

vegetables australia

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volume
3.2



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are they the future?

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IDO Profile: Simon Powell



Closing the gap between industry and consumers

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John Roach: Winds of change



Cut to the chase for soil solutions

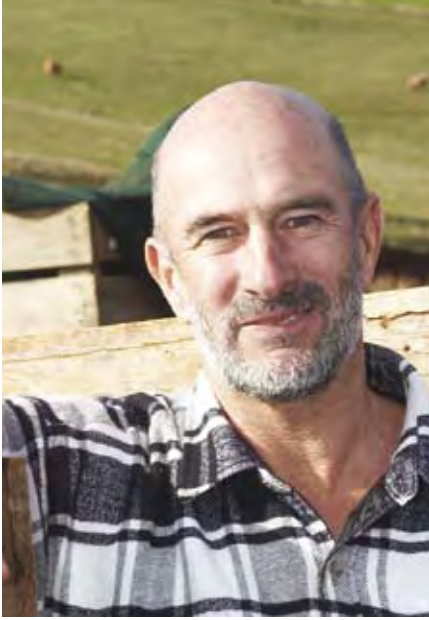
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A word from the AUSVEG Ltd Chairman

With the federal election looming AUSVEG is once again focused on reiterating its election platform to ensure that the government of the day is sensitive to the needs of the vegetable industry.

It has been another busy couple of months in the media as drought, floods and frost have seen the price of vegetables rise significantly and in some areas become more difficult to buy.

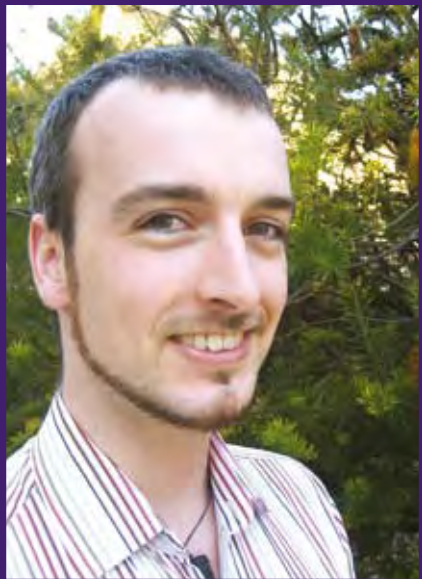
However, there are some encouraging signals. Growers who do have product are receiving higher returns, which means that our produce is valued highly by consumers and that growers are receiving a fair portion of that consumer dollar.

Last month was also a momentous one. On behalf of AUSVEG, I signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Chair of Bundaberg Fruit & Vegetable Growers, David DePaoli. This document officially outlines how the two organisations will work together and communicate to attain our shared vision for the future. The heartfelt support for this collaboration demonstrates that our industry is maturing.

There are several other MOUs on the table with like-minded organisations, which illustrates how united the industry is becoming—it truly is a force to be reckoned with.

Until next time,

Michael Badcock
AUSVEG Ltd Chairman



As we've all read, seen or heard on the news, even the strictest quarantine arrangements have failed to stop equine flu making its way into the country and threatening Australia's racing industry. For growers, it's a timely reminder of two things—first, the importance of protecting the vegetable industry from pests and diseases; and second, the effectiveness of the media in bringing to light issues that affect the industry.

Media coverage of vegetables has increased as consumers experience rising prices. Similarly, the importance of supporting local growers has made the news with the launch of the Australian Grown logo. But what other information do consumers receive? Media matters (page 46) provides a snapshot of vegetable headlines in mainstream media from the past two months.

For growers and researchers who want to protect the industry from pests and diseases and contribute to other research areas needed to achieve VegVision 2020, it's nearly Industry Call time for HAL R&D projects slated to start in 2008-09. See page 17 for details.

Finally, spring is in the air, and changes are on the horizon—make sure you have your say about the future direction of *Vegetables Australia* by completing the enclosed reader survey. Do this by October 12 to enter the draw for some great prizes (page 13).

Enjoy this issue of the magazine.

Jim Thomson
Editor, *Vegetables Australia*

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Joe Elbustani, President of the New South Wales Greenhouse Association, said that LOTE growers and non-LOTE growers share similar difficulties.



Language no longer

Growers who speak a language other than English are making the most of translating services and bilingual officers to access the latest industry information. Jim Thomson reports.

Reflecting Australia's reputation for being a multicultural melting pot, a study released in October 2005 reported that 39 per cent of Australian vegetable growers speak a language other than English (LOTE). The study, conducted by AUSVEG funded through the National Vegetable Levy Research and Development Program, found that while the prevalence of foreign cultures, cuisines and agricultural practices helped diversify and strengthen the nation's vegetable industry, communication between growers, associations and government departments was often difficult.

"The problem of language is a matter of a year or two for newcomers. One way or another, they are managing. When I first came to Australia, I enrolled in English courses before I did anything else. The courses were a lot easier to access than they are now."

Working in a multicultural industry ensures that no single factor will improve communication, especially given the diversity in language, culture, religion, literacy levels, business ownership and growers' support networks. However, it is important to remember that LOTE growers are not defined by the language that they speak, said Virginia Brunton, Resource Development Officer, Gosford Horticultural Institute, NSW DPI.

"Generally they are farmers first; they have the same needs as other farmers and we meet these needs by providing services in a language they can understand," she said.

Services rendered

According to the study, 81 per cent of growers in New South Wales speak a language other than English. Nationalities include Arabic, Vietnamese, Chinese, Cambodian, Yugoslavian/Serbian and Korean, not to mention the Maltese and Italian growers who migrated decades ago and now predominantly speak English.

Information most sought by growers relates to chemical responsibility and use, technical and practical information, and efficient vegetable production. Yet, with a grower-base as varied as NSW's, how can this best be communicated?

Language services for LOTE growers must be broad, varied, and often include one-on-one contact. In 2005, NSW DPI appointed three bilingual officers to work with Arabic, Chinese, Vietnamese and Cambodian growers in the Sydney Basin. The project also provided follow-up services for the mandatory training undertaken by those who use agriculture chemicals, along with information about efficient water use, sustainable agriculture, business management and food safety.

While it's possible that language difficulties experienced by LOTE growers could restrict their business opportunities,



Tony Har (left) and Leigh James, NSW DPI.

Integration begins with understanding

LOTE growers make a significant contribution to the vegetable industry and are currently under represented on many industry forums.

To improve communications and representation from LOTE growers AUSVEG is delivering a project funded by the National Vegetable Levy research and development program and the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC).

The communication process between AUSVEG and LOTE growers will take time to develop and must begin with mutual cultural appreciation and acceptance. These growers must be empowered to seek information, understand their responsibilities and be effectively integrated into the broader vegetable industry.

The project will:

- Establish a National LOTE growers forum and reference group
- Integrate LOTE communication activities into the current Vegetable Industry Communication Strategy (March 2005—March 2008)
- Raise awareness and understanding of vegetable industry structure, levy and responsibilities
- Increase LOTE grower participation in industry events
- Educate government about horticulture's high participation of LOTE growers and their diverse needs
- Foster greater appreciation and understanding of LOTE growers in the broader vegetable industry.

the great divide

(Above Left) Chun Fong, Bilingual Communication Officer NSW DPI (wearing navy cap and jacket), talks with growers at the Australian Chinese Growers Association of NSW 2006 field day.

(Above Right) David Chung (left) and Billy Lee, President and Vice-President of the Australian Chinese Growers of NSW respectively. Photo courtesy of Mike Lamond, GF&V.

Virginia said that there was little direct evidence of this.

"However, they may not always receive completely satisfactory feedback about product quality and prices. Information provided can be out of date or confusing, such as permitted chemicals or record-keeping requirements. These issues are not confined to LOTE growers," Virginia said.

Joe Elbustani, cucumber and tomato grower and President of the New South Wales Greenhouse Association, agrees that LOTE growers and non-LOTE growers share similar difficulties.

"Non-English speakers can often get information they need through the people they've employed, or their wives or husbands. The major problem is the missing link between the information regulation and the industry," said Joe.

Of course, the Sydney Basin isn't the only region with a high proportion of LOTE growers. The Adelaide Plains area has about 350 Vietnamese and Cambodian growers.

As a registered training organisation, the Virginia Horticulture Centre offers translators for all its courses; it also works with other training providers, such as ChemCert, to ensure translators are available.

"We have all Freshcare manuals and training information translated into Vietnamese, Khmer (Cambodian), Punjabi, Chinese and Arabic for growers. Our administration coordinator is Vietnamese and she frequently fields inquiries and calls from our Vietnamese growers. She also joins other

VHC staff members on-farm to assist with translation," said Victoria Richardson, Group Operations Manager Post Harvest at VHC.

The VHC recently organised a basic hydroponics course for Vietnamese growers. "The course enabled growers to change from soil to hydro, many of whom would otherwise not have had the opportunity or capacity to achieve this," said Victoria.

Is language the issue?

Since relocating from Lebanon, Joe has lived in Australia for 15 years. While he was not directly involved in agriculture in his home country, he came from a growing region. His story is not dissimilar to many other LOTE growers, and although English is his third language he'd be hard-pressed to call himself a LOTE grower. As he sees it, his concerns are shared by the majority of his colleagues, regardless of their English skills.

"The problem of language is a matter of a year or two for newcomers. One way or another, they are managing. When I first came to Australia, I enrolled in English courses before I did anything else. There was lots of help from the government at the time, it was a priority. The courses were a lot easier to access than they are now," he said.

By accident or design, there are 400 Lebanese growers in NSW, most of them in the Sydney basin. The NSW Greenhouse Association represents 200 growers, many of whom are Lebanese. While Joe is now fluent in English, what about association members whose English isn't as strong?

continues on next page



(From left) Leigh James, NSW DPI; Len Tesoriero, NSW DPI; and grower David Ha on his farm inspecting a parsley crop.

Language no longer the great divide (continued)

"We do as much as we can to help them, but we have limited resources. We can't afford to employ somebody," he said.

"Growers often work across language groups; they prefer to be associated with their product. There is a group of hydroponics farmers meeting weekly that has members from all the ethnic groups farming in Sydney."

David Chung, President of the Australian Chinese Growers Association of NSW, said that LOTE growers may face difficulties sourcing information, especially in regards to chemical use and record keeping. When it comes to helping association members he said it depends on the assistance they're after. "I've helped with taxation, water issues, chemical training, and I liaise with market authorities on behalf of some growers."

