



NZ Rural Leadership Trust – Chief Executive Officer

Position Description and Additional Information

15 January 2026

Chief Executive Officer – Develop Future Rural Leaders

- Christchurch/Canterbury Location
- Impact the future of NZ Primary Sector
- Purpose-Led Leadership

The Organisation | Purpose-Led, NZ's Food and Fibre Sector

New Zealand Rural Leadership Trust exists to grow exceptional leaders for New Zealand's food and fibre sector – leaders who create impact for industry, communities and the future of rural Aotearoa.

Bringing together the internationally recognised Nuffield Farming Scholarship and the Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme, NZ Rural Leaders has a proud legacy spanning more than 70 years, a deeply connected alumni network of over 1,200 leaders, and a reputation for excellence in leadership development.

With strong momentum, high partner confidence and an ambitious future ahead, the Trust is now seeking a values-led, strategically minded Chief Executive Officer to lead the organisation into its next chapter.

The Opportunity | Use your passion for growing leaders

Reporting to the Board of Trustees, the Chief Executive Officer has overall accountability for the strategic direction, performance, culture, and sustainability of New Zealand Rural Leaders. This is a rare opportunity to lead a nationally respected charitable organisation with deep roots in the rural sector, strong commercial discipline, and a clear purpose: to grow leaders who make a difference.

Amongst other things, the incoming CEO will:

- Build on a strong legacy while shaping the next phase of growth
- Lead a highly engaged team, partners, and facilitators
- Strengthen financial sustainability and partner confidence
- Champion innovation in leadership development
- Represent NZ Rural Leaders across industry, government, and community

Key Focus Areas for the CEO will include:

- Strategic Leadership and Execution
- Culture, People and Leadership Development
- Stakeholder and Partner Relationships
- Financial and Risk Stewardship
- Brand, Reputation and Influence

About You | Passion for Leadership

To be successful in this key executive role, you will be a senior, credible leader with:

- Proven experience as a Chief Executive or equivalent senior leader
- Strong strategic, commercial, and people leadership capability

- Experience working effectively with a Board and governance structures
- A genuine affinity with or deep understanding of New Zealand's rural and food and fibre sector
- A leadership style that is collaborative, grounded, and values-led

You are known for your integrity, the ability to build trust, and the humility to listen, learn, and bring others with you. You bring the confidence to lead change thoughtfully, enhancing what already works, and developing strategies to ensure ongoing success. Most importantly, you are motivated by purpose and the opportunity to enhance New Zealand's primary sector through the growth of its leaders.

Why Join New Zealand Rural Leaders?

- Lead an organisation with national impact and international connections
- Work alongside a highly engaged Board, partners, and alumni community
- Shape the future of leadership in New Zealand's most critical sector
- Be part of a values-driven organisation that genuinely gives back

How to Apply

This executive appointment is being managed by Decipher Group, trusted advisors in executive search and leadership appointments.

For a copy of the position description visit the Decipher Group website on <https://deciphergroup.co.nz/jobs/chief-executive-officer/>

To discover more about NZ Rural Leadership Trust, visit www.ruralleaders.co.nz

For a confidential discussion, please contact Lisa Edwards at lisa@deciphergroup.co.nz or on mobile 021 240 4410

Applications close: Monday 9th February 2026

Please do not email us your CV and Cover Letter. Please use the *Apply Now* link on our website.

decipher

www.deciphergroup.co.nz
Decipher Group
Level 4, 151 Cambridge Terrace
Christchurch

Lisa

Relationship focused
Evaluative
Interested
Driven

A circular portrait of Lisa Edwards, a woman with short blonde hair wearing a black blazer, is positioned on the right side of the banner. A curved arrow points from the text 'Relationship focused' towards her portrait. The background of the banner is a vibrant purple and blue gradient with a pattern of small white dots.

Our process



OUTREACH AND ADVERTISING | Applications close 9 February 2026

Potential candidates identified through targeted search; applications reviewed and responded to.



APPLICANT SCREENING | Early-Mid February

Initial screening of applications as they are received. This may include a discussion with candidates about their motivations for applying. We aim to run a timely and efficient process.



SELECTING AND SHORTLISTING | Late February

Once the role has closed our team will present the most qualified candidates to the client. Within this period, all applicants will receive notification of the status of their application.



CANDIDATE INTERVIEWS | Late February-Early March

Decipher Group prioritises a robust and consistent interview framework, based on a behavioural and competency-based assessment. Candidates will be advised of the interview structure and who will be present on the panel. All interviewed candidates will receive prompt feedback and will be advised of next steps once we have debriefed with the interview panel.



