood Alliance [aquaculture] 18

Chapter 6: Discussion 19
Chapter 7: Recommendations 20
Chapter 8: After my Study Tour 21
Chapter 9: Acknowledgement And Thanks 22
Chapter 10: References 23
Chapter 11: Annex 24
Annex I: NZ Young Farmers Fencing Judge Scorecards 24
Annex II: Table of UK Based Agricultural YPNs and YOs 29

DISCLAIMER

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author alone and not necessarily those of the Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust, of the author's sponsor, or of any other sponsoring body.

CONTACT DETAILS

Andrew Richardson

South Lanarkshire

andrew.richardson.00@gmail.com

https://www.linkedin.com/in/andrew-richardson-245948103/

Nuffield Farming Scholars are available to speak to NFU Branches, agricultural discussion groups and similar organisations.

Published by The Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust
Bullbrook, West Charlton, Charlton Mackrell, Somerset, TA11 7AL
email : office@nuffieldscholar.org
www.nuffieldscholar.org

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

For as long as I can remember, I have been obsessed with the sea. Completing a BSc in Marine Biology at the University of Aberdeen, I had my first introduction to aquaculture through a series of lectures. My eyes were suddenly opened to a positive, challenging, complex, international, evolving career and I haven't looked back since. I am still friends with Professor Sam Martin, the academic who runs that aquaculture course, and 2026 will be my third consecutive year of featuring as a guest lecturer on the course that kick-started my journey.



Figure 1: In my happy place on a fish farm in British Columbia, Canada. Photo Credit: Author's Own.

In 2022 I attended the Aquaculture New Zealand conference and watched two impressive young people, Ben Pierce and Maegan Blom, announce the launch of a new youth initiative called Young Fish Aotearoa. This was a young professional network for those working in the Kiwi seafood industry. I resolved on returning to the UK that I would start a similar initiative, something I did in 2023, with the launch of the Young Aquaculture Society.

This report is an exploration of youth organisations and young professional networks in both terrestrial and aquatic farming. How are they leveraged? Why do they work? When do they fail? If these questions interest you, then I hope you enjoy this report.



Figure 2: With Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar at the launch of the Young Aquaculture Society. Photo Credit: Salmon Scotland.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND TO MY STUDY SUBJECT

Aquaculture is the farming of aquatic organisms – this means fish (e.g. salmon & tilapia) crustaceans (e.g. tiger prawns & white leg shrimp), molluscs (e.g. oysters & mussels), and plants (e.g. seaweeds & microalgae).

Every two years the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) produces a document called State of the World's Fisheries and Aquaculture. The following graph and quotation are taken from the 2024 edition (FAO, 2024) (the most recent at the time of writing):

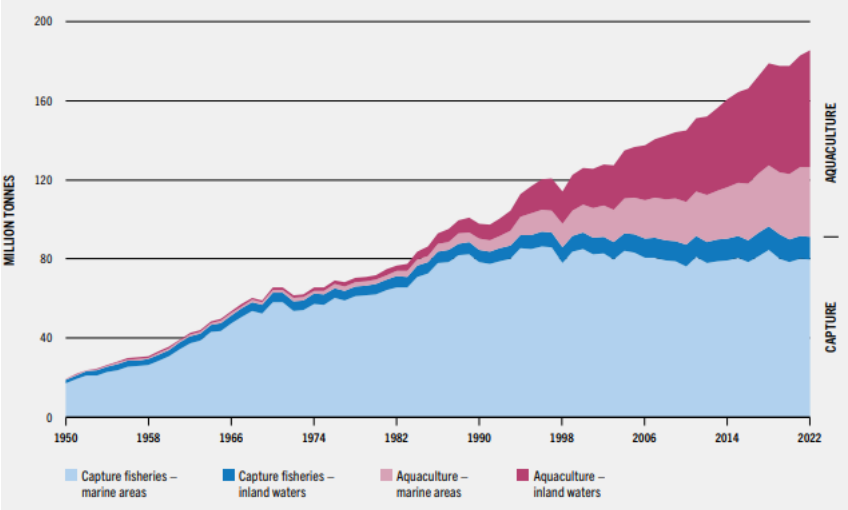


Figure 3 World fisheries and aquaculture production over time. Image Credit: State of the World's Fisheries and Aquaculture, FAO, 2024.

'World aquaculture production in 2022 achieved an all-time record of 130.9 million tonnes' – FAO, 2024.

Key Takeaways

1. Aquaculture is the fastest growing food production system on the planet and now produces more than capture fisheries annually.
2. Whilst aquaculture is growing, the state of wild fisheries is more challenging.
3. The sector is very young.

2.1 Youth Organisations and Young Professional Networks in Agriculture and Aquaculture

Youth organisations (YOs) and Young professional networks (YPNs) are structures that support the development of specific young communities.

For the sake of this report the definitions are:

- **Youth organisation:** a structured, often non-profit or voluntary, association designed to support, educate, and empower young people (typically aged 10–18).
- **Young professional network:** a community, forum, or organization designed to support, connect, and empower early-career individuals (typically aged 18–35).

In the UK many farming communities take for granted the existence of a mature structure for young people to learn, grow, and socialise inside their sector. This can foster real passion, create a shared identity, and build a network of friends in rural areas.

Whilst different organisations may define 'youth' differently the core objectives of these groups may be described loosely as *'forging a lifelong understanding of the terrestrial farming sector; perhaps leading to a passion and career'*.

CHAPTER 3: MY STUDY TOUR

Norway	February 2025, September 2025
New Zealand	March 2025
Canada	June 2025
Italy	October 2025
Iceland	March 2026
USA	March 2026
Chile	March 2026
Brazil	April 2026
Greece	May 2026

CHAPTER 4: A TALE OF TWO SECTORS

4.1 Introduction

Agriculture and aquaculture are sectors with several key differences. In this chapter we will review two distinguishing features:

1. Maturity
2. Structure

How do these differences affect how young people interact with them? How does this impact the established roles of YOs and YPNs?