David began farming in Australia in 1972, while he started with spinach, beetroot and lettuce, he now farms Asian green-leaf vegetables. He's proud of how quickly Australia's Asian vegetables market has grown—from almost nothing 20 years ago to nearly \$160 million per annum.

Band together

While one could assume that LOTE growers form close working relationships with growers who speak their language, there's another connection that is even stronger.

"Growers often work across language groups; they prefer to be associated with their product. For example, I have a group of hydroponics farmers meeting weekly that has members from all the ethnic groups farming in Sydney," said Virginia.

The 2005 survey found that LOTE growers generally own or operate farms that are between one half and two hectares in size. Joe believes that growers feel solidarity against the larger corporate farms, which may be one reason why they work together.

"Multimillion dollar companies can afford to lose money for 10 years while a small family business can't afford to lose for one year. Market access is becoming really hard for the small growers," he said.

Networking is crucial at this juncture, said Victoria. "The strong sense of community and networks among the Vietnamese and Cambodian growers create good business opportunities—particularly across state borders. Many of our growers deal with the eastern seaboard markets rather than Adelaide as a direct result of their own networks," she said.

"While some communicate solely with their own group there are those who are conversant with 'Europeans'—some as a direct need, others by choice. Growers often visit the centre and request to speak with Tina, our administration coordinator, whereas others are happy to speak to anyone. Quite often the level of interaction is related to the confidence level in spoken English or the complexity of the issue at hand."

When growers do band together, it's inevitable that they start to look outwards. An advantage of being a LOTE grower is the potential for exporting product, and it's something that Joe has his eye on in the future.

"Generally LOTE growers are farmers first; they have the same needs as other farmers and we meet these needs by providing services in a language they can understand."

"The potential is great. Transport is becoming a lot quicker and for the freshest vegetables to be on anybody's table in no time, in-season vegetables can be imported to other countries," he said. 🌱



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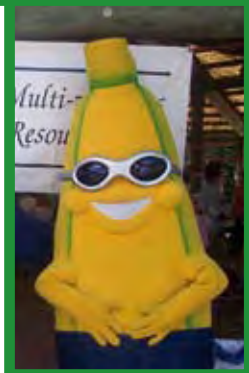
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Bundaberg Fruit & Vegetable Growers— Core values get results

(Left) As part of a community promotion initiative, free fruit and vegetables are given to children at community gatherings in the Bundaberg area.
(Right) BFVG members attended a bus tour of water-quality trials at three different sites around Bundaberg in May this year.



A 20 per cent increase in farm gate value is just one example of what a successful Bundaberg cooperative has helped achieve. Lisa Engelhardt reports.

Bundaberg Fruit & Vegetable Growers (BFVG) has built a strong reputation as a regional cooperative that delivers across the board.

Representing about 450 members, BFVG informs growers, government bodies, industry and the public about topics relevant to horticulture. This takes the form of growing assistance, advising about employment conditions, providing education and training initiatives, and political lobbying in conjunction with other industry bodies.

Statistics show that the region has become one of the largest and fastest growing areas. In 2005 the farm gate value yielded a gross value of \$300 million, up from \$250 million in 2003.

Having signed a memorandum of understanding with AUSVEG in August, Matt Dagan, Executive Officer BFVG, wants to focus on cross-communication by putting into writing the objectives of the organisation.

Matt said that the core of BFVG is its regional, cooperative and non-trading goals. Largely concentrating on the catchment at the Wide Bay Burnett area, with activities centred in Bundaberg, the cooperative aids

regional growers and their interests by providing contact and support.

Resources on offer include the monthly journal, *Fresh Pickings*, media representation, and the information hub at the BFVG headquarters in Bundaberg. The hub consists of two full-time staff, a project officer and several industry staff, and an on-site library that houses journals, publications, industry statistics, research and development notation, workshops, functions and commercial enterprises.

Industry growth

Through hard work BFVG has played a strong role in the advancement of horticulture in greater Bundaberg. This includes environmental campaigns, building community awareness, career opportunities, logistics support, and skills and training. Statistics show that the region has become one of the largest and fastest growing areas. In 2005, the farm gate value yielded a gross value of \$300 million, up from \$250 million in 2003.

Working closely with government departments, the cooperative's recent projects include a Workplace Health and Safety project with the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations. Matt said that other government work has involved facilitating water and infrastructure discussions in an

effort "to ensure long-term success and nut out the issues relating not only to Wide Bay Burnett but also those that are relevant nation-wide".

BFVG was successful in receiving funding from the Burnett Mary Regional Group (BMRG) for the Integrated Area Wide Management (IAWM) project in 2006-2007. Other successes include a long-term strategy to build skills and employment opportunities within the horticulture industry by initiating a 'Schools to Industry' program in the wider-Bundaberg region.

The media also plays a pivotal role in BFVG goals. Matt and other staff members regularly promote the achievements of local growers and, importantly, keep the community up to date with the local topical issues.

The cooperative will continue to build on the strong history of the region, focussing on a wide variety of horticulture. Matt said that BFVG will take a "grassroots approach that continues to deliver to its members, disseminate information and act as an important link to the public and wider community".



For more information visit the Bundaberg Fruit & Vegetable Growers website at www.bfvg.com.au
Email: <info@bfvg.com.au>
Phone: 07 4153 3007
Fax: 07 4153 1322

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Enclosed in this issue of the magazine is a reader survey. By completing the survey and returning it to AUSVEG you can let us know what you like about the magazine,

what you'd like to change, and what you want to read about in future issues.

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i For more information see the enclosed reader survey or contact Jim Thomson, Editor *Vegetables Australia*
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Contact phone number: _____ State: _____ Email: _____ Postcode: _____

Please tick here if you do not wish to be added to our database.

1. Are you a: Grower Advertiser
 Researcher Other: _____
 Industry representative

2. Age group: 18 - 24 25 - 34 35 - 44 45 - 54 55+

3. Crop (please identify your main crop)

4. Which state do you live in? New South Wales Tasmania
 Northern Territory Victoria
 Queensland Western Australia
 South Australia

5. How much time do you spend reading *Vegetables Australia*?
 0 - 15 minutes 45 - 60 minutes
 15 - 30 minutes More than 60 minutes
 30 - 45 minutes

6. On average, how many people read your copy of *Vegetables Australia*?

7. If you could receive multiple copies of the magazine for staff members to read, how many would you order? _____

8. Which stories do you most enjoy reading?
 Grower profiles R&D articles
 News Environmental articles
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 Economic outlook Other: _____
 Opportunities for professional development

9. What topics would you like to receive more information about?
 Ways to improve profitability and efficiency
 Equipment/technology Marketing/promotion
 Tax/finance Long-term business strategies
Other: _____

10. Do you have any suggestions for new sections or feature articles in the magazine?

11. Have you been involved in improved farm practices that other growers would be interested in reading about? Please provide details.

12. Would you like more information about how the vegetable levy is used for projects beyond the farm-gate?
 Yes No

13. Would you read or download *Vegetables Australia* from the AUSVEG website?
 Yes No

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Make a date with *VegeNotes*



Look for the new issue of *VegeNotes* whenever you receive *Vegetables Australia*.

VegeNotes, the popular fact sheets for growers, has returned with a fresh design and a great range of in-depth articles about issues affecting the vegetable industry.

The new series of *VegeNotes* will be distributed with *Vegetables Australia*. Growers should have received the first issue already, along with a storage folder. If you have not received your copy, contact the AUSVEG head office on 03 9544 8098.

The second issue of *VegeNotes*, included with this issue of *Vegetables Australia*, is about managing white blister. With a focus on brassica plants, it covers the latest information about remedies and prevention of infection for this fungus. 



For more information about *VegeNotes*, contact AUSVEG on 03 9544 8098

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The revised EnviroVeg manual is just one component of improvements made to the EnviroVeg Program.

During the past year the EnviroVeg Program has undergone significant change. The EnviroVeg manual has been re-written, the website is operational and extensive discussions have been held regarding third-party auditing.

Differences to the program and the revised manual, EnviroVeg.2, are:

- More information is included in the manual
- Information is based on the Plan, Do, Check, Review cycle
- The manual's checklist will help growers achieve certification
- The Self Assessment Checklist is easier to understand
- More examples of on-farm application are included
- More resources for obtaining advice are listed
- New modules are included for Property and Business Management, and Chemical Management.

EnviroVeg.2 contains the Freshcare Environmental Code of Practice and many aspects of ISO 14001. Growers who wish to progress from a self-assessment level can use the manual to help them achieve certification.

Support for certification

The grower committee overseeing the EnviroVeg Program discussed the merits of a third-party EnviroVeg audit before agreeing that another system would put further burden on growers. For this reason the Freshcare Environmental CoP will be used in the audit process for EnviroVeg members.

However, growers do not need to have Freshcare Food Safety to be audited under Freshcare Environmental as they are separate CoPs. Growers can hold SQF, HACCP or no certification.

EnviroVeg is an industry owned, managed and developed program. It is free to all growers to help identify what needs to be done on-farm to keep ahead of the regulators.

The program provides the information, support and training needed to achieve certification. Freshcare or ISO are the "rules" while EnviroVeg is the "information" needed to follow those rules.

EnviroVeg.2 workshops will be registered with FarmBis and held nationally. During the workshops growers will be introduced to the



Sample pages from the new EnviroVeg.2 manual.

program and the requirements for certification. Other courses will also be developed, including Healthy Soils Awareness Days and IPM courses.

i For more information: Visit the EnviroVeg page on the AUSVEG website at www.ausveg.com.au Contact Helena Whitman, Environmental Manager AUSVEG Email: <helena.whitman@ausveg.com.au> Phone: 0409 535 051

Dedicated campaign increases vegetable consumption



Spread the word—September is Fruit 'n' Veg Month.

Fruit 'n' Veg Month has been integrated into the Go for 2&5 campaign and is supported by a number of public relations activities to draw attention to the campaign's strong health message. Media outlets are encouraged to run stories on the health benefits of fruit and vegetables; healthy eating tips are circulated; campaign licencees integrate the event into promotional activities and support is also received from state and territory health departments.

While health is a key driver of Fruit 'n' Veg Month, the larger campaign is successfully

increasing consumption of fresh produce. Market research studies undertaken by the Federal Government reveal that 80 per cent of adults and 90 per cent of children have seen at least one element of the campaign. These results are also being mirrored at the state level.

In Queensland, fruit and vegetable consumption has increased by 0.5 serves per person per day since the start of the campaign. Much of this movement is due to vegetables, with an increase from 2.1 serves per person per day to 2.5 serves.