VETTING AND DUE DILIGENCE | TBC

We conduct thorough background checks and referencing to further assess competencies of preferred candidate/s. Decipher Group utilises a third-party provider for pre-employment and probity checks such as criminal history, qualification, employment history and bankruptcy. Our team will notify you in advance prior to us contacting your referees. Throughout the entire process, candidate confidentiality and privacy remain an absolute priority.



DECISION AND ONBOARDING | TBC

Following a rigorous evaluation, a conditional offer of employment will be made, subject to the completion of the above stage. Our team will communicate regularly with both the client and the successful candidate during this period. At the conclusion of the recruitment process, all remaining candidates will be notified, with the opportunity for feedback.



POSITION PROFILE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

New Zealand Rural Leadership Trust
January 2026



**RURAL
LEADERS**

Growing
world-class leaders
for our country

THE TRUST

NZ RURAL LEADERS OVERVIEW

New Zealand Rural Leadership Trust is a registered charitable trust established by Trust Deed on 15 February 2017. NZ Rural Leaders was formed from a merger of the Nuffield Farming Scholarship Trust, an internationally recognised Scholarship programme which has been developing entrepreneurial leaders in New Zealand since 1950, and the Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme (RLP) which was transferred from Lincoln University in 2015 and has been in operation in New Zealand since 1979. NZ Rural Leaders is a member of the International Association of Programs for Agricultural Leadership (IAPAL).

NZ Rural Leaders has an alumni base, including a total of 195 Nuffield Scholars since the inception of the programme, and 1070 Kellogg Scholars since inception. Our Alumni network is a key aspect of the success of our organisation.

NZ Rural Leaders purpose is to run leadership programmes for New Zealand's food and fibre sector, advance and promote food and fibre education, practice, and the general welfare of New Zealand's rural population. NZRLT does this by growing leaders for the sector (including the Nuffield Farming Scholarship and Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme and the Value Chain Innovation Programme) and through strategic projects, to play a collaborative leadership role in the sector.

Customer Satisfaction and Awards

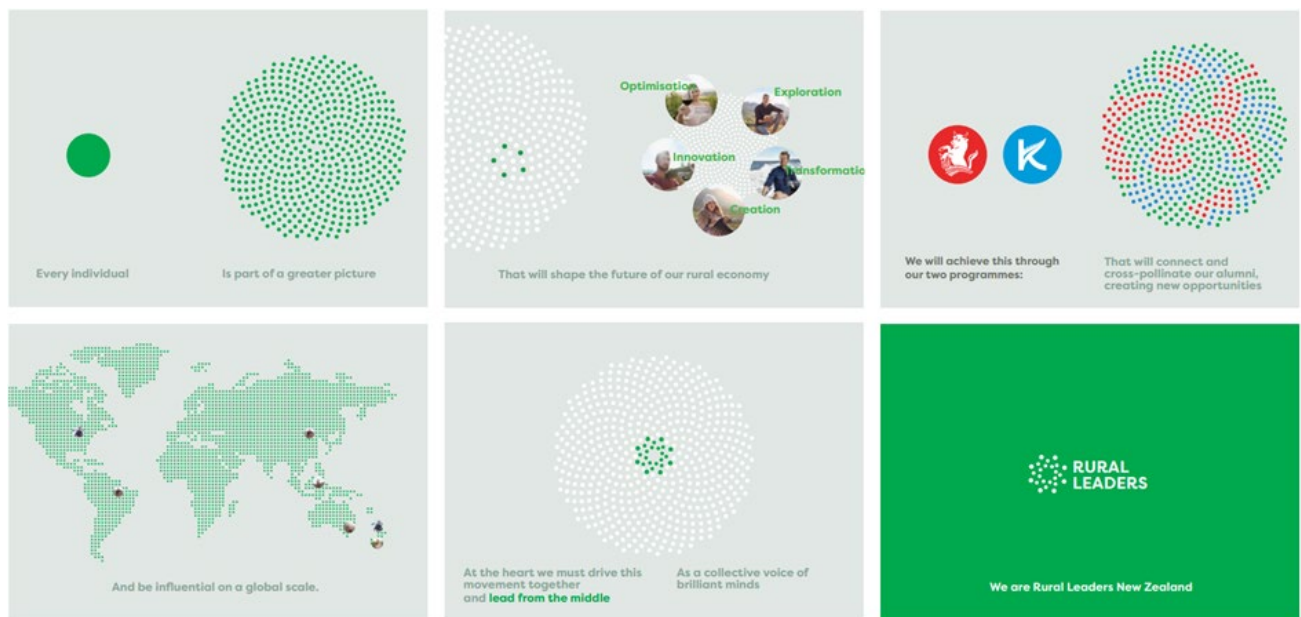
NZ Rural Leaders programme typically have a net promotor score of circa 90%+. NZ Rural Leaders was a finalist in the 2022 Beef+ Lamb NZ and Rabobank People Development Award.

