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Contract Growing in the New Zealand Nursery  
Industry: An Attitude and Belief Survey  
of Woody Plant Growers

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Masters in Horticultural Science  
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at Massey University

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## Abstract

Although the New Zealand nursery industry has a long history of exporting live plants, export only earns a small proportion of industry revenue. Many reports have identified promising market opportunities, but the reputed export potential remains unfulfilled. One reason is the reluctance of growers to enter formal growing arrangements with overseas customers. The increasing prominence of retail nursery chains, who also use contractual arrangements, met the same opposition in the domestic market. Growers prefer to retain flexibility and autonomy. Why does this aversion prevent growers capitalising on the opportunities that exist?

This study sought to explain the behaviour of woody plant growers towards formal growing arrangements. The Fishbein-Ajzen Theory of Reasoned Action claimed that behaviour is ultimately heavily influenced by beliefs associated to the likely outcome of the behaviour and the evaluations of these beliefs. Survey work on the domestic scene was more appropriate, collecting behavioural, attitudinal and demographic data. The model explained the behaviour satisfactorily. Analysis found eight important components of behaviour. Logistic regression quantified the strength of influence that each component had on the behaviour.

A conclusion was that changing the component scores of respondents was feasible, and this should ultimately lead to a behaviour change. Increasing the number of growers producing plants under negotiated agreements would mean more growers willing and capable of producing plants for export. However, efforts to increase the proportion of income earned through contractual arrangements may be more rewarding than efforts to increase the number of growers performing the behaviour. Future extension work should use the components identified in this study as the basis of the message.

**Keywords:** Nursery; contract; attitude; Fishbein-Ajzen; plant.

**Title:** Contract growing in the New Zealand nursery industry: An attitude and belief survey of woody plant growers.

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This thesis is dedicated to the three strand cord, two known, one to come.

"A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

Ecclesiastes 4:12.

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