Growers can help drive the message by encouraging the widest possible use of campaign materials. This can be as simple as subscribing to the campaign newsletter and distributing healthy eating tips to business associates and friends via email.

i For more information about Fruit 'n' Veg Month and the Go for 2&5 campaign, visit www.gofor2and5.com.au

The background of the advertisement is a large, central image of an hourglass. The hourglass is made of clear glass and is filled with clusters of green and purple grapes. The top bulb of the hourglass is partially filled with grapes, while the bottom bulb is almost completely full. The hourglass is superimposed over a landscape of rolling hills covered in rows of grapevines, suggesting a vineyard. The sky is a clear, bright blue. The overall composition is centered and visually striking.

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National Vegetable Levy project call opens in October



It's time to complete your proposal for National Vegetable Levy-funded projects to start in the 2008-09 financial year.

Applications for National Vegetable Levy research and development projects starting 2008-09 will soon be open. The official Industry Call submissions period is from 6 October to 19 November.

The National Vegetable Levy project call is for industry-specific R&D proposals involving R&D levies and/or voluntary contributions (VCs). Proposals are reviewed by the vegetable Industry Advisory Committee (IAC) and therefore must align with the industry strategic plan and annual priorities.

HAL has an online application system that replaces previous HTML and Excel applications. As a result, HTML and Excel applications will no longer be accepted by HAL.

HAL's online application system is available for the preparation of proposals, which allows researchers to work on their proposals outside the official call periods. However, proposal submissions to the this project call will be restricted to the official dates.

HAL invests almost \$80 million annually in projects in partnership with the horticultural sector. Projects are funded through R&D levies, marketing levies and voluntary contributions. All HAL's R&D activities are supported by the Federal Government through the provision of matching funding. These projects cover R&D and marketing activities.

Application types

When submitting a project to HAL via its online application system, there are five application types to choose from:

- Conference/Study Tour
- Industry Development Project
- Marketing
- Marketing Consumer Research
- Research and Development.

Funding for marketing projects cannot be sought from Federal Government matching dollars. For these projects seek funding

from "Other Sources not managed by HAL", "Marketing Levy Unmatchable" and "VC unmatchable".

Projects to be commissioned under the National Vegetable Levy will be aligned with the five strategic imperatives of VegVision 2020:

1. Delivering to changing consumer preferences and increasing demand.
2. Market recognition for Australian quality, safety, reliable supply, and innovation in products and services.
3. Internationally competitive Australian vegetable supply chains.
4. Advanced industry data and information systems to meet future needs.
5. Visionary leadership and change management.



For more information visit the HAL website at www.horticulture.com.au



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Asian Vegetable Profile

Fu qua

(*Momordica charantia*)

Fu qua is also known as bitter melon, and for good reason. Excess bitter flavour can be removed by soaking thin slices in salt. Remove seeds and pith and stuff with seasoned pork mince before baking or steaming. It can be used fresh in salads, stir fried, added to curry or pickled. Choose fu quas that are firm and bright green and store in a cool place (not a fridge) for up to one week.



For further information contact Jenny Ekman, NSW Department of Primary Industries, at jenny.ekman@dpi.nsw.gov.au

Gain export edge from MRL research

Keep your export markets in mind when using chemicals and pesticides, writes Simon Adams.

Growers wanting to export their produce may soon get an edge on their competition, thanks to research into maximum residue limits (MRLs) for export vegetables.

The project, which is currently under way, has analysed MRL data for the export of carrots, cauliflower, capsicum, broccoli and lettuce into a range of international marketplaces including Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, the European Union and the United Arab Emirates.

"The issue of food quality standards is gaining prominence globally as governments focus more on quality issues. As a result, standards are tightening," project leader Kevin Bodnaruk of AKC Consulting said.

MRLs are an important element of export market access, as countries monitor food commodities that arrive through their ports. Any commodity found to have chemical residues that breach local standards will not be allowed through customs into the marketplace. This would result in the commodity being returned to the export country, or it may languish on the docks, unsold.

"In the first five months of the new Japanese chemical residue system, the levels of violations detected increased five-fold. That's a concern."

Building on MRL data compiled in this and a previous project, Kevin compared the residue tolerance levels of a number of countries to which Australia could increase its vegetable exports. The results highlighted an emerging trend regarding food standards, with many countries, such as Japan, implementing a revamped set of MRLs.

Shifting attitudes

Under the new Japanese system, if a chemical residue is detected that isn't covered by an MRL for one of the approximately 800 chemicals on the list, the crop will not pass inspection. This means that a much stricter set of conditions now needs to be adhered to when growing for export.

"It's a major shift in the way the Japanese approach the issue of residues. Allied with that, there is increased monitoring with more stringent compliance practices," Kevin said.

"In the first five months of the new Japanese system, the levels of violations detected increased five-fold. That's a concern."

However, this change presents an opportunity for growers who are able to adapt to the new approach, something Kevin points out is the main aim of the project.

"Growers need to know that, from an export perspective, they're not going to have a problem with the market they're targeting," he said.

After listing the chemicals approved for use on crops in Australia, the MRL lists were compared with export destinations to highlight any gaps or discrepancies, which were then examined for possible solutions.

This involved comparing the results with data for the Minor Use project, which is trying to fill pest management gaps in



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horticulture by seeking minor use approvals needs for chemicals. The project's aim is to provide a linkage to ensure that trade issues are also considered when deciding which approvals are needed.

"Growers need to know that, from an export perspective, they're not going to have a problem with the market they're targeting."

In some cases, where a range of chemical solutions was available for a crop, a commonly used chemical was identified that would be acceptable to a number of countries and meet their differing MRLs, providing an easy solution for growers looking to export their crop.

Although some countries have standards for particular chemicals, Kevin found that there may not be approvals for use of these chemicals in Australia. In these cases, permits could be sought from the Australian

Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA), which offered a solution for export crops.


A matter of time

When there was no readily available preferred chemical solution to fill an MRL 'gap', Kevin examined the possibility of varying use-patterns, such as extending the time between the last spray of a chemical and the harvesting of the crop, to allow more time for the chemical to degrade.

Kevin also indicated instances where trials need to be conducted to either generate data that supports future approvals or calculate reliable recommended harvest intervals to ensure exported produce is acceptable under overseas MRLs. A harvest interval or withholding period is the duration between the last application of a chemical and the harvest of the crop.

"We need to be able to provide growers with the knowledge to keep them current and even ahead of global trends.

While Japan has recently tightened its food standards, a concern is that many other trading partners are likely to re-evaluate their standards," Kevin said.

"The markets we export to will start moving in a similar direction—the whole environment will change and you need to be ahead of the game. You need to be proactive and that's what this project is all about." 

The bottom line:

- Countries that Australian growers export too are tightening their acceptable MRLs.
- Minor Use permits can be sought for chemicals that export markets have deemed to be acceptable.
- Increasing the harvest interval for a crop allows more time for chemicals to degrade before produce is exported.

i For more information:
Visit www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers
Project number: VG05019
Keywords: Residue risk, export markets



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Help nature fight back

Supporting and encouraging a crop's natural resistance to pathogens is one way to reduce chemical applications, writes Jodie Powell.

When rain fell on Sydney's south-western outskirts for five weeks earlier this year, grower Haissam Hamed watched in despair as 60 per cent of his crop fell victim to powdery mildew.

The use of systemic acquired resistance could allow growers to minimise the number of chemical applications in a season, without compromising crop yield.

Haissam, along with other growers in the region, did what he has done for more than 10 years—he got on with the job. Beyond simply replanting his cucumbers and tomatoes at the property he farms in the Sydney Basin, Haissam knew there could be a long-term solution as he'd recently taken part in trials organised by Dr Jenny Jobling and her colleagues at the University of Sydney.

Funded by HAL, the trials were part of a project that aimed to manage mildew in greenhouses. For Haissam, who has 15 greenhouses, each of about 450 square metres, such research is crucial.

"Powdery mildew causes serious problems, especially when it covers the cucumbers. You produce nothing from the crop because it covers the leaves and they don't

take in carbon dioxide or sunlight. There's no fruit," he said.

A step ahead

Jenny and her team's search for new ways to control powdery mildew will potentially benefit many in the industry. With fungi becoming increasingly resistant to current chemicals, it is essential for science to stay one step ahead. She said incorporating integrated pest management and safe chemicals that boost plants' natural defence systems was critical for good farming practice.

"Fungicides are very effective, but if fungi develop resistance, you have lost that part of your inventory," Jenny said.

The project researched ways of enhancing plants' natural resistance to damaging pathogens or fungi, such as powdery mildew, through a process known as systemic acquired resistance. Systemic acquired resistance uses chemicals that are generally regarded as safe to enhance a plant's own defence systems to more effectively combat disease.

Jenny said the use of systemic acquired resistance could allow growers to minimise the number of chemical applications in a season, without compromising crop yield.

"There's a possible financial benefit, but there's a definite benefit in terms of managing beneficial insects and reducing pollution," she said.

Support the system

Jenny and her team have found that several natural or synthetic compounds, when applied to plants, can encourage and support the plants' natural defences.

"The results were fantastic in cucumbers—it was like chalk and cheese—there was an obvious improvement in disease control."

The trials showed good growing practices were still critical. Healthy plants responded much more strongly to the program than those that were compromised by such factors such as lack of water or nutrients.

"You still need the best commercial practices—good agricultural practice, good nutrition and good water," she said.

At the moment, many of the chemicals used in Jenny's trials are not registered for use on horticultural crops in Australia. However, they are widely and successfully used internationally.

"From a scientific point of view, it's absolutely fascinating to see what plants can do to protect themselves. There are



Milsana treated leaves



Dr Jenny Jobling said the results of her trials were fantastic, like 'chalk and cheese'. There was an obvious improvement in disease control'.

plans to register the chemicals; companies need some efficacy data to show they are effective under Australian conditions." 🌱

The bottom line:

- Powdery mildew can drastically decrease crop yield by restricting a plant's capacity to bear fruit.
- Systemic acquired resistance uses 'safe' chemicals to enhance a plant's natural defence system to protect against pathogens.
- The 'safe' chemicals used in the trial are not yet available for use in Australia. More data is needed before they are introduced.

i For more information:
 Visit www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers
 Project number: VG05034
 Keywords: Powdery mildew, systemic acquired resistance

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Winds of change

The Fair Dinkum Food Campaign in 2005 was successful at raising community and government awareness about issues facing the vegetable industry.

