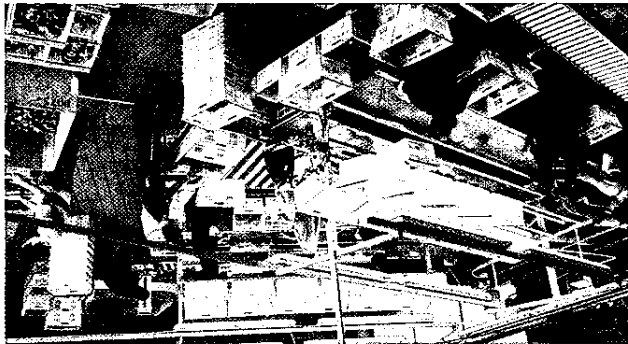


Purple passion

Text: Sarah Beresford
Photographs: Sally Tagg



Growing kumara is a business that's all about people.



Peter, Anthony and Gary/Blundell

This philosophy includes everyone from the growers, such as Brian Henderson whose father Max was one of the first to supply the crop to the company, to many of the 30 staff who work at the processing plant in Ruawai.

There's Laurie Oliver, who was first employed at the site more than 50 years ago when it was in its former incarnation as the local dairy factory. Other members of his family have joined him working for the company at various times, including his grandchildren.

Jill Jennings has clocked up 37 years with Kaipara Kumara, and shows no signs of wanting to leave yet. Receptionist Joanne Reed joined the company intending to stay a few months and nearly four years later is still there. "She's got a fair way

The decision required plenty of stamina on all sorts of levels, right down to how they were going to find crates for supplying produce, which traditionally had been provided by the auction system. Kiwi ingenuity came to the fore and Gary milled the timber to make replacement crates. Anthony and Peter spent school holidays helping out by stamping the company's brand on them. Plastic crates eventually replaced the wooden variety and, though a lot more has changed in the intervening years, the Blundells are emphatic that one thing has remained the same.

"Dads always insisted that produce is a people business," says Anthony. "Pete and I have had that tattooed into our minds since we were just little kids."

ary Blundell knows a thing or two about kumara. After 40 years of growing, handling, selling and eating kumara he's got a fair few facts and a lot of experience under his belt, so to speak. Kumara is in his blood – and he's passed his passion on to his two sons, Anthony and Peter.

Although he now takes a bit of a back seat at Kaipara Kumara, the family company that he founded, he was a trailblazer in his time.

"One of the greatest attributes Dad had when he started the company was vision," says Anthony. "He stepped out of the produce auction system and started supplying Foodtown direct 40 years ago when they were a chain of just four stores."