WORK ENVIRONMENT

NZ Rural Leaders office is located on campus at Lincoln University. This recognises the longstanding relationship with Lincoln and the ongoing collaboration to increase rural education levels. One example is the Post Graduate Certificate programme for Kellogg Scholars that NZ Rural Leaders delivers with Lincoln.

NZ RURAL LEADERS' VALUES

The NZ Rural Leaders brand story speaks to the heart of what we believe is good leadership. Fundamentally we believe leadership is a team sport, best achieved through genuine collaboration and an entrepreneurial mindset. The Brand is also emblematic of how we seek to grow leadership practice.



NZ Rural Leaders believe that the values their people stand by are essential to the Trust's high performing culture. There is a promise to customers and collaborators on what can be expected from NZ Rural Leaders. The Trust's values are:

- **Deliver** – *get the job done* - we improve our environment and deliver results.
- **Connected** – *muster support* - we deliver through, with and for others. Therefore, leadership-warmth and connection are important to how we work.
- **Empowering** – *plant for harvest* – NZ Rural Leaders ultimate legacy is more and better leaders, who are creating positive impact, we love investing in people.
- **Genuine** – *plough a straight furrow* - to achieve results, connect and leave a legacy, we seek to be ethical, credible, and believable.

Giving Back

NZ Rural Leaders is all about giving back. Some of the ways this is done, is through the promotion of Scholars thought leadership. This includes publication of reports, the Ideas that Grow Podcast etc. It also includes supporting research and Sector wide initiatives to improve people and workforce practice.

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

For further information on NZ Rural Leaders, please visit:

<https://register.charities.govt.nz/Charity/CC54252>

THE ROLE

Position Title: Chief Executive Officer

Reporting to: Board of Trustees, through the Chair

Location: Lincoln

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Key Relationships - Internal

- Chair and Board of Trustees
- Audit and Risk Committee
- NZ Rural Leaders Team
- All contractors and facilitators

Key Relationships - External

- Strategic Investing Partners
- All other partners (including programme partners, service partners, academic and regional partners)
- Alumni
- Nuffield International
- Like minded organisations, such as the Agri-Women's Development Trust

Committees/Groups

- NZ Rural Leaders Board
- NZ Rural Leaders Board Risk & Audit Committee

INCOMING CEO PRIORITIES & CHALLENGES

Immediate Priorities

1. **Maintain Momentum:** It is essential that the new CEO maintains the growth momentum, keeping a pulse on urgency whilst taking the time to build respect and knowledge before making tangible moves. Considerable momentum has been created by the outgoing CEO and the business has enjoyed sustained growth and success under their leadership, the appointee will need to be respectful of that legacy focusing initially on subtle adjustments and strategy resets without letting momentum stall. It will be important to balance growth of the business with the requirement to further build people capability and capacity within the regions.

2. **Get Across the Charitable Purpose:** The new CEO must value the culture and purpose of the Trust, where increasing people capability, confidence and ability for impact is the key to continued success. S/he will need to come up to speed quickly on the **Charitable purpose**, maintaining NZ Rural Leaders focus on its rural base which helps, avoid initiatives that may dilute the quality of service around the brand.
3. **Retention & Development:** It will be important for the new CEO to gain the trust and confidence of the NZ Rural Leaders partners and teams through listening, learning and understanding the business and its people in order to keep the teams motivated and future-focused and investor confidence high.
4. **Changing Market Conditions:** The new CEO will need to navigate a changing marketplace, where on one hand the need for systemised leader development has never been greater and yet at the same time, inflation, speed of change and tightening business conditions will mean it is crucial to keep investor confidence and find ways of maintaining demand for leadership development programmes.