The vegetable industry has undergone significant change during the past two years. Youna Angevin-Castro speaks to AUSVEG CEO John Roach about how the industry can best achieve its goals.

John Roach enjoys change and the challenges it presents. As the CEO of AUSVEG, the national peak industry body for the Australian vegetable industry, he is energised by the developments the industry has made since he joined AUSVEG 18 months ago. However, he sees these changes as just the beginning for the rapidly maturing vegetable industry.

"The real work is just getting underway. The next challenge is for industry to act on innovative concepts and create real outcomes for growers. At the end of the day, it's what's in the hip pocket that counts," said John.

Close the gap

Riding high on the success of the second vegetable industry conference—'Vegetables Claim Centre Plate'—earlier this year, John believes the time is ripe for the industry to secure its future. He said that growers are recognising the importance of consumers and that industry priorities are starting to reflect this.

"The vegetable industry has already captured consumer sentiment. Consumers are concerned about their health and well-being, about childhood obesity. They know that vegetables are good for them," said John.

This places the industry in a strong position to respond to consumer needs, but before this can be done, the industry's strategic intent needs to change.

"Traditionally, the industry has been supply-driven but closing the gap between growers and consumers will create opportunities," John said, adding that to achieve true alignment with consumers, the industry has to become unified.

"An individual will never be as effective as a team, and for a team to achieve its goals, it needs to think and work as a team. For the vegetable industry, this not only means growers and industry groups working together but also that they work with supply chains, service industries and consumers to close the gap."

Time to change

Prior to joining AUSVEG, John worked with a number of agricultural industries, including the seafood industry. He identified many similarities between the vegetable industry's current activities, and those of other industries.

"Most agriculture-based industries in Australia undergo a major change process about every 15 years. Our industry is displaying a number of key indicators that make it the right time to move to the next level."

These indicators include the public's growing awareness of community health and well-being, and John encourages industry to use this to its advantage.

"Research studies such as the 2005 Victorian Population Health Survey indicate that Australian consumption of vegetables

continues to fall short of recommended dietary guidelines. Something like only one in 10 people consume the recommended five vegetables per day. As an industry, we need to ask—why?" John feels that resistance to change may be a contributing factor.

"In other agriculture-based industries, those threatened by change are typically employed by industry or feel insecure about their future. Yet, change often creates new opportunities and redefines roles. This will happen only if individuals start thinking as members of a group.

"Traditionally, the industry has been supply-driven but closing the gap between growers and consumers will create opportunities."

"The vegetable industry has the added complexity of being a diverse industry but at a commercial level it is one of the most innovative industries in agriculture—this is something that should be celebrated and recognised."

Work together

John sees that there are a number of immediate opportunities to be developed by the industry. A high-priority is developing strategic partnerships with other agricultural industries, such as the protein producers.



John Roach, CEO AUSVEG—"The next challenge is for industry to act on innovative concepts and create real outcomes for growers."

"Partnering with the meat industry has the potential to open doors to export markets; the seafood industry holds a strong position in the higher value markets of the world; the pork industry has made significant inroads into South-East Asia, known to be large consumers of vegetables; and the chicken industry has had a 15-year growth period. If we can find ways to work cooperatively with these industries, we can multiply our avenues to consumers," he said.

John stresses the importance of industry bodies driving and supporting change, particularly at a regional or local level.

"At a regional level, it is critical for growers to see their neighbours as collaborators, not competitors, and local support networks will assist this change. One of the key market

development opportunities that exist is the potential to create regional supply and branding. This can occur only if growers work together and develop their own market. This is happening in some pockets but badly needs acceleration and broader coverage."


National grower bodies, including AUSVEG, must also drive initiatives, such as the 'Save the Ausveg' and 'Vegetables Claim Centre Plate' campaigns, which were aimed at creating public awareness. The industry is finding its voice and needs to engage consumers. Growers working directly with consumers are far more effective than growers going it alone.

"It is critical that peak industry bodies accurately represent the people who produce

the product. In recognition of this, AUSVEG has been developing a discussion paper for consultation with industry, which will determine the most appropriate structure for grower representation."

In the interim, AUSVEG has moved to develop Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with a number of grower groups and representative bodies across all vegetable commodities.

"These MOUs are designed to better articulate communication and coordination between various industry sectors, including different commodities, regional groups, and marketing bodies," said John.

"This is an important and critical step in build the 'vegetable team' for the future and the most successful way to approach change." 

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Skills survey gives growers a voice

How often do you consider the skills needed to run a farm business? Fertiliser application, irrigation, and crop protection assist in producing a healthy product for consumers, while skills in negotiating and marketing help sell your produce. However, others areas need attention as well, such as managing staff and investments, communicating with suppliers and planning for retirement.

A survey of levy payers is being conducted to determine which skills are needed by the vegetable industry. This is your chance to let us know what management skills you need and how you would like them to be developed in the industry.

Consultation with vegetable industry personnel for the Taking Stock Report identified the development of a business culture as an important way to empower growers. It will help them create new and develop existing opportunities, and provide them with increased skills and confidence to improve their practices and negotiating power.

The industry strategic plan, VegVision 2020, identified the importance of developing skills and knowledge in the industry. Foundation Project 5—Investment in Business Skills Development has commenced with a People Development Investment Plan.

The objectives are to:

- Identify the development needs of people in businesses and organisations at all levels of the vegetable industry value chain
- Engage growers in the development process
- Create awareness and motivation for participation in people development activities
- Build the Australian vegetable industry's capacity to access existing business skills and leadership programs and funding sources, and
- Refine existing programs to meet the requirements of vegetable industry participants.

Investment in the future

The People Development Investment Plan has an emphasis on supporting young growers and exporters, and facilitating an innovators' network. An industry mentoring program for local leadership will be developed, including participation of women and ethnic groups.


Dianne Fullelove, People Development Coordinator AUSVEG, said business management skills are as necessary in farm operations as any of the more practical

tasks and that they can make a large impact on the profitability of growers' businesses.

"If you have the skill and confidence to negotiate a better return for your produce or a reduced cost for inputs such as fertilisers, it will mean a higher net profit."

"If you have the skill and confidence to negotiate a better return for your produce or a reduced cost for inputs such as fertilisers, it will mean a higher net profit," Dianne said.

"Gaining new skills does not have to mean sitting in a classroom away from your farm," Dianne said.

"It could be through visiting other farms or businesses in the supply chain; it could be via the Internet or in small groups." 

The bottom line:

- Business management skills are of equal importance to the profitability of growers' businesses as practical skills.
- The grower survey, enclosed in this issue of *Vegetables Australia*, is a chance for levy payers to have their say.
- Development of skills and knowledge in the industry is a crucial component of VegVision 2020.

i The survey is available in this issue of *Vegetables Australia* or by contacting Dianne Fullelove, People Development Coordinator AUSVEG
Email: <dianne.fullelove@ausveg.com.au>
Phone: 07 3374 4111 or 0400 960 695



Business Skills Development Survey

The vegetable industry, with funding from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) through the Australian Vegetable Industry Development Group (AVIDG), is currently implementing a business skills and leadership development strategy.

Managed by AUSVEG, the peak representative organisation for vegetable growers, the strategy is focused on increasing growers' skills in business management within their own businesses and the industry as a whole.

The industry strategic plan VegVision 2020 identified a need to encourage stronger participation of growers in their industry from regional to national level. Improving business skills will make all of industry stronger and more competitive.

A program to deliver business skills development will commence in mid 2008. Vegetable growers are being asked for their input across Australia to ensure that the program meets the practical needs of all growers.

We need your help in identifying business skill requirements of the vegetable industry. If you are interested in being involved in this process, please complete the following survey and return in the pre-paid envelope to: Vegetable Industry Business Skills Survey, PO Box 563, Melbourne, VIC 3170.

All responses will be treated with the highest confidentiality. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. I appreciate your time in completing this survey.

Regards,
Dianne Fullelove
People Development Coordinator
AUSVEG Ltd
Email: dianne.fullelove@ausveg.com.au
Phone: 07 3374 4111
Mobile: 0400 960 695

AVIDG
Australian Vegetable Industry Development Group
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

About you

Name: _____
Age: _____
Position in the business: _____
Courses completed eg Diploma in Rural Production or Chem Cert: _____
Language spoken at home: _____

Business Description

Crops grown: _____
Region and Postcode: _____
Number of Full Time Employees: _____

For each skill, rate your need for learning by placing an "X" in the box.

Business Skills	1 Low	2	3	4 High
Manage your business				
Identify and set your business goals				
Compare and analyse business benchmarks				
Develop a business plan and implement action plan				
Understand the legal side of business				
Explore business structures (eg Cooperatives)				
Identify new business opportunities				
Manage finances				
Understand business				

Complete the enclosed grower survey to let us know what business skills the vegetable industry needs to foster.

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Closing the gap between industry and consumers



The food service sector is clamouring for more information about vegetables, writes Hannah Burns, Communications Officer AUSVEG.

The Australian vegetable industry successfully made its mark on the food service sector at the dedicated restaurant event, restaurant 07.

There was a strong demand for information about vegetable varieties, preparation techniques, storage methods and nutritional facts. While there is a wealth of information on the Internet, teachers and students want it in formats that can be displayed and distributed as teaching aids, such as posters, leaflets and booklets.

Restaurant 07 was held at Royal Hall of Industries, Sydney, on Monday 13 and Tuesday 14 August, attracting more than 4,500 visitors including restaurateurs, chefs, restaurant managers and students. More than 200 exhibitors took part in the event to showcase the best in regional produce, innovative products and services.

The Australian vegetable industry display featured a colourful array of fresh produce, which attracted significant interest from

chefs, students and teachers who were keen to learn more about what the industry has to offer. Visitors discussed topics such as flood, drought and imports, and learned about other industry issues.

Impressive presentation

AUSVEG partnered with renowned chef Martin Boetz of Longrain Restaurant and Georgina Damm of Damm Fine Food to deliver a culinary skills session, titled "Vegetables as a Centre Plate Focus". During the one-hour session, Martin and Georgina demonstrated the versatility of vegetables by cooking potato gnocchi, vegetable curry and relish.

There was a strong demand for information about vegetable varieties, preparation techniques, storage methods and nutritional facts, particularly for use in schools and educational facilities. While there is a wealth of information on the Internet, teachers and students want it in formats that can be displayed and distributed as teaching aids, such as posters, leaflets and booklets.

The potato-variety handouts were extremely popular, highlighting the need for equivalent information sheets to be prepared for vegetables. Visitors to the display

were also interested in the Asian vegetables feature, eager to learn the names and preparation techniques of these versatile vegetables. The lettuce corer and "How to Prepare an Artichoke" demonstrations were a major hit.