4.2 Sector Maturity

Agriculture has played a defining role in the development of humanity, uncoupling it from the necessity to hunt and gather food and enabling the establishment of civilizations. Aquaculture, by contrast is only 4-5 decades old (with a few exceptions).

4.2.1 Hearts and Minds

My son is eighteen months old at the time of writing and unaware of agriculture's importance. He does, however, have a favourite (red) tractor. He can name farm animals and mimic their noises - an impressive feat given he is yet to say his own name. Agriculture sits at the heart of Western identity. It features in our nursery rhymes, our earliest literature, and our understanding of what is 'natural' about our landscapes.

Aquaculture does not – this right has not yet been (and may never be) earnt. The sight of net pens or mussel rafts in a loch does not evoke a normal part of country living, but a new industrial enterprise shrouded in mystery. We don't learn about it in school and are likely to misunderstand its impact and importance.

This lack of cultural familiarity impacts social license – a key facet of talent acquisition, sectoral identity, sectoral pride, and importantly, governmental support.

4.2.2 Case Study: Young Salmon Farmers of BC [aquaculture]

In 2024 the salmon sector in British Columbia suffered a massive blow, as the Canadian government confirmed its intention to ban open pen activity at a federal level. This ban will be enforced by 2029, by which time all activities must cease (Government of Canada, 2025). This is despite scientific review finding that open pens represent a relatively small threat to wild salmon populations and the environment (Marty *et al*, 2025).

Why did the ban happen? According to local trade bodies, the regional YPN and First Nations partners I talked to, it is a complex story. Fundamentally it seems that massively successful eNGO activity and lobbying in Vancouver and Ottawa undermined the sector's social license; particularly amongst the growing urban

middle class – a group distant from the issue and who's consumption of salmon is growing year-on-year. Well intentioned and vulnerable to viral misinformation at worst and over-simplification of nuanced/ complex topics at best, they rally behind simple environmental messages. The liberal government's ban may be seen as a political manoeuvre to attempt to secure favour from that group ahead of vulnerable elections. It is also worth noting that eNGO activity is often funded by foreign philanthropy groups, raising questions about the propriety of such interference in domestic policy.

BC's salmon production has fallen 40% to ~50,000T as a result of the policy. Meanwhile salmon imports into Canada have doubled to meet rising consumer demand and salmon remains Canada's most consumed seafood.

Amongst this turmoil, a YPN was established called the Young Salmon Farmers of BC (YSFBC) to provide a political voice for young farmers impacted. When I spoke to them they shared stories of their livelihoods being incredibly uncertain, a feeling of not being listened to, and importantly that they were in the right. Salmon farming, when appropriately regulated, can be a sustainable and high value industry for young people to engage in – and they felt that the promise of the sector (and their early careers) was being sacrificed on a political altar.



Figure 4: With members and leaders of the Young Salmon Farmers of BC. Photo Credit: Author's Own.

YSFBC uses social media to re-educate urbanites by showing in short videos what the sector is really like. This is unique amongst the YPNs I have interacted with – which are generally engaged in internal knowledge sharing and networking.

The ban is being fought by both the salmon companies and their First Nations partners.

Key Takeaways:

- Very few sectors enjoy the same long-term cultural impact as agriculture. This undoubtedly impacts how young people, families, and regulators engage with it.
- Large scale aquaculture operations suffer from poor social license, impacting growth and in some cases sector survival.

4.3 Geographic Spread

Over the millennia agriculture has found its way into almost every terrestrial ecosystem on earth – from the stepped paddy fields of the Himalayas to the rolling South Downs of England. You are rarely far from agricultural activity. This means that the sector impacts (directly or indirectly) a massive number of people – whether it is just visually, culturally, or economically. Agriculture commands interest from others.

Aquaculture operations are often limited to specific suitable coastal regions or at sea, reducing the number of individuals connected to, and impacted by the sector. As a result, most populations understand less about it, and show less interest in it.

4.3.1 Case Study: Chilean Salmon Industry [aquaculture]

Salmon is Chile's second largest export after copper. It is a massively important economic activity of this country's southern region which has seen cities double in size, significant financial investment, and unemployment drop rapidly as a result of the sector's existence.

Despite this, the sector is largely misunderstood by the increasingly urban middle class, mainly centred in Santiago (the country's capital city which sits further north). It has failed to secure social license, and faces an uphill battle as it tackles issues of succession. I talked to several large trade bodies (Salmon Chile & Consuelo du Salmon) as well as young people and senior leaders of the sector. All bemoan challenges attracting talent.

Public education in Chile is relatively poor, with the best education being found in the capital. As a result, talent migrates to this city for their education. This leads to their urbanisation and many do not return south until they are ready to have families. Industries in the south miss this opportunity to capture the young talent, and when they return they are unlikely to join a sector they now either do not understand or perceive as problematic. As a result, the average age of the crew at one Coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*) farm I visited was 45+ – with no young salmon farmers onsite to take advantage of the team's skill and training.

Key Takeaway:

- Aquaculture's smaller footprint limits its cultural significance and broader levels of support.

4.3.2 A Focus on Succession

Agriculture's maturity highlights the importance of passing the banner to the next generation – as so many generations have done beforehand. Whilst the sector certainly does not have the challenge of succession perfected, as recent shifts in inheritance tax policy in the UK have highlighted for many, it does take succession very seriously as inheritance is the most common pathway into the sector (Leonard et al. 2017). In contrast, aquaculture's temporal immaturity means

that this is not often at the forefront of the sector's focus. Indeed, as a relatively small sector (in terms of personnel) promising aquaculture talent can represent a challenge to current leaders/ managers in the sector, threatening their dominance.

4.3.3 Case Study: Young Fish Aotearoa [aquaculture]

New Zealand's government has set itself a target of tripling the value of their aquaculture sector by 2035 to a total of NZD $3Billion (Ministry of Primary Industries, 2024). Meeting this challenge head on means upskilling young people and putting them in leadership roles early. This succession problem is born out of a positive for the sector, but demands commitment and focus from actors. As with all succession planning initiatives, moving early is important.



