

Bringing clarity to business strategy: How Assurity validated Carrfields' journey to the future



CASE STUDY

When rapidly-expanding agribusiness Carrfields recognised that growth should be controlled and directed to achieve optimal results, it looked to Assurity Consulting for a Strategy Validation engagement. Through the efforts of the consulting firm, Carrfields today has a clear purpose, refreshed vision and sharp focus on where it is today – and where it is headed in the future.

Headquartered in Ashburton, Carrfields is focused on creating and adding value to farmers with eight operating divisions that touch most aspects of agriculture. The company delivers products, support and services through a team of in-field representatives and specialists located across New Zealand, Australia and India to boost productivity across a broad range of rural services.

Situation

Starting out as a family-run agricultural contractor tractor business, Carrfields has grown over 40 years to become a provider of a complete range of products, services and solutions for New Zealand's primary producers and today employs more than 500 staff and contractors.

"We primarily work with farmers, providing a lot of inputs across machinery, seed, irrigation, technology, contracting and taking their outputs including seed, grain, livestock and wool to market. Our purpose is creating value for farmers in all that we do," explains Managing Director, Craig Carr.

"As we were going through an exercise looking at developing our core purpose and refreshing our vision, we realised there is the potential to expand in various directions – not all of which might be appropriate. We engaged with Assurity early in 2020 looking for an 'outside-in' evaluation of our vision, mission and strategy," explains Carr.

"The reality is, we weren't 100% clear at Carrfields on why we get out of bed in the morning. This meant any investment decisions might or might not align with our purpose," he adds. "While there are solid, strong platforms as we look for the next wave of growth, we need to build our people and capability. And we knew that while things have been done the same way for a long time, we have to adapt for the future."



Solution

While the engagement kicked off at nominally the worst possible time – in March, just ahead of lockdown – there was a silver lining. "We wanted a fast turnaround and, despite COVID, the team really put the foot down and got onto it," notes Carr.

In fact, he says lockdown served as an accelerator for the Strategy Validation exercise. "This is something the board of directors had known we needed to do, but the time to get it done was elusive. With lockdown, people in our business, customer base and the wider industry had time and that allowed deeper thinking and engagement for a piece of work considered crucial to our future direction."

In its initial engagement, Assurity found that the successful business lacked a unifying purpose statement. In practical terms, this was causing the company to fracture into operational siloes across its operational units. While Carr, the MD, and his board had a firm notion of the company's future, the challenge was bringing along every staff member, as well as the broader industry with which the company engages – and, specifically, its customers.

Taking an inclusive approach to gauge inputs from across the value chain in which Carrfields operates, Assurity set about gathering quantitative and qualitative data on which to make decisions on the company's strategy. Executed through a series of workshops identifying what Carrfields is to a range of sectors and customers, the work also brought in the views of a cross-section of industry experts, securing multiple vantage points.

The views of typical agricultural specialists was augmented with, for example, input from the head of the New Zealand Vegan Society and American company Impossible Foods, which produces plant-based substitutes, to gain perspectives on a possible 'meatless society'. Other contributors included Venkies, India's biggest chicken producer, NZ Young Farmer of the Year nominees, customers who have positive sentiments towards Carrfields, and also those who have negative sentiments.

The initial work culminated in a company workshop in which representatives from across Carrfields were strategically selected. For a wide range of inputs, participation went beyond company executives to include frontline staff, as well as promising up-and-comers. Again, this reflects the inclusive approach favoured by Assurity Consulting, recognising that every staff member must be aligned to turn strategy into action.

Care was taken in the workshop design, resulting in a seamless, engaging and thought-provoking set of activities which encouraged 'natural collaboration'. This contributed to a broader understanding of Carrfields' purpose, resulting in an ideation and prototyping session. In due course, a cohesive report was presented to Carrfields' board.



CRAIG CARR
MANAGING DIRECTOR
CARRFIELDS

Results

A purpose statement – ‘We Create Value for Farmers’ – was developed to encapsulate all operating divisions, effectively binding them together and setting a course for the next five years.

“What became clear early on is that our entire reason for being is the creation of value for farmers in various ways,” notes Carr. “By clarifying the purpose, it becomes obvious that everything we do, and everything we might consider doing, should be seen from this perspective, whether it is from the farm gate, building relationships, providing products for operations, writing contracts to buying back their produce.”

The resulting vision is: ‘To be the most trusted partner in connecting New Zealand’s agriculture to the world’. “The vision piece is really good. Being a trusted New Zealand brand and providing products to global markets reflects our perhaps unusual position of both supplying farmers and buying from them. Our customers are up and down the value chain and Assurity’s work makes sure our values are aligned with our strategy and products,” Carr comments.

The work is credited with delivering a clear understanding of precisely where Carrfields fits in the agricultural value chain, providing the necessary confirmation of where and how it should focus its efforts and aspirations. Assurity’s work has also resulted in the identification of at least four potential new initiatives which Carrfields can pursue.

“By pulling together those insights and themes from customers, internal people and global industry figures, we’ve been presented with 10 key themes where Carrfields should focus to look for growth and opportunity. The work done by Assurity has brought the clarity we sought.”

He adds that the engagement is likely to result in a review of the company’s systems and processes too, as it seeks modern ways of working collaboratively in a global marketplace.

“In short, it’s been good. A solid piece of work efficiently delivered.”



At a glance



Company:
Carrfields

Industry:
Agriculture

Requirements:

Carrfields is going through a rapid expansion and recognised that growth should be controlled and directed to achieve optimal results. It engaged Assurity Consulting for a Strategy Validation engagement to develop a clear purpose, refreshed vision, and sharp focus on where it is today – and where it is headed in the future.

Solutions:

- Undertook an inclusive approach to gauge inputs from across the value chain in which Carrfields operates
- Gathered quantitative and qualitative data on which to make decisions around the company's strategy
- Worked closely with Carrfields' key stakeholders a series of workshops
- Helped identify a range of sectors and customers, brought in the views of a cross-section of industry experts and secured multiple vantage points
- Presented a cohesive report to Carrfields' board

Services:

- Customer and Industry Expert Empathy
- Brand Purpose Development
- Brand Vision Clarification
- Rapid Prototyping
- Value Chain Mapping
- Facilitation
- Human-Centred Design
- Capability Uplift

Outcomes achieved:

- Delivered a purpose statement
- Clarified Carrfields' vision
- Identified at least four potential new initiatives which Carrfields can pursue