AUSVEG received many enquiries from restaurant owners looking to source their produce directly from growers.

Organisers of restaurant 07 have announced that due to the popularity of the event, a similar gathering will be launched in Melbourne and held at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre from 26-27 May 2008. Restaurant Sydney 08 will be held from 11-12 August 2008 at Royal Hall of Industries.

Thank you to John Said from Fresh Select, and Luke Harris and Ryan Kennedy from Harris Farm Markets for sourcing, delivering and setting up the Australian grown fresh produce display. Thanks also to Justin Wearne from Western Potatoes for providing potato display materials and flying from Western Australia to take part in the event.

AUSVEG is keen to be involved in similar events to continue to lift the profile of the Australian vegetable industry and bring growers closer to consumers.



The culinary skills session, "Vegetables as a Centre Plate Focus", with chef Martin Boetz of Longrain Restaurant and Georgina Damm of Damm Fine Food was a hit with delegates.



Visitors to the display wanted to learn more about Asian vegetables, including names and preparation techniques.



Justin Wearne (far right) from Western Potatoes talks with a delegate at the Australian vegetable industry trade-stand.



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New Consultant

Scholefield Robinson welcomes new Senior Consultant, Lauren Thompson, to the team at our Adelaide Office. A graduate of the University of California, Lauren has experience in both California and Australia with a range of horticultural crops. Her work with corporate horticultural, agribusiness and irrigation companies, together with the role of Research, Development and Extension Leader for the processing tomato industry in Victoria and NSW, demonstrates the broad expertise that Lauren can provide to industries, projects and growers.



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Asset	Life (Years)
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Self-propelled	8
Fertilizer spreaders:	
Generally	10
Spinner	5
General assets:	
Bins:	
Plastic	10
Timber	5
Mulch layers	12
Mulch lifters	12
Mulchers	8
Rakes (eg cane trash rake)	10
Slashers	8
Harvesting assets:	
Cane haul out bins	12
Harvesters (including cane, carrot, onion, potato and tomato)	10#
Harvesting aids (incorporating trailer and conveyor belts)	15
Onion lifters	10#
Trailers	15
Windrowers (including potato diggers, onion and potato windrowers)	10#
Planting assets:	
Billet planters	12
Potato cutters	15
Potato planters	10
Precision seeders	10
Transplanters:	
Automated	7
Manual	10
Tillage assets:	
Generally	15
PTO operated (including rotary hoes and power harrows)	8
Trellising assets:	
Stake drivers	12
Stake pullers	12
Trellising (incorporating stakes and wire)	5
Wire winders	15

refers to statutory caps of six years and eight months for harvesters and tractors introduced to apply to these type of assets acquired on and after 1 July 2007.

With the new financial year well under way, it is worth noting that the Australian Tax Office has released new depreciation rates (now called effective life years for capital allowances) for vegetable equipment. The new schedule is to be used as of 1 July, 2007.

Agriculture, forestry and fishing

Asset	Life (Years)
All terrain vehicles (ATVs) used in primary production activities	5
Motorcycles used in primary production activities	5
Tractors	12#



For more information, visit the Australian Tax Office website, www.ato.gov.au

Hydroponics

Asset	Life (Years)
Hanging gutters	10
Troughs	10

Hydroponics growers may use the effective life for relevant assets shown in Nursery and Floriculture Production on the ATO website



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Are skysrise greenhouses the farms of the future? Images courtesy of Waimond Ip at verticalfarm.com

The sky's

Vertical farms—sky-rise greenhouses in urban centres—may help feed the growing global population as land availability decreases, but are they financially viable? Brea Acton reports.

Picture a skyscraper like any other in the CBD. You take the elevator to the 25th floor, but instead of stepping out into an office space you face a modern greenhouse producing up to ten levels of crops—herbs and smaller plants at the bottom, trusses of tomatoes hanging from the ceiling.

One vertical farm will produce enough fruit and vegetables to feed 50,000 people per annum.

Vertical farming is the concept created by Dr Dickson Despommier, Professor of Environmental Health Sciences and Microbiology at Columbia University. The FAO and NASA predict that by 2050, 80 per cent of the world's population will live in high-density urban centres. Arable land is diminishing and countries such as Japan and the USA may not be able to grow enough produce to feed their expanding population.

"As the climate changes and soil-based agriculture becomes impossible in many areas, more people will turn to alternative methods for obtaining food," Dickson said.

"Vertical farming offers one possibility for creating a reliable source of food and water in areas of the world where agriculture in the traditional sense cannot occur."

Inspired or unsuitable?

One vertical farm will produce enough fruit and vegetables to feed 50,000 people per annum. Additionally, the design of the vertical farm ensures minimal wastage. Moisture collects in pipes housed inside the ceiling of each floor; through a process of evapotranspiration this can produce up to 60 million gallons of water per year. Blackwater is converted to potable water through a series of filtration systems, while irrigation runoff collects in a central pool to be reused. Non-edible plant matter, such as corn husks, is converted into fuel and fuel pellets, which can be used to generate electricity.

Australia has a land mass four fifths the size of the USA, yet a population one tenth the size. Still, Dickson is optimistic that vertical farming in Australia will ensure the availability of year-round crop production. Some growers disagree, concluding that although vertical farming is conceptually neat, the costs, in terms of both money and energy, make it unsuitable here.

Food for thought

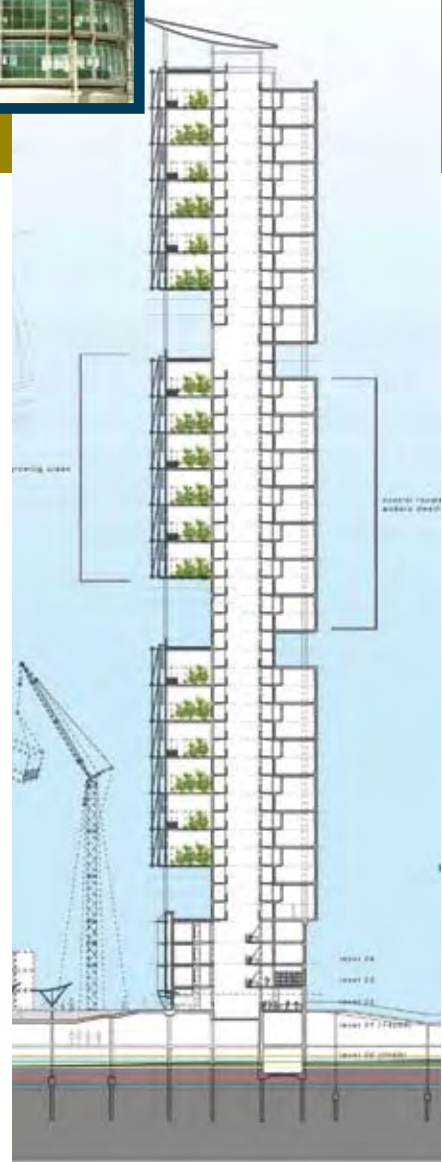
Will vertical farms feed us in the future? The possibility solicits mixed opinions from Australian growers.

Kim Vincent

Proprietor, Vincent's Produce
Coffs Harbour, NSW

This is a great concept. Vertical farms offer efficiency in raw materials, growing and management of waste. [I] would support this provided that, as a working environment, there is a return on investment, which is as at least comparable to existing hydroponics operations.

the limit



Queensland grower Max Horvath said that Australia has enough land available for traditional greenhouses. "In fact, if outdoor growers converted to hydroponic or greenhouse growing, much less land would be needed and water consumption would be a lot lower," he said.

There are other concerns too, such as how to get enough light to what is effectively 30 stacked greenhouses. Crop plants need photosynthetically active radiation (PAR) to grow—a minimum of approximately 6 to 8MJ/m²/day of PAR (the equivalent of fairly bright sunlight for ten hours a day)—to achieve reasonable growth rates and yields. The obvious alternative is artificial lighting, yet this is a costly option requiring large amounts of energy.

Decreasing costs

Dickson responds to these concerns by comparing a vertical farm to a mobile phone. "All possibilities must be tried, but solar panels and large parabolic mirrors that reflect light into the vertical farm would be appealing in many areas of Australia. As use goes up, cost of operations goes down. Look at the initial cost of a cell phone in the 1980s compared with those of today."

Dickson says that initial costings for a vertical farm have not been confirmed. "The first ones will be very pricey—hundreds of millions of dollars perhaps—and the next generation will be less so, and so on down the line as they become perfected and modularised, just like your laptop computer." Eventually, with government grants and subsidies, Dickson envisions that renting a floor in a vertical farm would be affordable for growers.

Some growers say that although vertical farming is conceptually neat, the costs, in terms of both money and energy, make it unsuitable for Australia.

The question remains, if Australia has enough land to enable traditional growing methods in a costly and competitive market, is vertical farming viable? If, as Dickson predicts, the cost of building and operating vertical farms decreases over time, it may be a long-term solution to inevitable population growth and land degradation. Either way, growers will be watching their city skylines very closely.

Robert Hayes

Co-CEO and Group Operations Manager, Freshzest (Hydroponic Herbs)
Bangalow, NSW

The capital and operating expenses plus associated energy and environmental costs indicate that this isn't an economic option compared with growing using the sun's energy—whether that be in the soil or in protected cropping structures using advanced nutrient techniques such as hydroponics.

Graeme Smith

President, Australian Hydroponic & Greenhouse Association
Woodend, Vic

It is inevitable that we move towards more productive and safer food production systems—maybe vertical farming is one answer. Australian Hydroponic & Greenhouse Association is keen to work with interested bodies to research the strong potential of these modern systems.

Max Horvath

Member, National Greenhouse Advisory Committee
Bundaberg, Qld

Would I rent a vertical farm? Absolutely not. We are struggling to survive as farmers with greenhouses as it is. Costs are increasing, but the price of produce is being forced down. There is no way vertical farming would be economically viable in Australia, without subsidies or grants.

Cultivating a successful industry

Making sure R&D projects produce better market-focussed outcomes is one way Simon Powell will help Queensland growers. By Emma Reeves.



Simon Powell, Queensland's new Industry Development Officer (IDO), is readily available to inform growers about industry developments. Although he has only been in the IDO role since July, Simon has adopted a demanding schedule to familiarise himself with Queensland growers and researchers. This has included visits to Bundaberg, Gattam Research Station, Lockyer Valley, Stanthorpe, Beaudesert Shire and the AUSVEG head office in Victoria.