Figure 5: With Ben and Maegan, the founders of Young Fish Aotearoa. Photo Credit: Author's Own.

Young Fish Aotearoa highlighted to me that whilst young Kiwis are being promised exciting careers, companies are not prioritising the development of their young leaders. They highlighted two key challenges:

1. The very small sector means there are limited leadership roles available, and those in them are fiercely protective. This is keeping younger talent in entry level/ middle-management roles.
2. Legislative stress is draining company resources, reducing available finance for longer term projects with no immediate capital return (like succession planning).

Key Takeaway:

- Aquaculture currently does not place the same emphasis on succession planning as agriculture, potentially creating long term vulnerabilities.

4.4 Sector Structure

Aquaculture is dominated by large, often international, businesses that operate several sites. Whilst these organisations certainly exist in agriculture there are still a significant number of small to medium sized farming businesses. This structural difference is key to understanding the variable approaches to youth and young professionals.

4.4.1 Aquaculture's Journey to Consolidation

Why are large corporations found farming the seas? Ultimately capital expenditure (CAPEX) and operating expenditure (OPEX) drive this trend. As the salmonid sector became more sophisticated, companies that had access to

expensive tools like wellboats (~£50 million) out competed those who didn't, and as a result small farming operations were bought by big players. This consolidation, coupled with an ever-increasing cost to produce, means that the number of family run SMEs (small and medium sized enterprises) has shrunk year on year.

Successful aquaculture firms often seek growth internationally, financing operations in foreign geographies. This further alienates the sector from the local population and distances it from local regulators.

4.4.2 Case Study: Young Aquaculture Network Iceland [aquaculture]

Iceland is a relatively small but rapidly growing producer of aquatic farmed seafood. In support of this growing sector a youth group called Young Aquaculture Network Iceland (YANI) was established in 2025. Unfortunately this fledgling organisation has not seen much initial success.

Aquaculture in Iceland is sponsored to a large degree by foreign investment (mostly Norwegian). Whilst the country is accepting of that investment, it is fiercely proud of its own culture and national identity. Aquaculture is not seen as 'Icelandic' - at least not yet. The individuals who founded YANI are Norwegian and British, and whilst the organisation has heard supportive noises from Samtök Fyrirtækjaí Sjávarútvegi (SFS or Fisheries Iceland) - who see value in supporting young people – it has not materially thrown its weight behind the group.

Key Takeaway:

- Consolidation has largely removed family-owned SMEs from the aquaculture landscape, and introduces further challenges around the nature of foreign investment.

4.4.3 Ownership

As seabed cannot be owned, aquaculture operations typically pay a form of rent to the state. Land, as an asset class however, is relatively secure. Businesses may come and go, but the land upon which they are built remains. This enables a terrestrial farmer to confidently presume that, if well managed, an asset of value should successfully pass through several generations.

Youth Organisations in the agricultural world are a mechanism for farming families to support the development of farming skills early. In part this may be to ensure that young people grow up with the skill sets to manage this asset. Parents are often very supportive of their children integrating into a farming youth organisation, and this drive from within the families greatly improves youth organisation reach and impact.

4.4.4 Case Study: 4H Canada [agriculture]

In Canada I spent time with 4H, a youth organisation that supports the development of rural life skills in young people. The young people I met were

phenomenal. They were smart, conscientious, hardworking, and passionate – meeting them was one of the highlights of my travel.

When I think about this organisation's success, I believe it is in large part due to the parents who run and manage the structure at a local level. They take turns hosting events, ferrying their children, and imparting their knowledge. The result for 4H is a relatively 'hands free' structure which still successfully supports thousands of children to find their passion for agriculture. If the parents were not involved and did not see value in the lessons learnt by their children, then the 4H program would cease to exist.

I am not aware of any aquaculture program that attempts to proactively engage with parents in this way, likely because the businesses are rarely familial.

Key Takeaway:

- Different asset classes coupled with differing levels of family ownership result in variable levels of parental involvement.

4.4.5 Career Pipeline

Young people in aquaculture start interacting with the sector when they begin looking for a job. This typically means that their earliest experiences would be around 17 years old, although many enter the sector significantly later. Apprenticeship programs, internships and college or university qualifications are all major drivers of 'early' interest.

Interest in terrestrial farming can start a lot earlier. This could be motivated by familial investment, school engagement, an interest in farming machinery (e.g. combines or tractors), or a romantic ideal – or indeed several other factors.

This results in key structural differences in how youth are engaged. Aquaculture starts this process later, utilising YPNs (17+). Agriculture leverages YOs (as early as 5+) that might extend into YPNs.

4.4.6 Case Study: Young Fish [aquaculture]

Young Fish is the Norwegian seafood YPN, and at over 10 years of age it is the most mature one globally. Its success is routed in its ability to positively impact the careers of its members, who as alumni go on to support its mission. Membership and engagement with the group allows a young person to connect meaningfully with companies (who host events), build relationships with impactful peers, develop leadership skills, and importantly build a positive reputation for themselves.



Figure 6: Speaking at the Young Fish conference in Bergen, on the topic of YPN's, succession, and skills development. Photo Credit: Young Fish.

Membership in Young Fish requires that the young person works in fisheries or aquaculture – they do not accept students or academics. This career ethos creates clear alignment with corporations, and enables easy dialogue around financial support. Indeed some companies go so far as to financially incentivise some of their young employees to seek leadership roles within Young Fish.

This symbiotic relationship between the YPN and the seafood sector drives growth and security for the YPN – and makes the value proposition of membership very clear to young people.

Key Takeaway:

- Aquaculture's youth engagement starts relatively late, and is intertwined with a career mindset in a way that agricultural YOs are uncoupled from.

4.4.7 Public Finance

As established, public bodies treat aquaculture differently to agriculture. Financial support in the form of subsidies is often absent, something which is relatively rare in agriculture (although notable exceptions like New Zealand exist).

This translates to YOs and YPNs – where often some form of public finance is available to these structures in agriculture, but it is rarer to find examples for aquaculture. Despite this, on my journey I have seen that young farmer programs (either terrestrial or aquatic) are under supported by public bodies or finance is drying up.

