

# Cultivating Our Future Food Markets



How might we position ourselves to thrive in a rapidly changing export world, toward 2050?

Timaru’s economy is deeply rooted in goods production. In 2024, the district’s GDP approached \$4 billion, with goods-producing industries accounting for 26.9% well above the national average of 17%. Manufacturing remains our largest sector, contributing 16.4% to local GDP, followed by agriculture, forestry, and fishing at 14.3%. Dairy manufacturing leads our export portfolio, generating over \$2.1 billion in value, alongside significant contributions from meat and other food product manufacturing. Our top exports – milk, cream, butter, and cheese reflect Timaru’s longstanding strength in animal protein and dairy. These figures highlight our key role in New Zealand’s food supply chain.

Looking to the future, the Ministry for Primary Industries’ (MPI) 2024 Future Foods report outlined the major forces reshaping global food systems by 2050. Demographic shifts, climate challenges, and evolving consumer values are changing the way food is produced, consumed, and valued.

The report suggests that continuing our current path may not be enough. It identifies four potential growth areas for future food exports: weightless exports, food-based services, origin-driven products, and premium or value-added goods. Each offers a way to diversify while leveraging our strengths, presenting exciting opportunities for our Timaru District.

Weightless exports involve products and services that aren’t physically transported, like digital tools, agritech solutions, and advisory services. For example, Timaru-based firms could develop farm management software, remote sensing technologies, or innovative food processing systems to license globally. These offerings are scalable, lower-emission, and less vulnerable to physical supply chain disruptions.

Food-based services are another promising area. As global interest in health, wellbeing, and food experiences grows, there’s potential to pair food with tourism, education, or wellness. This could include personalised nutrition plans, cooking workshops, or food journeys tied to our culture and landscape, connecting consumers more deeply to what we produce.

Origin-driven products are also gaining global traction. Increasingly, consumers want to know the “who” and “where” behind their food. Provenance and authenticity are shifting from niche values to mainstream expectations. Timaru’s stories of multi-generational farms, unique landscapes, and distinctive ingredients are ripe for wider promotion. Advances in traceability technology can make it easier to showcase these stories to international buyers.

Premium and value-added goods are another avenue. From organic and grass-fed labels to “food as medicine” concepts, more consumers are seeking high-quality, purpose-driven products. To meet this demand, local producers may need to invest in innovation, compliance, and processing infrastructure.

Encouragingly, many local businesses are already responding. Across the district, firms are investing in sustainability, R&D, and productivity. Efforts include waste reduction, energy efficiency, and smarter farming systems. These initiatives reflect an understanding that change is underway and a determination to stay ahead.

Layered onto these opportunities are broader shifts in global consumer needs. The MPI report highlights both enduring and evolving expectations. Core needs such as safety, affordability, quality, taste, and convenience are likely to remain central by 2050, though they will be interpreted differently. For instance, food safety may come to include ethical sourcing and climate resilience, while taste could become more customised, supported by advances in sensory tech and AI.

At the same time, values around sustainability, ethics, and food sovereignty are moving from the margins to the mainstream. Although many consumers still hesitate to pay a premium for sustainability, they increasingly expect it as a baseline. Exporters must navigate rising regulatory standards especially in markets like the EU and US where expectations around transparency, animal welfare, and labour conditions are intensifying.

Ethical concerns are gaining ground, particularly among younger generations. This includes interest in alternative proteins and more visibility into how food is produced. Additionally, food sovereignty – the idea that communities should control their food systems is gaining prominence. It connects closely to transparency, equity, and access to local food, all of which may shape future trade expectations.



For Timaru District, these trends suggest a future with multiple viable strategies. High-value exports, digital services and heritage-based products could coexist and complement each other. Tradition and technology can work hand in hand with global competitiveness shaped as much by story and ethics as by price and volume.

With our strong foundation in food production, Timaru is well-positioned to seize these emerging opportunities. The next steps, be it through strategic investment, collaboration, or simply staying alert to changing global signals will shape how our region thrives in the evolving landscape of global food exports.

## Help shape Timaru’s future together.

The Towards 2050 plan is about more than just infrastructure or workforce development – it’s about building a community where everyone can thrive. From creating meaningful career opportunities and expanding local businesses to fostering social cohesion and environmental sustainability, this plan is designed to support every resident in Timaru.

## Your voice is key.

Share your ideas and aspirations by completing our online survey to help ensure our district remains sustainable, innovative, and prosperous for generations to come. Take part in the survey and help us build a brighter future for all—now and for those who will call Timaru home in the years ahead.

## Help Develop: An Aspirational Vision for 2050.

Take the survey



Scan QR code or visit, [vtdevelopment.co.nz/towards-2050](https://vtdevelopment.co.nz/towards-2050)



“The Towards 2050 (and beyond) plan is not about me or you...its about US. Together lets be bold and innovative as we establish the foundations for our great district being the best it possibly can be and so much more. I encourage us all to take the time to feed into the plan – nows the time to ‘Dream big, Plan well and Act now.’”

“Nigel Davenport  
CEO, Venture Timaru”