Simon is investigating the implementation of a range of programs to help the industry grow and respond to business-related challenges, such as labour shortages and succession planning.

He said the most satisfying aspect of his role is meeting growers and working with them to recognise issues that affect their businesses. "I'm really enjoying the position so far. There are many possibilities to complete some very worthwhile work."

Starting with seeds

With a variety of experience in horticulture, Simon is well placed to assist the state's vegetable industry. He grew up in seed potato growing country, near Ballarat, Victoria, and he has been involved with the industry all his life. He developed a strong interest in growing techniques while on the family farm and completed a Bachelor of Agricultural Science at the University of Melbourne in 2005.

Simon's experience is not limited to potato crops. His has worked as a jackaroo and grown carnations as a market farmer. These roles strengthened his interests in farm management techniques, spraying


programs, water conservation and irrigation systems.

The IDO role is primarily about good communication, in terms of providing a valuable, central resource for growers to benefit from industry research and development programs. Simon said the goal of the position was to "produce better market-focussed outcomes for the Queensland vegetable industry".

Simon believes that research and development can assist growers to deal with many different pressures. This includes dealing with disease and pest outbreaks, and helping growers adapt to new water use requirements. The trialling of new cultivars is also a research priority, and he said that building resistance in cultivars is an important issue.

R&D activity can also help the industry grow and respond to business-related challenges, such as labour shortages and succession planning. Simon is investigating the implementation of a range of programs to facilitate this, including the possible creation of commodity innovation teams to develop more efficient supply chains, research to explore niche domestic and export markets, and information resources for Queensland vegetable growers.

He observes that there are differences between the work conditions in Queensland and Victoria. "Queensland is such a vast state, so the spatial arrangements are very different here with quite varied growing conditions in the specific regions," he said. "Every state has different horticultural practices, but I certainly don't mind the weather."

Simon is happy to assist growers with information about R&D activities. 

i For more information: Contact Simon Powell,
Queensland Industry Development Officer
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Phone: 07 3620 3825
Mobile: 0408 135 042

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HAL releases 2007/08 R&D project list

The list below is of newly approved and recommended projects that the National Vegetable Levy will invest in for the 2007/08 financial year. This suite of projects covers major issues in the industry from crop disease research to market intelligence. Please note that it does not include the ongoing projects funded in previous years.

HAL has introduced a new system whereby projects will be approved gradually throughout the year; as such, projects listed have been grouped by their current status:

- **Approved**—Approved by HAL Board and contracted.
- **Assessed**—Assessed by HAL specialist and awaiting HAL Board approval.
- **Variation Approved**—Service provider request to change project has been approved by HAL.
- **Resubmission Received**—Assessed by HAL specialist. More information has been provided by service provider.
- **Resubmission Requested**—Assessed by HAL specialist. More information required.
- **Submitted**—Project submitted by service provider ready for assessment by HAL.
- **Draft**—Draft project proposal received by HAL.



For more information visit the HAL website at www.horticulture.com.au

Project Code	Project Title	Current Status	Project Start Date (M/D/Y)	Project Finish Date (M/D/Y)	Service Provider
VG07035	Understanding spatial variation in sweetcorn production	APPROVED	7/1/2007	5/30/2008	Australian Centre for Precision Agriculture
VG07058	Controlled traffic farming systems for the Tasmanian vegetable industry	APPROVED	7/1/2007	5/30/2008	Tasmanian Farmers & Graziers Association
VG07073	Groundtruthing survey of vegetable industry statistics	APPROVED	10/1/2007	7/4/2008	NSW Farmers Association
VG07095	Program approach to plant pathology	APPROVED	10/1/2007	6/30/2008	Horticulture Australia Limited
VG07115	Project for developing a marketing plan for the Australian vegetable industry	APPROVED	2/28/2008	2/29/2008	Horticulture Australia Limited
VG07140	Facilitating the communication and development of the vegetable industry in NSW (continuation of VG99053)	APPROVED	7/1/2007	2/28/2008	NSW Farmers Association
MT07055	Facilitating the communication and development of the Tasmanian vegetable industry (continuation of VG00070)	ASSESSED	7/1/2007	2/28/2008	Tasmanian Farmers & Graziers Association
VG07001	Plugging the gap: new biocontrol agents for whitefly management in greenhouse vegetable crops	ASSESSED	9/1/2007	8/31/2009	Biocontrol Solutions
VG07003	Development of IPM strategies and tools for Western Flower Thrips in hydroponic lettuce	ASSESSED	7/1/2007	6/30/2010	NSW Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI)
VG07017	Thrips management in the green beans industry	ASSESSED	10/1/2007	9/30/2009	QLD Department of Primary Industries & Fisheries
VG07030	Developing sustainable solutions for integrated brassica crop management	ASSESSED	8/1/2007	7/31/2010	South Australia Research & Development Institute (SARDI)
VG07031	Boosting the health benefits of fresh and processing carrots in Australia	ASSESSED	1/1/2008	12/31/2010	NSW Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI)
VG07036	Developing guidelines for environmentally sustainable use of mineral fertilisers	ASSESSED	7/1/2007	8/1/2009	Department of Agriculture & Food Western Australia
VG07039	Enhancing the efficacy of fungal pathogens using a synergistic chemical, Imidacloprid	ASSESSED	8/1/2007	1/31/2009	The University of Queensland
VG07040	Revegetation by design: QLD bush working for you	ASSESSED	1/1/2008	12/31/2012	CSIRO Entomology
VG07055	Development of residue management strategies and action plans for export vegetables	ASSESSED	7/2/2007	6/25/2010	AKC Consulting Pty Ltd
VG07056	National vegetable industry communication program	ASSESSED	8/1/2007	4/1/2010	AUSVEG Ltd
VG07059	Economic Policy and Research Manager for the vegetable industry	ASSESSED	10/1/2007	3/30/2010	AUSVEG Ltd
VG07060	Australian vegetable industry data	ASSESSED	10/1/2007	3/1/2011	AUSVEG Ltd
VG07061	Industry development services for the vegetable industry	ASSESSED	8/1/2007	4/1/2010	AUSVEG Ltd
VG07062	Vegetable levy payer password-protected website	ASSESSED	7/1/2007	2/1/2010	AUSVEG Ltd
VG07063	Financial performance of Australian vegetable farms	ASSESSED	10/1/2007	3/10/2010	AUSVEG Ltd
VG07064	Australian vegetable trade data and research	ASSESSED	10/1/2007	3/10/2010	AUSVEG Ltd
VG07067	Well informed carrot supply chain initiative	ASSESSED	8/1/2007	8/1/2008	AUSVEG Ltd
VG07075	Evaluation of protective covering systems for fresh-cut value added products	ASSESSED	1/1/2008	6/30/2009	Houston's Farm Research and Development
VG07076	Lettuce IPM (extension of VG05044)	ASSESSED	1/1/2008	12/31/2009	NSW Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI)
VG07079	Reducing Listeria contamination from salad vegetable farms	ASSESSED	9/1/2007	9/1/2009	VIC Department of Primary Industries
VG07081	Developing 'superyellow' enhanced pigment sweetcorn for eye-health	ASSESSED	10/1/2007	9/30/2012	QLD Department of Primary Industries & Fisheries
VG07082	Post harvest treatment of hydroponically grown Asian vegetables	ASSESSED	10/20/2007	9/30/2008	Excel Consulting Group
VG07046	Enhancing the profitability of the processing brassica vegetable sector	VARIATION APPROVED	7/1/2007	5/30/2009	Tasmanian Farmers & Graziers Association