4.4.8 Case Study: BC Agriculture in the Classroom Foundation [agriculture]

The BC Agriculture in the Classroom Foundation provides teachers and children with fundamental and entertaining ways to learn about how and where their food is produced. It is a brilliant initiative which includes programs like Spuds from Tubs where children grow their own potatoes, and a board game which allows children to gamify a career in agriculture.

This foundation receives most of its funding through the Province of British Columbia, and is dependant on this public finance to continue its initiatives. Whilst this finance is provided by the province, its origin is largely federal.

Open pen aquaculture has recently been banned by Canada at a federal level. As the finance for the BC Agriculture in the Classroom Foundation is federally sourced, salmonid aquaculture (impactful in the region) cannot be included in the foundation's activities, as this could result in the loss of that important federal finance. The same is true of all federally supported agriculture initiatives in the region.

4.4.9 Case Study: Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs & National Association of Young Farmers Clubs [agriculture]

In 2016 the Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs (SAYFC) stopped receiving an annual revenue grant from the Scottish government (Farmers Weekly, 2016). The sum lost was ~£66,000 annually, equivalent to ~13% of the organisation's revenue. Although guaranteed regular finance is not provided, the organisation does receive strategic and project funding on a competitive basis. An example of this support is matched funding (up to ~£98,000) for the new SAYFC headquarters – the total amount being raised is £1.6 million.

The National Association of Young Farmers Clubs has similarly seen some volatility in this space. In September 2025, stories broke in the sector press that Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) was dropping their discretionary grant for the organisation, although there remains uncertainty as to whether this will happen (Farmers Guardian, 2025).

This trend to defund these organisations is concerning especially given their reach and the number of young people impacted by their activities. Whilst not massively financially impactful, it potentially highlights the growing distance between farming and food in the minds of an increasingly urban population and thus political base.

Key Takeaways:

- Public finance for YPNs and YOs in agriculture is often available in some form, whilst aquaculture relies more on corporate backing.
- YOs and YPNs typically do not receive enough public financial support.

4.5 Youth Structure

Youth organisations in both sectors are structured differently, reflecting the sectors they operate within.

4.5.1 Embedded vs Emerging

It is unquestionable that the YPN & YO space is more mature in agriculture than aquaculture. Several trace their heritage to the early 1900's (4H est. 1902, NFYFC est. 1921) and their success established a paradigm that these types of institutions have value, leading to a proliferation. Annex ii is a table detailing agricultural YPNs I became aware of in the UK during my study.

This proliferation itself encourages growth and engagement, as new waves of young people and stakeholders look to build on the legacy.

4.5.2 Case study: UK Food and Farming Forum [agriculture]

Launched at the 2025 World Food Forum (WFF), the UK Food and Farming Forum is the latest YPN sprouted in the UK. Its mission is a focus on policy engagement, and with its ties to the FAO (as a formal chapter of their WFF) it hopes to make an impact both nationally and internationally.



Figure 7: At the FAO's WFF in Rome. Photo Credit: Author's own.

Its first months have been smooth, with young people in the sector used conceptually to engaging with YPNs. It already enjoys collaborations with other YPNs inside the ecosystem (including nature charities' youth movements – which fall outside the scope of this reports definition for an agricultural YPN). They mutualise initiatives and boost each other's impact.

Furthermore, it has been able to secure seed financial support from future farming focused NGOs. Instinctively, I presumed that increasing the number of YPNs and YOs would reduce available financial support to each (as they share resource), but it seems now the opposite is true. The value proposition of YPNs in agriculture is now familiar and they are trusted to deliver impact.

Key Takeaway:

- The embedded nature of agricultural YPNs encourages proliferation, and sector familiarity encourages financial support.

CHAPTER 5: PRIMARY FUNCTIONS

5.1 Introduction

YOs and YPNs have different primary functions, derived from the structural difference of the sectors they represent.

5.2 Community And Identity

Agricultural young farmer's organisations typically have a focus on social connection and community with a firm, but secondary focus on skills development.

5.2.1 Community First

A common theme of agricultural youth focused programmes is a regular scheduled calendar of gatherings (either weekly or monthly). These meetings are often a mix of socialising, sport, friendly competition, charity fundraising, skills development and farm visits. As a result, young people engage with these structures for a variety of reasons. Some highlight not being particularly 'ag interested' but enjoy the social aspects, whilst others put massive value on the more concrete elements such as skills.

5.2.2 Case study: Young Farmers New Zealand [agriculture]

Young Farmers NZ is a very important YPN, whose impact is such that its annual national competition has been televised, and the winner is awarded prizes in excess of $100,000 NZD (typically in the form of farming equipment).

I was able to attend Young Farmers NZ regional events. Each event was categorised by a competition (laying fences, judging animals, clay & pigeon shooting etc.). There was a true mix of people, some taking the competition quite seriously, whilst others were enjoying a more relaxed approach. Points would be noted down and were impactful as candidates looked to accrue points throughout the year allowing them to attend national competitions. Prizes were given to winners, and friendly jokes were made of those who had under-performed.



Figure 8: With some really inspiring young farmers from NZ, who hosted me so (so) well. Photo Credit: Author's Own.

I talked with a couple who had one day off their farm in a month and had decided to drive for several hours to attend the fence-laying competition and socialise with their friends. I was frankly astounded that someone would build fences for fun on their only day off for weeks on end – I can think of no aquaculture equivalent. Fence laying is a surprisingly important and well-structured

competitive activity, and the full rules can be found in the Annex of this report for your interest.

At no point in my time with this group did an individual talk about formal workshops or STEM style learning opportunities created by the group (although they may indeed happen). The focus seems very squarely on proving your individual skill, building reputation and developing relationships whilst having fun.

Key Takeaway:

- Young farmers appear to value the social elements as much as the skills and STEM related learning opportunities.

5.2.3 Farming Fashion and Identity

Throughout my Nuffield journey I have travelled through several countries and met a wide variety of young farming people. Despite all of this, I have been surprised by the universality of farming fashions.

