



## Heads of mission learn Waikato's potential

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Mark Taylor/Fairfax NZ

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS: Sir Lockwood Smith, head of mission for London, led a high-powered trade delegation through Hamilton last week.

The world needs Waikato's meat, dairy and agricultural technology but convincing it is a tough job.

That's why 11 Kiwi heads of mission were in the region last week week learning more about our businesses and which products might sell best overseas.

The high-powered delegation saw Sir Lockwood Smith, head of mission for New Zealand to London, lead the trade team on a tour of local companies.

Greenlea Premier Meats, BBC Technologies, LIC and Pacific Aerospace were all on the list.

Smith said the development of agricultural technology in the region was "fascinating".

"The growth available is huge."

He said his focus for the next two or three years was signing a free trade agreement with the European Union (EU).

"We've just started the process, and it'll take time.

"New Zealand in the past has been seen as an agricultural product competitor, and we've got to show them how that's no longer the case. We've got to show them how the world demand for agricultural products is so great we can't flood the European market even if we wanted to."

New Zealand's exports to the United Kingdom were worth \$1.55 billion in 2011, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website.

Sheep meat made up \$583 million of that, wine \$293m, and wool products \$61m. Our imports from the UK were worth \$1.27n, of which petrol made up \$153m, vehicles \$104m, turbo jets \$100m and medication \$58m. Books and newspapers contributed \$48m.

Smith, also high commissioner resident to Nigeria, said Waikato's other big opportunity was in West Africa. However, he said that government and regulatory stability were a barrier to trade on the continent.

"We have to learn to cope with that in the immediate future, because the West Africa story as I call it is really a 30-year project." "West Africa has got this huge potential because it's got oil and gas, it's got energy, huge quantities of energy."

He said 50 per cent of the world's undeveloped agricultural land lay on the continent, with huge population growth expected.

That would mean huge opportunities for New Zealand agritech exports.

Hamilton City Mayor Julie Hardaker said, "They've visited some of our key exporters today and they've learnt an awful lot about them," she said.

"They can take that back to where they are heads of mission and they can spread the word as well."

She said the occasions were "very valuable" for the businesses involved.

**- Waikato**