

# Communities can and must set a vision for the future

Minister of Agriculture, Jim Anderton said today at the Persuasive Policies conference, in the Pohangina Valley, that New Zealand's rural and provincial centres tell a good story of rejuvenation and re-emergence as communities and looked a lot different than how they were as recently as the nineteen-nineties.

"Our rural and provincial communities are our heartland, not only emotionally speaking, but in an economic sense. They are the pump that keeps our economic blood flowing. We need them to flourish; we need them to be attractive, vibrant places where New Zealanders with skills and talent can raise their families and work. And with goodwill, clear objectives and a commitment to the future of each of our rural communities, we can realise that future," Jim Anderton said to the AgResearch audience in the Manawatu.

"The Labour-Progressive government has the goal of increasing the value of our exports which calls for innovation across the production process. From science, to farm management and support, to marketing and more...there will be a greater demand for skills. The skill ingredient in our exports will drive our increased incomes for as far as we can predict. And skilled workers can and will demand high returns and high quality lifestyles.

"For rural communities - and for New Zealand as a whole - the prospect is a virtuous cycle. The more attractive a community is to live in, the more skilled people will settle and contribute. They'll bring with them their earnings and employment. And in turn that will shape a more attractive place for other skilled people to settle and stay.

"The challenge New Zealand faces is to be attractive enough for the skilled people we need - and that is a never-ending challenge. Although it takes time and people don't like the strain of debating alternative visions, communities have to make plans for their own future. And it is essential that everyone knows they are welcome to contribute. To forge a future may be a hard task, but it is a lot harder living in a withering community, with no direction.

"We have to be creative and co-operative when we look for ways to meet the challenges of the changing world in which our communities exist. We all have to adapt to change. Rural communities have in many cases had to adapt more - and with greater impact - than many other parts of New Zealand. Planning for change is a question of how we adapt, not if we adapt.

"The fundamentals we have learned - and that some of us knew all along - include that every community has a future. But we need to work together to realise our potential. Each community itself needs to take ownership of its own destiny. Everyone with a stake needs to be involved in setting priorities. And the government needs to play its role. We need to get this right," Jim Anderton said today.