There are I think some interesting features of this trend.

1. The shared visual cues support community and culture
2. Farming fashion seems preserved across generations, whereas typically young people might not choose to look like their parents/ grandparents.
3. A fashion can be 'in vogue' and non-farming people will (when it's on trend) adopt aspects of this identity. I wonder about the positive impact this has on farming's social license – it is perhaps hard to be overly critical of a sector whilst it is trendy to look like you work within it.

Aquaculture does not have this same shared visual identity, and I think is worse off for it.

As an example, in the UK, Norway, and Chile yachting brands are leveraged by companies for their corporate attire (a maritime theme evoked) but I suspect this makes those employed seem 'other' in the rural communities they work in. I propose this is overall damaging to local social license – by increasing the cultural difference between the aquaculture sector and the communities they operate in.

5.2.4 Case study: Brazilian Farmers and Identity [agriculture]

In Brazil we see the same farming fashion norms (albeit with an American slant – cowboy hats are very common). These visual cues are very important, especially at gatherings and events, and attendees enjoy the feeling of community and shared purpose.

Brazil, however, is an interesting case study for aquaculture because, unlike in Europe and the UK, young farmers see agriculture as a business first and a lifestyle second. When asked if it was important to have more farmers or more profitable farms they answered with the latter. Similarly, whilst most I met did not

align with 'mega' corporations like JBS (a Brazilian multinational operating across the meat and food production supply chain), they were largely supportive of consolidating & professionalising their sector – focussing on creating more value from their considerable output.

This is mirrored by the CNA (Confederação da Agricultura e Pecuária do Brasil) which provides amongst other things, a youth commission for future farming leaders and strategic governance for SENAR (Serviço Nacional de Aprendizagem Rural) – a training institute for rural livelihoods. There is a clear focus on agribusiness profitability and promoting entrepreneurship. Conversely there is not a focus on propagating or protecting farming culture.



Figure 9: At an educational facility in Brazil, sponsored by the CNA. Photo Credit: Author's Own.

This is interesting for aquaculture companies because they are similarly 'business first' corporate structures. Brazil demonstrates that it is not a requirement to prioritise 'farming culture' to enjoy the benefits of 'farming fashion' or shared identity.

Key Takeaway:

- The consistent nature of global farming fashion propagates a shared identity.

5.3 Skills and Representation

In Aquaculture, we see more of a focus on STEM knowledge development with a secondary focus on community (indeed almost all community focus in aquaculture YPNs could be categorised more accurately as corporate networking).

5.3.1 Building

Aquaculture YPNs focus more strongly on skills development as a motivator for participation in events. These events are typically farm visits, technical seminars, conferences, or lectures from experienced leaders. I am not aware of any event focussing on sport or friendly competition – although there are examples of gatherings motivated by charitable causes. Typically, this means that aquaculture YPNs meetings or events are less frequent and more ad hoc; or are galvanized by opportunism.

5.3.2 Case study: Young Aquaculture Society [aquaculture]

I founded the Young Aquaculture Society (YAS) in 2023 to create career transparency in the UK's aquaculture sector. This means both:

1. Helping more young people find out about the sector, and the breadth of careers it offers.
2. Helping those young people within the sector find routes to success.

Relatively small (in terms of personnel), the UK's aquaculture ecosystem is insular and places considerable importance on reputation and network, whilst offering little support to broaden young employee sectoral understanding. YAS makes this insular sector easier to navigate.



Figure 10: YAS events offer an opportunity to network with peers. Photo Credit: Salmon Scotland.

YAS provides visits to companies in the sector, arranging tours and learning opportunities. They have organised discussions with politicians, visited parliaments (both UK and Scotland), and enabled members to speak at globally impactful conferences.

As a result of this career focus, YAS communicates predominantly on LinkedIn - a trait shared across almost all aquaculture related YPNs. This limits its reach and cultural impact but supports its reputational development in the sector.

Key Takeaway:

- As aquaculture networks are younger (and thus lack mature social structures), they are more likely to incentivise membership through discrete learning opportunities.

5.3.3 Sharing

Young aquaculture voices are largely silent around the world, with the exception being in countries where there are YPNs. Galvanising that voice is a key role of those new YPNs. Agriculture, in contrast, has several global and European initiatives for connecting, sharing, and meeting (e.g. Global 4-H Network Summit or the European Congress of Young Farmers).

Some global organisations like FAO have had terrestrial farming youth movements associated for some time, and have recently pivoted to include seafood. The World Food Forum's Youth Constituency for Fisheries and Sustainable Aquaculture is a network designed to enable a global youth voice to support policy recommendations provided by the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture

technical teams. These recommendations are taken under consideration by the world's governments, and means this group is likely to deliver some impact.

5.3.4 Case study: Next Generation Seafood Alliance [aquaculture]



Figure 11: Preparing to speak on a panel with fellow NGSA colleagues from the US, Canada, Norway, and Australia at the Scottish Pavillion at AquaNor 2025. Photo Credit: Author's own.

Salmon trade bodies around the world collaborate through membership in a structure called the International Salmon Farmers Association (ISFA). In 2025 this body funded a newly imagined umbrella organisation for seafood YPNs called Next Generation Seafood Alliance (NGSA). The idea is to create a space where young seafood professionals can network, share ideas, and importantly collaborate on shared and global communications.

It is too early to say whether this network (now with 5 YPN members from 4 countries) will be a success, however it highlights that globally leaders perceive a gap in youth engagement.

Key Takeaway:

- Local, regional, or national YOs or YPNs create opportunities for international collaboration and engagement.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

This study set out to explore how agriculture and aquaculture engage young people through youth organisations (YOs) and young professional networks (YPNs), and what each sector might learn from the other. Whilst many of the differences identified are structural or historical, the implications are practical and immediate. Youth engagement is not simply a cultural exercise; it directly affects talent attraction, leadership development, social licence, and long-term sector resilience.

