

Encouraging innovation

New Zealand's primary industries are the backbone of this country – earning us billions of dollars each year from exports of products such as meat, dairy products, fruit and vegetables.

However, in this rapidly changing world it's essential to always be looking to the future, and it's clear that innovation is vital if our economy is to flourish.

Every year, Fieldays opens up its Innovation Awards to agricultural innovators from around the country, offering them a platform to conduct market research, gather information, receive advice, make connections and present their ideas nationally and internationally.

Fieldays Innovations event manager Gail Hendricks says the benefits of entering the awards are far more than the generous prize money on offer.

"As well as the \$60,000 prize pool on offer in cash and support, entrants will also be given a platform to test the market, the opportunity to learn from industry experts and the chance to develop their innovation through the various production stages," says Hendricks.

"These awards support ingenuity and creativity and the Kiwi can-do attitude, recognising people looking at problems or processes and being creative in the way they solve or enhance them."

Among last year's winners were companies with a robot to navigate kiwifruit orchards and capture highly accurate data, an app to help orchard supervisors collect timesheets and push to payroll, and a two-wheel drive electric utility vehicle.

Entrants are supported by organisations and individuals who provide advice around law, research, networking, engineering, technology and science, and this year's sponsors and mentors include Amazon Web Services (AWS), Gait International and James & Wells, which join past sponsors Vodafone NZ, Callaghan Innovation and Massey University.

"We are really lucky to have this group of amazing sponsors supporting the Fieldays Innovation Awards for 2019. The support, advice and connections for entrants will do wonders in advancing their ideas and propelling them onto the national and world markets," says Hendricks.

Patent and trade mark attorneys James & Wells works with NZ-based, NZ-owned companies, as well as overseas companies selling technology to NZ or competing with local companies in overseas markets. David Macaskill, partner from James & Wells, says the company has seen a sharp increase in patent filing rates, which indicates there has been a significant investment in innovation in agri-tech over the last five or more years.

Macaskill says good legal advice is



Gallagher's touch screen Weigh Scale and Data Collectors are leading the way in integrating data collection and connectivity to provide insights across animal and herd life.

critical for young start-ups wanting to take their products to the market, both locally and overseas.

"We are seeing significant increases in technology being used to address challenges and solve problems in the agricultural industry, and these ideas need to be protected."

Innovation is being seen across a wide spectrum: horticulture – in areas like water use, monitoring and control; dairy and animal husbandry – with electrical devices that send signals, monitoring and sense information on those animals such as what they eat and their health. Other areas that appear to be important include IOT and big data, remote control and automation, data acquisition, and sensors/sensing. There's also a focus on animal health and productivity.

"We are here to advise people who are wanting to commercialise their products – it's important they do the

preparatory work to protect their intellectual property and assets, and have legal support before they get into the sales process," he says.

"Our role is to look at how you protect innovation with legal mechanisms in a way that helps you achieve your business goals. Your legal rights need to be built in before you begin to expand overseas and develop partnerships, for example, with a US company. We can help with complex issues like filing for international patents for new products, and it's really important the issues are addressed before you begin moving into overseas markets," he says.

Strategy is also important in an increasingly competitive market.

"Companies should consider getting protection along the entire product chain. This may include distinct patents which protect every part of a system

separately, for example, sensors being protected separately from cloud-based analysis systems. The key is to look at what is important for your business and how competitors could look to exploit those features," he says.

Other protection strategies may be data security, access and control, and companies rely on these to protect their data sets, given that they are a key competitive advantage, says Macaskill.

"Good ICT and cyber security tools are necessary. However, another important strategy is the internal policies for staff and others who can access data. This means effective processes to ensure data is retained as confidential information and is not inadvertently disclosed."

Lawyers from James & Wells will be at Fieldays to raise awareness of these issues and to talk informally to people – from start-ups to large companies.