**Consumers want 'authentic' goods**

By GERALD PIDDOCK - The Timaru Herald

Last updated 05:00 11/04/2009

The primary sector is perfectly placed to take advantage of the new "experience economy", a merino industry leader says.

New Zealand Merino chief executive John Brackenridge told farmers at a recent field day in Mayfield this social correction has led to consumers wanting greater authenticity in purchases.

"People are going back to authentic experiences, people are going back to things that are real. If ever there is an opportunity for this country, it is now. More so in decades. The world is correcting and it is everything in synch with what we do in this country.

"The world is changing, the rules are getting rewritten, people are seeing the waste and the superficiality of what was there before and are going to authentic products," Mr Brackenridge said.

Global markets have responded by moving toward this experience economy because people wanted greater authenticity in products.

He said the gap between New Zealand as a commodity-producing country and this global phenomena lay in how New Zealand did its marketing, research and development and in creating value transfer mechanisms, which could be transferred back to farmers as producers.

But the primary sector needed vision to take primary products forward to take full advantage of this, he said.

The merino industry was able to do this by providing customers with a story behind the brand, developing new products and a culture of innovation, and developing long-term partnerships with those within the supply chain.

There was now about $15 million to $19m coming into the merino industry each year as result of these activities.

Mr Brackenridge said the primary sector also needed to provide substance to its retail brands through promoting platforms such as quality and performance, animal welfare, environmental sustainability and fair trade.

Traceability was also key.

"You can't have substance without traceability. Traceability is no good unless you've got substance. If you have both, then you can really lift the platform of what we're offering out there in retail."