One of the clearest observations from this work is that agriculture has benefitted enormously from time. Its youth structures have evolved alongside the sector itself, becoming culturally embedded, socially expected, and widely supported by families and communities. Aquaculture, by contrast, is still negotiating its place in society. Its youth engagement tends to be reactive and career-driven, often arriving too late to shape identity, values, or long-term loyalty to the sector.

It would be simplistic, however, to suggest that aquaculture should attempt to replicate agricultural youth structures wholesale. The sectors differ too greatly in ownership models, geographic footprint, and workforce scale for simple transplantation to succeed. Instead, aquaculture must be deliberate in designing youth engagement that reflects its reality while still investing in social connection, early exposure, and succession planning. Culture will not emerge accidentally in a young, industrialised sector; it must be actively created and protected.

Equally, agriculture should not view its existing youth ecosystem as complete or invulnerable. Public funding pressures, increasing urbanisation, and changing societal attitudes towards food production all pose risks to established organisations. There is value in agriculture learning from aquaculture's professionalism, clarity of career pathways, and stronger alignment between young professionals and industry leadership.

Finally, this study is shaped by its scope and my own bias. This has impacted where I have been, who I have spoken to, and my interpretation of what I have learnt. There are regions—particularly in Asia—where the boundaries between agriculture and aquaculture are far less distinct. Future work in these contexts would likely challenge some of the assumptions presented here. Nonetheless, the central conclusion remains: sectors that fail to invest intentionally in their next generation do so at their own risk.

CHAPTER 7: RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Social licence must be operational, not rhetorical

- Invest in coordinated, community-based social-licence programmes where sectors operate.
- Prioritise cross-company and cross-stakeholder collaboration to scale impact.
- Integrate YPNs and YOs from the outset, not as secondary contributors.

2. Youth engagement must start earlier and be social in nature

- Stop relying on self-selection; engage young people well before career decisions.
- Focus on social, enjoyable participation rather than career messaging.
- Secure parental buy-in to extend reach and reduce cost.

3. Succession planning must be formal and protected

- Provide visible, structured pathways that offer certainty.
- Better utilise graduate programmes, mentoring, shadow boards, and leadership training.
- Proactively develop future leaders through YPNs and YOs.

4. Youth organisations need stable, blended funding

- Improve access to finance, particularly in aquaculture.
- Support YOs and YPNs to navigate public funding processes.
- Favour modest, long-term corporate support over short-term grants.

5. Aquaculture must actively design its identity

- Make community engagement routine, not exceptional.
- Measure identity indicators such as belonging and trust.
- Adapt existing rural identity norms to embed the sector socially.

CHAPTER 8: AFTER MY STUDY TOUR

My Nuffield journey has been an eye opening and life changing experience. In the immediate aftermath I remain concretely embedded within youth structures for aquaculture (on the board of NGSA, YAS, FAO's Youth Constituency for Sustainable Aquaculture). I will also continue to speak on behalf of youth development, and already have engagements planned for the rest of my year.

I have a young son (18 months at the time of writing), so I will also be making a very concerted effort to repay my amazing wife – allowing her the opportunity to travel and spend evenings away with her friends!

Finally, founding YAS has motivated me to launch my own commercial enterprise. Whilst I recharge my batteries following my Nuffield experience, I plan to build out some proof-of-concept aquaculture focused educational material for young people.

CHAPTER 9: ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND THANKS

'There is no doubt about it; this has been a project of privilege.' - Jock Gibson
2024 NSch

I am immensely grateful for my Nuffield Farming Scholarship Journey. It has been in equal parts the most humbling, challenging, and thrilling experience of my career thus far. None of it would have been possible without my generous sponsors the Elizabeth Creak Charitable Trust. Additionally I received financial backing from The Fishmongers Company. I am indebted and will look to repay this generosity when I have the opportunity!

I am very proud to be a part of the Nuffield peer group, in no small part because the members of my cohort are each intimidatingly brilliant. I am inspired by all of them.

I would also like to thank the Nuffield Farming Scholarship Trust for all the hard work and effort put into creating this opportunity for farmers like me. My topic of study and my career make me an unusual Nuffield Scholar. They have shown nothing but trust and faith in me – I hope it has been justified.

If you have hosted me, taught me, patiently listened to my meandering thoughts, shared a meal or beer with me, or shared any advice with me – THANK YOU. There are too many of you to mention, a fact which in itself is mind bogglingly humbling. I am already trying to (and will continue to) pay your generosity forward.

I am eternally indebted to my amazing wife for her commitment to supporting me throughout this process. Whilst I am sure her patience does have limits, I have yet to find them!

CHAPTER 10: REFERENCES

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2024: Blue Transformation in Action. Rome: FAO, 2024.

Government of Canada, canada.ca. (2025). Salmon aquaculture transition in British Columbia. [online] Available at: https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/ised/en/salmon-aquaculture-transition-british-columbia

Marty, Gary D., Jayde A. Ferguson, Theodore R. Meyers, Thomas B. Waltzek, Michael L. Kent, and Esteban Soto. “Pathogens From Salmon Aquaculture in Relation to Conservation of Wild Pacific Salmon in Canada: An Alternative Perspective.” *Aquaculture, Fish and Fisheries* 5 (2025)

Leonard, Brian, Anne Kinsella, Cathal O’Donoghue, Maura Farrell, and Marie Mahon. "Policy drivers of farm succession and inheritance." *Land use policy* 61 (2017): 147-159.