Top Priorities: First 2 Years

1. **Maintain the pursuit of excellence:** Given NZ Rural Leaders past success the new CEO will have to be vigilant in order to avoid complacency, risk aversion and sticking to the 'status quo'. S/he will need to undertake a robust assessment of the competitive landscape and calibrate NZ Rural Leaders growth profile. As an indication, NZ Rural Leaders value discipline model focuses on customer intimacy (enduring relationship with alumni and partners and the wider community of practice (including membership organisations like Young Farmers and IRPNZ) and product leadership (provision of best practice leader development)..
2. **Coherence:** The new CEO should have a focus on;
 - program delivery success
 - fit for purpose Nuffield, Kellogg and VIP programme delivery
 - Increase value from sponsors
 - Alumni mobilisation
 - Internal policies & processes
3. **High-Performance Impact:** The new CEO will be responsible for embedding a high-performance mindset across NZ Rural Leaders, ensuring that strong values and intent are translated into consistent, high-quality outcomes. This will require clear expectations, disciplined execution, and appropriate accountability, while maintaining the Trust's collaborative and values-led approach.

The focus will be on strengthening organisational capability, lifting management and delivery performance, and balancing innovation with operational discipline to support sustainable impact over time.

4. **NZ Rural Leaders Culture:** Core to NZ Rural Leaders success is the culture of the organisation and the values which enable the Trust's purpose to be delivered. It is critical to the Board and the staff of NZ Rural Leaders that the new CEO shares those values and will work to sustain this culture. Relationships are essential whether internally or externally and the appointee must build on and enhance rather than break the foundation created by his/her predecessor.

Longer-Term Priorities

1. **Longer-Term Growth:** In positioning NZ Rural Leaders for longer-term growth, the CEO will need to build capital reserves and rebalance relative reliance on investing partners towards programmes that sustain the Trust financially.

ROLE PURPOSE

The Chief Executive has accountability for the overall strategic direction and performance of NZ Rural Leaders as set out below: this includes overall accountability for well-being and safety at an organisational level.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

Provide Outstanding Leadership to NZ Rural Leaders

- Ensure the business is positioned appropriately in the market in order to differentiate itself, compete and grow sustainably in the short, medium, and long term.
- Continue to foster an innovative, vibrant, and high-performance culture.

Leadership and Succession Planning

- Provide clear, values-led leadership to the NZ Rural Leaders team, contractors, and facilitators, creating clarity of direction and alignment to the Trust's purpose and strategy.
- Build organisational capability through effective talent development, performance management, and succession planning.
- Identify and develop current and future leaders within the organisation to support continuity, resilience, and sustainable growth.
- Foster a culture of accountability, learning, and continuous improvement, ensuring people are supported and challenged to perform at their best.
- Ensure appropriate organisational structures, roles, and resourcing are in place to deliver strategic and operational priorities

Manage Board Relationships

- Work closely with the Chair, the Board and its Committees
- Act as the key conduit between the Board and the Rural Leaders Management Team.
- In conjunction with the Chair, set the agenda for Board and Strategy meetings and ensure inputs to meetings are of appropriate quality.
- Continue and improve the process to review the effectiveness of Board meetings, strength of relationships etc.

Strategic Management – Strategy, Planning and Execution

- Direct the development and implementation of strategic planning activities including assessment of current and future environments (particularly in relation to the rural sector) and establish necessary strategies, goals, objectives and plans.
- Identify and achieve new growth opportunities for creating long term value.
- Lead the review and implementation of the 3–5-year strategic plan for the business.
- Establish short and medium-term initiatives aligned to the strategic plan which are set out in an annual business and financial plan.

Position profile:

Chief Executive Officer - NZ Rural Leaders

Business Performance

- Be accountable to the Board for the overall business performance.
- Lead the development of strategic and operational financial plans and gain agreement from the Board.
- Develop a 5–10-year investment plan in the context of ensuring the business has the necessary infrastructure and capabilities to deliver services in the medium-long term.
- Ensure the trust's investment portfolio is controlled and managed effectively.
- Ensure sound financial management practices and controls are in place across Rural Leaders.

Risk Management

- Ensure appropriate enterprise-wide frameworks are in place and operating effectively to manage the following risk categories; strategic, investment, and operational risk, including appropriate policies and procedures.
- Make sure effective mechanisms are in place to retain, develop and motivate key talent.
- Ensure appropriate financial delegated authority frameworks are in place and operating effectively.

External Relationships

- Build and maintain effective relationships with all stakeholder groups, including alumni, customers, media, business leaders, community leaders, community groups, government, employees, and the public.
- Ensure that Rural Leaders contributes appropriately to the well-being of the industry and of the communities it serves.