VG07103	Young growers tour to New Zealand	VARIATION APPROVED	9/1/2007	1/31/2008	Horticulture Australia Limited
VG07125	Best-practice IPM strategies for control of major soilborne diseases of vegetable crops throughout Australia	RESUBMISSION RECEIVED	9/1/2007	6/30/2010	VIC Department of Primary Industries
VG07126	Integrated management of soilborne pathogens (Sclerotinia beans, lettuce, carrots, celery and other)	RESUBMISSION RECEIVED	9/1/2007	5/30/2010	VIC Department of Primary Industries
VG07007	On-farm diagnostic kits for brassica disease: Phase II	RESUBMISSION REQUESTED	1/1/2008	7/31/2009	VIC Department of Primary Industries
VG07010	Enhancing the plant immune response for improved disease control	RESUBMISSION REQUESTED	9/1/2007	6/30/2010	VIC Department of Primary Industries
VG07015	Pests, beneficials, disorders and diseases in Cucurbits: Field identification guide	RESUBMISSION REQUESTED	7/1/2007	12/31/2008	NSW Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI)
VG07023	Driving better vegetable irrigation through profitable practice change	RESUBMISSION REQUESTED	12/1/2007	11/30/2010	QLD Department of Primary Industries & Fisheries
VG07053	Developing innovative products and alternative uses for process brassica vegetables	RESUBMISSION REQUESTED	8/1/2007	12/31/2008	Tasmanian Farmers & Graziers Association
VG07070	IPM for foliage diseases	RESUBMISSION REQUESTED	9/1/2007	7/1/2010	VIC Department of Primary Industries
VG07074	European greenhouse study tour - October 2007	RESUBMISSION REQUESTED	7/16/2007	8/30/2007	Australian Hydroponic & Greenhouse Association
VG07109	Development of effective pesticide strategies compatible with IPM management used on farm	RESUBMISSION REQUESTED	8/31/2007	6/30/2008	Xeron
VG07110	Best practice production models (lettuce, brassicas)	RESUBMISSION REQUESTED	11/1/2007	10/31/2009	VIC Department of Primary Industries
VG07118	Build capacity of greenhouse growers to reduce crop loss through adoption of preventative disease management practices	RESUBMISSION REQUESTED	10/1/2007	9/30/2009	NSW Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI)
VG07119	Identification and monitoring of resistance in vegetable crops in Australia	RESUBMISSION REQUESTED	9/24/2007	9/24/2009	NSW Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI)
VG07127	Integrated management of foliar diseases in vegetable crops	RESUBMISSION REQUESTED	1/1/2008	12/31/2010	QLD Department of Primary Industries & Fisheries
VG07128	Integrated viral disease management in vegetable crops	RESUBMISSION REQUESTED	12/1/2007	12/23/2010	QLD Department of Primary Industries & Fisheries
VG07136	Review of "Diseases of Vegetable Crops"	RESUBMISSION REQUESTED	8/31/2007	1/31/2008	QLD Department of Primary Industries & Fisheries
VG07137	Vegetable pathology program - Workshops and coordination	RESUBMISSION REQUESTED	9/1/2007	5/31/2008	Horticulture Australia Limited
VG07078	Vital Vegetables 2	SUBMITTED	1/1/2008	12/30/2012	VIC Department of Primary Industries
VG07083	Vital Vegetables 2	SUBMITTED	2/1/2008	5/31/2009	Horticulture Australia Limited
VG07084	Synovate market information projects	SUBMITTED	1/1/2008	5/31/2008	Horticulture Australia Limited
VG07085	Allocation for the implementation of soil health program	SUBMITTED	2/1/2008	5/31/2008	Horticulture Australia Limited
VG07086	Fresh produce watch	SUBMITTED	4/1/2008	5/31/2008	AUSVEG Ltd
VG07087	Biosecurity PHA	SUBMITTED	1/1/2008	5/31/2008	AUSVEG Ltd
VG07088	Restaurant group menu development	SUBMITTED	3/1/2008	5/31/2008	AUSVEG Ltd
VG07089	Formal review of the vegetable levy	SUBMITTED	4/1/2008	5/31/2008	AUSVEG Ltd
VG07091	Vegetable IDO extension allocation	SUBMITTED	7/1/2007	1/31/2008	TBA
VG07092	Soilborne diseases of greenhouse crops	SUBMITTED	1/1/2008	5/31/2008	Horticulture Australia Limited
VG07093	Allocation for MRL for Minor use of chemicals	SUBMITTED	8/1/2007	11/30/2008	Horticulture Australia Limited
VG07096	Greenhouse project study allocation	SUBMITTED	2/1/2008	5/31/2009	Horticulture Australia Limited
VG07097	Minor use allocation for field and desktop studies	SUBMITTED	12/1/2007	4/30/2008	Horticulture Australia Limited
VG07102	Vegetable industry strategic leadership course	SUBMITTED	8/1/2007	11/30/2007	AUSVEG Ltd
VG07105	Development and implementation of greenhouse industry performance	SUBMITTED	3/1/2008	5/31/2008	Horticulture Australia Limited
VG07014	Pests, disorders and disease guide for cucurbits	DRAFT	7/1/2007	6/30/2008	NSW Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI)
VG07032	Southern Hemisphere Network: Enhancing global competitiveness through strategic collaboration	DRAFT	7/1/2007	6/30/2009	Agrico
VG07042	Protecting cucurbits against root and leaf diseases by inducing SAR using seed drenching with BTH (BION)	DRAFT	7/10/2007	7/31/2010	The University of Sydney
VG07044	Identification of new supply chains for Australian vegetable exports	DRAFT	7/2/2007	6/30/2008	Department of Agriculture & Food Western Australia
VG07045	Improving profitability of brassica vegetables for the processing sector	DRAFT	8/1/2007	6/30/2009	Tasmanian Farmers & Graziers Association
VG07051	Study tour for greenhouse vegetable growers to Spain and Holland	DRAFT	11/17/2007	11/28/2007	Virginia Horticulture Centre
VG07090	Growers tour to PMA	DRAFT	7/1/2007	10/31/2007	Quadrant Australia Pty Ltd
VG07094	Implementation of IPM plant health results VG05043	DRAFT	1/1/2008	5/31/2008	Horticulture Australia Limited
VG07098	IPM coordinator	DRAFT	9/1/2007	5/31/2008	Horticulture Australia Limited
VG07100	Nuffield farming scholarship	DRAFT	2/1/2008	5/31/2008	AUSVEG Ltd
VG07101	Australian Rural Leaders Program	DRAFT	1/1/2008	5/31/2008	AUSVEG Ltd
VG07106	Brassica think tank	DRAFT	10/1/2007	8/31/2008	Horticulture Australia Limited



Testing times for healthier soils

Inspired by a successful program conducted by the banana industry, a research team has turned its attentions to measuring how soils function in vegetable production, writes Graham Gosper.

Bob Euston plants beans into a standing mulch crop of pearl millet at his farm in Gympie, Queensland.

The testing of soil samples is well under way in an innovative project involving researchers and vegetable growers across Australia. The project canvasses six vegetable growing areas in three states, a dozen vegetable farms where new soil management techniques are being applied, more than 20 research and extension specialists and a host of grassroots growers.

The two-year project aims to increase long-term industry sustainability through

the development of production practices to improve crop and soil health. As a first step towards achieving this, researchers will develop practical and easily accessible tests to help growers effectively monitor improvements in soil health. They will also investigate grower priorities for soil-health development and what the industry must do to significantly improve soil-management practices.

Tony Pattison, a Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPI&F)

nematologist, is leading the Vegetable Plant and Soil Health (VEGPASH) project. He said the project's linkage of soil-health science with improved on-farm soil-management practices will ensure practical outcomes. Grower reference groups have been established in each of the study regions, which enables the involvement of a wide cross-section of growers. Study regions have been set up in the Bowen-Burdekin region, Bundaberg-Gympie and Gatton in Queensland, around the Sydney



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The south-east Queensland sampling team: (front left) Jenny Cobon, DPI&F nematologist; (front right) Lisa Gulino, DPI&F microbiologist; (back left) John Bagshaw, DPI&F horticulturist and Bob Euston, Gympie bean grower.



DPI&F horticulturist John Bagshaw and DPI&F microbiologist Lisa Gulino operate the hammer penetrometer during a cold winter's day in Gympie. The penetrometer measures the amount of force required to penetrate the soil, which is an indication of soil compaction.

Basin and Cowra in New South Wales and near Perth in Western Australia.

The soil sampling and testing phase will involve comparisons between innovative and traditional vegetable production systems at 12 locations. Tony said the tests will investigate a range of physical, chemical and biological soil-health indicators to provide a holistic view of how soils function in vegetable production.

Researchers will develop practical and easily accessible tests to help growers effectively monitor improvements in soil health.

"The tests will also help researchers to better understand how soil organisms interact with their environment to participate in vital soil functions such as suppression of pests and disease, supply and recycling of nutrients, and building of soil structure," he said.

The research team includes soil microbiologists, nematologists, plant pathologists, horticulturists, extension specialists and an agricultural economist.

Expanding interest

Sue Heisswolf, a Queensland DPI&F horticulturist based at Bowen, managed the project for the past six months while Tony continued his soil-health research in Costa Rica.

Sue said growers have been keen to participate—some volunteered their farms for the study from the beginning. "The study is attracting interest from other growers who are interested in soil management, including

some who will provide valuable input though the reference groups," she said.

"Soil-management practices under evaluation include organic and compost systems, crop rotations, soil bacteria amendments, organic mulches, reduced tillage operations and permanent bed systems. Crops involved include beans, brassicas, carrots, chilli, lettuce, pumpkin and zucchini. Soils range from heavy clays to red-brown earths to sandy loams to coarse sands."

Sampling of soils began on farms in July and will continue over the next nine months. Sue said tests will be conducted on-farm, with samples also analysed at laboratories in Queensland and NSW.

Spurred by success

Tony said increasing interest among vegetable growers in measuring the effectiveness of practice changes for soil-health improvements led to the VEGPASH project. This interest had been spurred by the success a soil-health project involving Queensland's banana industry.


"Research over the past 13 years found that damaging nematodes can be suppressed by developing banana farming systems that improve soil health," he said. "This led to a 75 per cent reduction in the amount of nematicide used to grow banana crops and reduced losses in production due to nematodes. The new soil-health systems also improved soil stability and nutrient recycling. The improvements were measured using soil-health indicators that measure the soil's physical, chemical and biological properties."

Vegetable growers in northern Queensland are interested in applying the same principles to their industry. Demonstrations

that show how soil-health properties can be measured easily on-farm have further increased growers' desire to validate their own improved soil-health practices.

Tony expects the VEGPASH project will result in a better understanding of how farm management can impact on soil functions. "It will deliver a set of practical, well tested indicators for measuring changes in soil health," he said.

"It will also provide a snapshot of soil-health properties under different vegetable production systems. Follow-up studies will be needed to determine how sustainable the systems are, and if they meet the needs of vegetable growers in terms of productivity, profitability and protection of the environment."

Tony said the challenge for vegetable growers is to produce crops profitably in systems that balance farm inputs and outputs, with minimal impact on the environment. "This project is a step in that direction." 

The bottom line:

- Soil-management practices are being analysed to confirm important factors for long-term soil sustainability.
- A similar study conducted by the banana industry resulted in a 75 per cent reduction in nematicide use, and higher produce yields.
- A number of different soil types are being sampled and tested, to ensure maximum relevance for growers nationally.



For more information visit www.ausveg.com.au/levy-payers
Project number: VG06100
Keywords: Soil health, monitoring tools

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The Shed, a converted bus, takes tourists on the Seed to Salad Tour, explaining the processes of modern agriculture.



Grower Alf Turrisi has thought outside the square to find alternative ways to ensure his family business remains financially viable.

Teaching tourists the lay of the land

Creative genius is seeing the Turrisi family, on Queensland's Granite belt, through lean times. Alf Turrisi spoke to Angela Brennan about innovations on his family's property.

The marriage of Italians to Queensland's Granite Belt was destined to be long and fruitful. The cold climate and sandy loam is perfect for growing wine-grapes and stone fruit, and today's tourists, in increasing numbers, journey from the humidity of Brisbane to enjoy the fireplaces and brisk air of the highlands.

"Tourists are in awe of what they see here. Generally city people don't give much thought about where their food comes from. It's a real eye-opener for them to see how sophisticated agriculture has become."

In the mid-1950s Salvatore Turrisi, with an educated Sicilian's eye for good soil and opportunity, planted the first trees of a family orchard business in Amiens, on the Stanthorpe Plateau. The business flourished and has grown to become Eagle's Produce—a 500-acre vegetable farm, a 160-seat café, a tourist destination and a fountainhead of new technology in irrigation, water conservation and hi-tech computerised horticulture.

John and Alf Turrisi, son and grandson of Salvatore, run Eagle's Produce, growing mainly lettuces, cabbages and cauliflowers. Harvesting three times per year, they grow

all their seedlings in their nursery, a plot just over the border in New South Wales where rainfall is more reliable. At any one time, they have 1.2 million plants at various stages of growth in the nursery.

It is a family business, but in good seasons they employ up to 90 staff members. As recent seasons have not been so good, their creative and managerial skills have been tested to the limit.

The region has never boasted a huge rainfall, averaging 16 inches per annum, but for more than a decade it has struggled with the "drought of all droughts". There are no major rivers in the region and these days the ground is so dry that good rainfall is more likely to soak into the sandy soil than run into the all but empty dams.

