



Karen Morris, Alliance Smithfield plant manager

Karen Morris might have made history as just the second female manager of Alliance Group's Smithfield plant since processing began at the site in the 1890s, but her sights are firmly set on the future.

Ms Morris, who has worked for Alliance since 1995, is planning a review of the Timaru plant's operations, looking at extending the plant's season and aiming to engage more closely with the local community – to help address recruitment needs.

"We are looking at what is working well here and what isn't working so well and we already have a lot of ideas of how we can improve things," she said. "Our prime focus is on safety first, but also on quality, delivery and costs."

The plant employs over 500 people at the height of the season, and with low unemployment in Timaru, recruitment is always an issue. Her management team is looking at how to make work more accessible to more people in the community, such as through part-time hours and job sharing.

Ms Morris's own career provides a good example of opportunities the industry offers. Having initially joined Alliance to provide 12-months maternity cover in the laboratory, she went on to work in internal auditing, as a Systems Project Coordinator and Plant Technical and Environmental Manager, all at the Pukeuri plant, before becoming Group Manager Food Safety and Quality Assurance in 2005.

While acknowledging the industry is still seen as being male-dominated, Karen doesn't see any barriers today to women advancing to the most senior roles. She is the second female plant manager appointed by the co-operative this year – Melonie Nagel moved from South Africa in January to head up the Mataura plant.

"The focus is on the right person for the role. I haven't experienced any negativity," she says.

"I've really enjoyed my previous job but when the Plant Manager position at Smithfield came up, I saw it as an exciting new challenge. I had already done a lot of work with the plant in my group role and knew a lot of the team very well. I am really enjoying working with them in a different way, engaging with the team and helping the plant to grow and develop.

“There is a great team here and the plant is very important to the community. Generations of the same families have worked here. Our people are proud to work here and the plant has seen a lot of investment – including a \$1.2m upgrade of our boning operation that is currently underway.”



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