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Apatu Farms Ltd

ACC Fleet Saver Bronze Accreditation – “Front footing transport safety”

Apatu Farms is a family-owned business in the Hawke’s Bay with 50 years of agricultural experience under their belt. The business spans the industries of agcontract, export, viticulture, livestock and transportation but their primary business is - and always has been - vegetable growing. Vegetable growing is highly seasonal, causing staff numbers to swell from a core of 30 up to 100 during the peak season. From December to May they operate 24 hours a day, and their fleet of six trucks expands to twelve to accommodate the demands of the busy season.

The transport division only makes up about 10% of what Apatu Farms does, but their decision to apply for ACC Fleet Saver was an easy one. Director Paul Apatu, who manages the business with his brother Mark, seized the opportunity to get “on the front foot”, positioning Apatu Farms as a safe, efficient, positive business with a strong culture of safety, knowing further rewards are yet to come.

It didn’t take long for Paul Apatu to make the decision to apply for ACC Fleet Saver accreditation. Reading through the requirements of the ACC Fleet Saver audit, he and his team found that there were a lot of things that they were already doing that demonstrated strong health and safety practices in their workplace. “Putting the system together was painless,” he says.

The first obvious benefit for Apatu Farms was the framework that ACC Fleet Saver provides. “It allows quite a lot of structure in terms of our transport division - and structure is key,” says Paul. Pulling together the stand-alone initiatives that are already a part of their day-to-day business, “it (ACC Fleet Saver) simplifies things; puts different areas into the right boxes.”

As Paul sees it, as ACC Fleet Saver gains a higher profile there are future rewards to be won like growing a reputation of being a leader in fleet health and safety. By gaining ACC Fleet Saver accreditation early on Apatu Farms have secured a headstart on competitors. Corporate clients will soon be looking out for the accreditation, and “we need to be on the front foot - recognition for those types of clients is important,” Paul says. It’s not just customers who will be looking for the ACC Fleet Saver badge, though. “As the ACC Fleet Saver programme develops we’ll get recognition from potential drivers - it’s important to have a positive and proactive approach in the employment market.”

ACC Fleet Saver allows businesses to tap into a breadth of resources that many medium-sized businesses don’t have at their fingertips. “ACC has a lot more resources than your average medium-size enterprise, so for them to provide some framework behind that I think is a good thing.” It makes sense for Apatu Farms to use an existing framework, because transport is a relatively minor part of their business equation – “but it is one of the highest risk activities that we do.”

In Paul’s opinion, ACC Fleet Saver gives businesses the tools they need to achieve their transport-related goals. “You look at driver training, you look at fuel efficiency and health and safety risks. It’s a really good tool,” Paul says. As the ACC Fleet Saver programme gains momentum, Paul believes this will lift other operators to a higher level of overall safety. For Apatu Farms’ drivers, this cements the natural progression to safer practices that they’re already familiar with by bringing “the recognition that the industry’s working towards being safer and more efficient on the roads.”

Paul values the way that ACC Fleet Saver’s framework lays the foundation for good practices then puts checks into place that will ensure ongoing safety. “What it does is make you commit to being robust and covering a lot off at the start. It ensures you make a commitment to ongoing monitoring and development – that’s the bit that you need to commit to and keep going on.”

Paul’s advice to business owners who are thinking about gaining a ACC Fleet Saver accreditation is this: “Don’t be scared. It’s achievable, and it’s beneficial. It’ll add some value and help mitigate risks in your business.”

Apatu Farms will be going for ACC Fleet Saver Silver Accreditation this year. The financial incentives are there as “a bit of a sweetener, to say yes, well done”, but that’s certainly not what it all comes down to for Apatu Farms, “It’s about having a positive, safe business.”

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