Image & Reputation

- Set the tone for Rural Leaders by demonstrating the organisations values and, exemplifying consistent values of high ethical awareness, honesty and fairness.
- Demonstrate personal conduct appropriate to the office.
- Enhance the brand and reputation of the organisation.
- Represent Rural Leaders at public events and via media.
- Represent Rural Leaders in relevant industry and business events and industry groups.
- Develop strategies to create and sustain a positive public profile for Rural Leaders.
- Develop appropriate external networks at an industry, regulatory and government level in the context of influencing legislative and regulatory change.

Regulatory Compliance

- Ensure overall compliance with external legislation and regulatory requirements.

Wellbeing and Safety

- Drive, support, and develop strategy for wellbeing and safety initiatives.
- Foster a culture of wellbeing and safety and demonstrate commitment to workplace safety and wellbeing practice.
- Promote and support initiatives that contribute to a healthy and safe working environment for employees, visitors, and contractors.
- Ensure compliance with safety and wellbeing policy and procedures, including accident and incident reporting and investigation, hazard management, induction, training and supervision, employee participation and contractor management.

THE CANDIDATE

EDUCATION / CERTIFICATION

- Relevant tertiary qualification essential.

EXPERIENCE

- Proven record of successful management and achievement at Chief Executive or similar level.
- Proven experience in and a passion for developing capability in others.
- Extensive experience and demonstrated superior skills in leadership, strategy, results orientated management, general management, diplomacy and oral and written communications.
- Demonstrated track record in building and managing effective teams encompassing people with different attributes and skills.
- Previous experience of successful engagement or, at least a strong affinity with the rural sector in New Zealand.
- Good understanding of governance and previous experience working with a Board.

LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

- **Client Driven (Internal & External)** – A commitment to understanding the needs and best interests of both internal and external clients, in order to provide them with outstanding service and help them to make informed decisions.
- **Accountability** – Taking personal ownership of decisions, behaviour, and development, and being responsible for how these actions impact on the wider organisation and clients.
- **Adaptability & Change Management** – Demonstrating a willingness to engage in a changing environment and being flexible and comfortable working with change.
- **Motivation & Drive** – The determination to achieve goals and strive for excellence.
- **Relationship Building** – Developing and maintaining positive, professional relationships that are built on mutual trust and respect.
- **Teamwork** – Making a positive contribution to the Rural Leaders team and collaborating effectively with others to achieve objectives.
- **Critical Analysis** – The capability to identify key issues, trends, or important facts from information and to question and probe.
- **Motivating and Developing Others** – A commitment to getting the best out of people and motivating them to reach their full potential.
- **Change Leadership** – The drive to initiate opportunities to address Rural Leaders organisational needs and to communicate change in a way that gains buy-in and support from others.
- **Strategic Thinking** – External awareness and the capacity to stand apart from the day-to-day and take a long-term, big picture view of the business.

Position profile:

Chief Executive Officer - NZ Rural Leaders

- **Leadership Courage** – A dedication to leading the Rural Leader team toward their vision and values and communicating Rural Leaders's future direction with clarity and enthusiasm. The awareness and courage to front up to difficult situations with sensitivity and integrity.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

- Personal values which align with the organisations ethos and with the values of Rural Leaders.
- Open, honest and trust-worthy – serves as a role model for others exemplifying the highest standards for professionalism, integrity, ethics, and honesty.
- Perceptiveness and intuition to identify and maintain the positive aspects of Rural Leaders culture while possessing the capability to create a stronger focus on performance.
- The patience and subtlety to transition into a business that has enjoyed sustained, successful growth under a highly respected predecessor and to take the necessary time to gain the respect trust and confidence of employees and key stakeholders.
- Innovative and open to change but does not need to rush into it or make change for the sake of change – comfortable in allowing the things that are working to continue.
- Flexible and open to other points of view with highly developed listening and communication skills with the ability to engage in a clear and effective way to varying types of audiences up to Board level.
- A resilient character, who is able to back his/her own judgement and is able to respond constructively when challenged.
- Strong connection with community.
- Confident and self-assured but humble and grounded.
- Collaborative and team oriented.
- Calm under pressure.



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[https://www.linkedin.com/company/
decipher-group-limited/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/decipher-group-limited/)

Our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Statement

Decipher Group care deeply about helping individuals achieve their full potential and supporting organisations to thrive by working toward a more progressive future. Fostering a culture of inclusion and belonging that truly values individual differences, backgrounds, and perspectives ignites creativity and new ideas – and this is part of what makes our team exceptional. For us, progress is the only goal worth benchmarking.