Ministry for Primary Industries, *New Zealand Aquaculture Development Plan 2025–2030* (Wellington: Ministry for Primary Industries, 2024)

Farmers Weekly. (2016). *Scottish YFC loses £66,000 government grant - Farmers Weekly*. [online] Available at: https://www.fwi.co.uk/news/scottish-yfc-loses-66000-government-grant

Farmers Guardian. (2025). *Defra says no decision yet made after NFYFC told discretionary grant funding would end*. [online] Available at: https://www.farmersguardian.com/news/4518507/defra-end-discretionary-grant-fund-farmers

CHAPTER 11: ANNEX

Annex I: NZ Young Farmers Fencing Judge Scorecards

NZ YOUNG FARMERS

NZ Young Farmers Fencing Tournament – Judging Specifications

Points assigned per fault. Line Number/Team Name_____

Strainer

Criteria	Comments/Feedback	Total
Strainer height - 1 point per 10mm		
Plumb taken from wire side and back of strainer. - Forward lean has double penalty points. Exactly plumb has no penalty points. 1 point per 1 mm (only applied if strainer put in by competitors)		
Stay Alignment. Centered when looking down from the top of strainer. - 1 point per 1 mm		
Strainer Chamfered. 20mm wide on a 45° angle - 3 points no chamfer. - 1 point per width and angle		

Stay

Criteria	Comments/Feedback	Total
Height (600 mm from top) - 1 point per 5 mm		
Shape Faults - Stay should be trimmed in proportion with strainer diameter to maximise bearing surface. - Trim cuts to be of equal length. - All chainsaw marks planed out. - 1 point per fault		
Mortice. No twist or gaps - 1 point per fault		
Stay aligned. Should be parallel to line wires and any bow in stay downwards. - 1 point per 10mm		

NZ YOUNG FARMERS

Stay Block Faults - Square to stay. - Centre of stay aligned to centre of block. - 1 point per fault - 150mm min. depth. No max. depth (1 point per 10mm)		
Shortened stay. - 1 point per 10mm		
Breast block faults - Square to wire - Centre of blocks length to centre of strainer - 50mm minimum depth, no penalty if deeper. - 1 Point per fault		

Posts

Criteria	Comments/Feedback	Total
Height and plumb taken from the wire side. 1 point – 5mm height 1 point – 5mm plumb - Rammed tight 1 point per fault		
Post contours. M - Must be 90° to wires or bisect angle of the line wires on rises or dips. - 1 point per fault		
3 posts evenly spaced. - No penalty within post width, then 1 point – 100mm		
Post line to be straight when eyed from behind strainer - 1 point per fault		



Wire Gauging and Stapling

Criteria	Comments/Feedback	Total
Gauge of wires at strainer taken from wire side, then level around back and other side. - 1 point per fault		
At posts exact gauge is essential. - 1 point per fault		
Staples - Must have adequate skew to hold wire as near to gauge mark as possible without binding. - Staples are driven to maximum depth, but must not bind wire to post. - Staples in a line down the post, all skewed the same way, not staggered. - 1 point per fault		
Insulators - 5mm gauging tolerance - In line down the post. -		
Stapling on the correct side of the insulator, all staples at the same angle approx 45° or all level. - 1 point per fault		

NZ YOUNG FARMERS

Wirework and Electrics

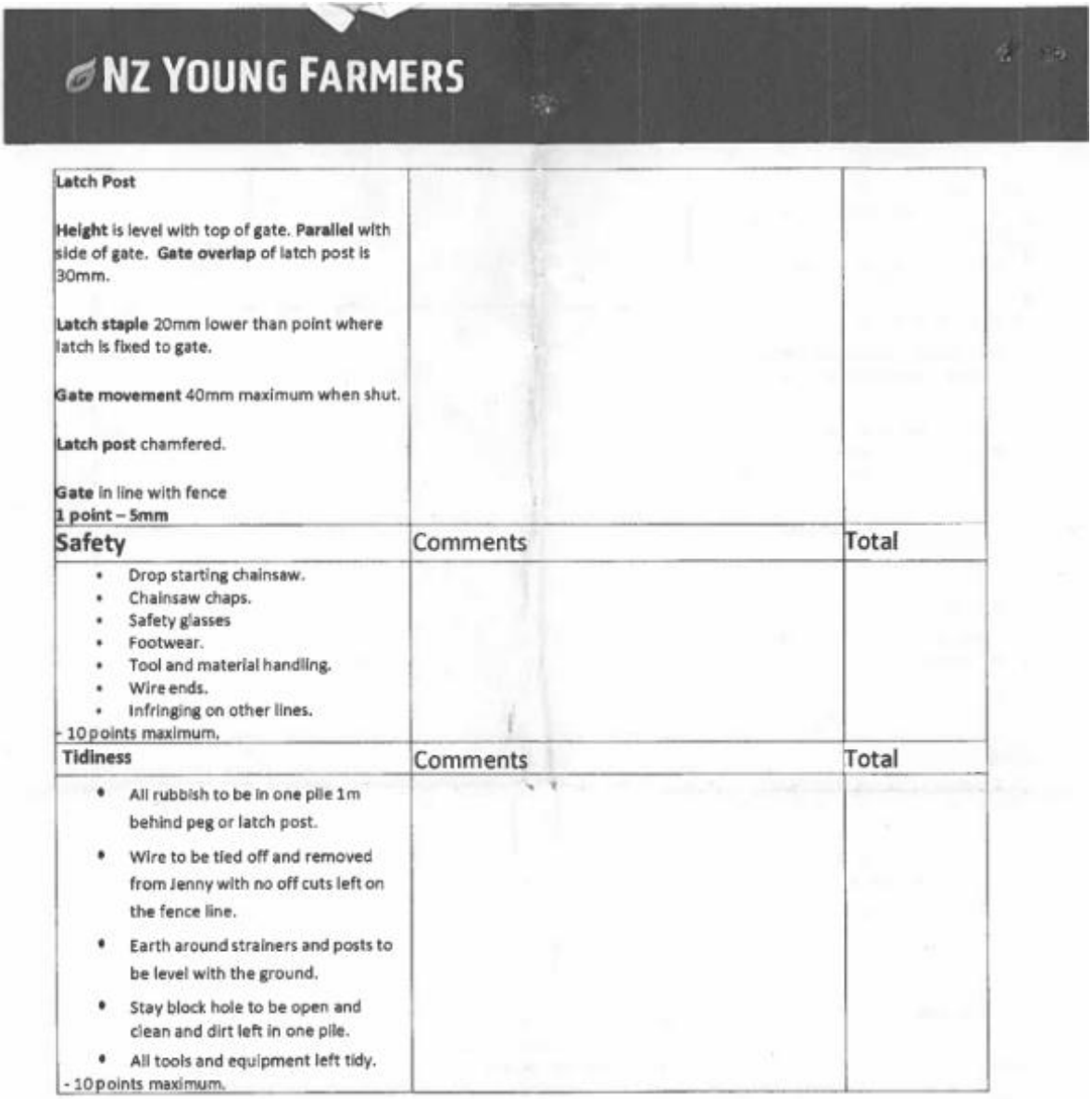
Criteria	Comments/Feedback	Total
Contractors Knot shape length wrap - Eye of the termination knot must not be drawn too tight so as to induce wire fracture - First easy wrap to lead onto wire at 30 degrees no longer than 50mm - Finishing to be minimum. 2.5 times tightly around line wire and broken off leaving no protrusions. - 1 point per fault		
Knot style must be consistent. - Tied in line with fence direction and plumb. - All knots should be in a perfect line, including eyes when looking down from the top. - 1 point per fault		
Position of knot -Eye of the termination knot tied approx. 20mm so they will not knock in - Positioned 1/5 to ¼ diameter of strainer - 1 point per fault		



End insulator - Distance = 125mm from the face of the strainer - 10mm tolerance then 1 point – 5mm		
End insulators tie off. - Minimum of 6 tight wraps either side of insulator pulling from the centre of insulator - The insulators to all aligned the same way so when looking down from the top you can see the eye of all end insulators. - 1 point per fault		
Clamping/wire joints - Should be neat and tidy - Clamped tight wires broken off with no protrusions. - 1 point per fault		
Switch/Cabling - The switch should be positioned midway between the first and second wire and centered. - Cabling level across from top of switch, then staple vertically down outside of termination knots. - 1 point per fault		

Gateway

Criteria	Comments/Feedback	Total
Height of Gate = Level with top of strainer. Level of Gate = Taken at the hinge end 1 point – 5mm		
Plumb of Gate = Taken at hinge clamps of gate when closed. 1 point – 5mm		
Gudgeon Line Position = 20mm toward the fence off the 45°. This allows for zero binding with maximum gateway opening. **Gudegeons** must also be in line when looking down from top to bottom. Hinges must bear on both gudgeons. Look for gate end aligning with back of strainer. **1 point – 5mm**		



NZ YOUNG FARMERS

Latch Post **Height** is level with top of gate. **Parallel** with side of gate. **Gate overlap** of latch post is 30mm. **Latch staple** 20mm lower than point where latch is fixed to gate. **Gate movement** 40mm maximum when shut. **Latch post** chamfered. **Gate** in line with fence **1 point – 5mm**		
Safety	Comments	Total
• Drop starting chainsaw. • Chainsaw chaps. • Safety glasses • Footwear. • Tool and material handling. • Wire ends. • Infringing on other lines. - 10 points maximum.		
Tidiness	Comments	Total
• All rubbish to be in one pile 1m behind peg or latch post. • Wire to be tied off and removed from Jenny with no off cuts left on the fence line. • Earth around strainers and posts to be level with the ground. • Stay block hole to be open and clean and dirt left in one pile. • All tools and equipment left tidy. - 10 points maximum.		

Annex II: Table of UK Based Agricultural YPNs and YOs

Organisation	Age	Tone	Social	Technical	Policy	Notes
National Federation of Young Farmers Clubs (NFYFC)	10–28	Social / developmental	High	Medium	Low	Social-first youth organisation; skills embedded through activities
Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs (SAYFC)	14–30	Social / leadership	High	Medium	Low	Strong leadership and competition culture
Young Farmers Clubs Wales	10–28	Social / cultural	High	Medium	Low	Strong Welsh-language and rural identity element
Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster (YFCU)	12–30	Social / leadership	High	Medium	Low	More overt leadership focus than some YFCs
1835 Network	18–35	Professional / peer	Medium	Medium–High	Low	Post-YFC style professional network
Lincolnshire Agricultural Society – Young Professionals Group	~20–40	Professional	Medium	Medium	Low	Broad agri-professional audience
The Farmer Network – Next Gen Programme	18–40	Professional / business	Low	High	Low	Strong business, tenancy, finance competence focus
Back the Future	~18–35	Transformational / peer	Medium	High	Medium	Systems change, future farming thinking
Emergent Generation	18–35	Values-led / strategic	Low	High	Medium–High	Regenerative, systems and leadership emphasis
FLAME – Youth Branch of the Landworkers' Alliance	18–30	Activist / movement	Medium	Medium	High	Explicit political and land justice orientation

Young People in Horticulture Association (YPHA)	<35	Professional	Low–Medium	High	Low	Clear sector-specific skills pipeline
UK Youth Food and Farming Forum	~18–30	Policy-engaged	Medium	Medium	High	Branch of FAO World Food Forum policy exposure focus
Country Land & Business Association – Next Generation Network	~20–40	Strategic / professional	Low	Medium	High	Land ownership and rural business policy
AIC Future Forum	~18–35	Professional / industry	Low	High	Medium	Feed policy and trade focus
National Sheep Association – Next Generation	<35	Technical / sectoral	Low	High	Low	Strong on production systems and sector voice
Young Crofters	<41	Community / cultural	Medium	Medium	Medium	Crofting-specific, place-based advocacy
Rare Breeds Survival Trust – Young Members	<26	Technical / conservation	Low	High	Low	Conservation breeding and skills focus
NFU Scotland – Next Generation	~18–40	Policy-professional	Low	Medium	High	Explicit policy engagement route
NFU Cymru – Next Generation	~18–40	Policy-professional	Low	Medium	High	Member-representation focus
NFU Student & Young Farmer Ambassador Programme	<30	Advocacy / outreach	Medium	Low	High	Representation and communication, not technical



Copyright @ Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust

ISBN: 978-1-916850-88-0

Published by The Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust
Bullbrook, West Charlton, Charlton Mackrell, Somerset, TA11 7AL
Email: office@nuffieldscholar.org
www.nuffieldscholar.org