Thinking outside the square

It is tempting to thank the drought for the Eagle's Produce's shift from fieldwork to hi-tech horticulture and tourism, but while water shortages have played their part, it is the ingenuity of the Turrisi family that has made good work from bad times.

Alf, John and the other family members manage their own transport business and seedling farm for use by Eagle's Produce. They have established the fully licensed Giardino Café and developed a million-dollar computerised cooling and cold-

storage system operational from anywhere in the world.

Tourists are taken around Eagle's Produce in 'The Shed', a converted bus, and learn the workings of a vegetable farm, the real impacts of the drought, and the truth about where their food comes from.

"Tourists are in awe of what they see here. Generally city people don't give much thought to where their food comes from. It's a real eye-opener for some of them to see just how sophisticated agriculture has become. It certainly isn't just plant a cauli, get a cauli, anymore. There's a lot of science involved," said Alf.

"I've heard some tourists say they'll never complain again at the price of a lettuce. They will of course, it's human nature, but they find it hard to believe how little return farmers get for their effort.

"These days a farmer wears quite a few hats. We're salesmen, agronomists, plant doctors. We even have to be lawyers to write industrial agreements. We have to know about computers and hydrology. At Eagle's Produce we run a tourist business, a farm, a café; so we're teachers as well when it comes to educating tourists about what it means to work on the land. We've learnt the lot on the job—my grandfather was the last one in this family to get a college education."

Continues on next page



Using an adapted irrigation system has halved water consumption and made a soil oasis for crops.

Teaching tourists the lay of the land (continued)



All Eagle's Produce seedlings are grown in the business's nursery, in New South Wales where rainfall is more reliable. At any one time, the nursery has 1.2 million plants at various stages of growth.

Wearing their farmers' hats, Alf and John have put a good deal of old-fashioned know-how towards reducing water consumption and improving soil quality. An irrigation system, based on the method used by strawberry growers of black plastic 'mulch' and drip-tape (T-Tape), has halved their water consumption.

"These days, farmers are salesmen, agronomists, plant doctors. We have to know about computers and hydrology. We're teachers as well when it comes to educating tourists about what it means to work on the land."

"Unlike strawberries, our crops have a fast turnover so the plastic needs to survive two to three plantings. We've modified a simple slasher that mows to the plastic's level

without damaging it. Then we spray the weeds and when they have dried up we have a machine like a road-sweeper to clear off the debris, ready for the next planting," said Alf.

Contrary to plastic's reputation for being bad for soil, Alf said that the system creates its own little oasis. "We can use better fertilisers because we get more mileage out of them, and we found that after three crops the soil was healthier. The worms had returned and soil tests, which we do every year, indicated a healthy level of microbes," he said.

Supporting the locals

"One of our main objectives is to keep our business local. As much as possible our café food comes from our own paddocks. The rest—strawberries and other fruit, wines, herbs, jams, olives, tapenade, meat, poultry—comes from local growers, or we go to the wholesale markets at Rockley," said Alf.

"This region is already a good tourist area, and we all help each other. Tourists love the cold weather up here. They love to sit around fires and sip fine wines. What most of them don't realise is that vegies are a bigger business here than wine. We are giving tourists a new perception of growers in the district."

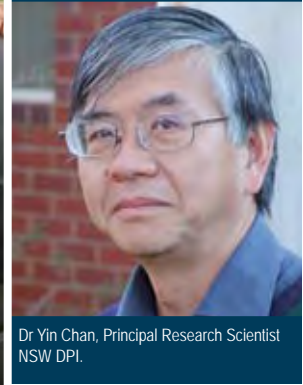
Giardino Cafe can be a surprise for tourists who visit the farm. The restaurant offers the smoothest of coffees to wash down the Italian sweets or a slice of magnificent cake made fresh on the premises. The lunch menu includes crispy salads, mixed grills and hot bread; roast chicken, beef and panini open grills; smoked salmon, relishes and cheeses—certainly a step up from the ploughman's lunch.

"Economically, we are ticking over," said Alf. "It's hard work because we are battling on all fronts—the climate, the government, the chain-stores—but we are learning better ways to farm and we are teaching visitors what we do and how we do it."

(left) Darren Fahey, NSW DPI, harvests capsicum from the garden organics compost trial.

Cut to the chase for soil solutions

Compost made from garden cuttings may provide an eco-friendly alternative for growers wanting to combat soil problems that result from conventional practices, reports Graham Gosper.



Dr Yin Chan, Principal Research Scientist NSW DPI.

The benefits of using compost made from cuttings from Sydney gardens in vegetable cropping are being tested in a three-year research project involving vegetable farms in the Sydney Basin. The project is a collaboration between the NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) and the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change.

Project leader, NSW DPI Principal Research Scientist Dr Yin Chan, said soil samples were collected from 34 vegetable farms in the Sydney Basin and compared with nearby unfarmed soil. Tests revealed that a combination of excessive cultivation and heavy application of fertilisers had overloaded the farm soils with phosphorus. This reduced soil health and structural stability and increased the potential for run-off and nutrient transport.

"Phosphorus levels in the farm soil were found to be well above that required for vegetable nutrition while organic carbon levels were low," Yin said. "This reflects the heavy reliance by growers on poultry manure as a fertiliser. While it is a cheap source of nitrogen, poultry manure is also high in phosphorus, which builds up in the soil."

Organic benefit

Hopes of a solution to such problems have been raised by the results of almost

two years of crop trials stemming from the soil study. The trials involved controlled growth of vegetables using compost made from garden cuttings for comparison with other crops grown conventionally.

"Broccoli, eggplant, cabbage and capsicum grown in the compost produced equivalent yields to crops cultivated by conventional means, but with less phosphorous build-up. Capsicum grown in compost achieved yields 26 per cent higher than conventional crops," Yin said.

"Capsicum grown in compost achieved yields 26 per cent higher than conventional crops."

He added that the trials were proof that high soil phosphorous levels are not necessary for high crop-yields. "They also demonstrated that the compost benefits the soil, increasing its organic content, biological health, stability and structure."

Work will soon begin on the final stage of the project, which will involve a cost-benefit analysis to determine whether use of garden organic compost is an economically viable option for vegetable growers and other agricultural sectors. Further studies are needed to determine how compost supplies can best be tailored to meet the needs

of growers and how quality of supplies can be guaranteed.

Yin said the project has implications for all growing regions where conventional soil management practices had resulted in farm soil problems. He hopes the findings will encourage growers to review management strategies they have been using for years and consider trialling alternatives.

Findings from the studies are being communicated among growers through field days and the DPI extension program. Yin and his research team are advocating development of strategies for improved soil nutrient management and use of minimal tillage practices as part of this program.

The bottom line:

- Using chook manure as a fertiliser for crops will increase phosphorous levels in soils.
- Replacing chook manure with compost made from garden cuttings can stop phosphorous build up and increase crop yield.
- A cost-benefit analysis of this project will be conducted to confirm whether this is a viable option for growers.

For more information contact Dr Yin Chan, Principal Research Scientist NSW DPI
Email: <yin.chan@dpi.nsw.gov.au>
Phone: 02 4588 2108

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Number crunching will benefit industry

A lack of industry data is hurting growers' bottom line and restricting the development of the industry, writes Ian James, Chief Economist AUSVEG.

Vegetable farms are no longer farms—they are businesses. As such, vegetable growers should expect that their farms can deliver the profits necessary for them and their families to enjoy a level of material welfare at least equivalent to the rest of the Australian population.

To survive in a globalised economy, where information exchange is increasingly easy, the maintenance of good farm records is essential. The same can be said for the vegetable industry at large. Filling in forms is usually seen as a pain in the neck, another bureaucratic imposition to face after a 12-hour day on the farm; however, without industry-wide data, vegetable growers are badly handicapped.

The industry's Taking Stock Report identified that a lack of quality and timely economic data and analysis was a serious obstacle against informed decisions being made by industry bodies, government and businesses.

Similarly, VegVision 2020 saw a critical strategic imperative to be the provision of "advanced industry data and information systems to meet future needs". Vegetable growing businesses need information to make informed decisions. This particularly applies to costly long-term investment decisions that are required for vegetable enterprises to thrive in the face of global competition.

There are wider ramifications of the lack of industry data. Data is needed to understand industry developments, such as the importance of losing potato processing contracts to New Zealand or the increase of frozen vegetable imports from China. Governments act only when confronted with statistical facts, yet there is little data and no

research about the economic impact of the vegetable industry in regional Australia and the national economy.

With proper data collection it can be proven that growers are excellent business operators and that many of the industry's problems lie beyond the farm gate.

The vegetable industry helps maintain the social fabric of rural communities and towns where vegetable growing activities are an important component. What implications does market loss have on vegetable grower families and their local communities? Nobody knows.

Projects under way

Data collection is not costless. Some growers believe that industry data must be available somewhere. It simply isn't. Nor are government agencies willing to fund its collection without some contribution from industry. The use of grower-levy money to support data research and develop the subsequent analysis is essential. AUSVEG, through a project funded by the National Vegetable Levy Research and Development program, has sought to correct these problems by improving industry data collection.

In doing so AUSVEG is conscious of the competing demands for industry funds and a strategic approach has been adopted to gain maximum benefit from the funds spent. The aim of this data collection is not to answer every request for data but to provide the essential information vegetable growers need to run profitable enterprises in a rapidly globalising economy.

There are four key data areas that AUSVEG has identified which would support grower businesses. These are:

- Detailed production and establishment data through an improved Agriculture Census and Agriculture Surveys that AUSVEG has devised in cooperation with the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- Annual monitoring of the financial performance of vegetable farms undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics.
- Detailed trade data collection attained from the Australian Customs Service.
- An economic impact study of major economic shock on areas of regional Australia where the vegetable industry is concentrated.

Worth the investment

Data collection can justify its cost only if it delivers outcomes that benefit the vegetable industry. All this data collected will require in-depth analysis as it becomes available.

What can growers expect for their money? Examples from the first preliminary data from these initiatives are shown in the tables. Table 1 helps prove to policy makers that, despite a number of growers leaving the industry, the size and impact of the vegetable industry have been seriously underestimated. Table 2 debunks the myth that the vegetable industry is a poor cousin of other agricultural industries and shows that vegetable growers are the most efficient producers in agriculture. The graph alerts the industry to the need for a coordinated industry response to the threat of imports from China and how it is the lack of competitiveness of the vegetable processing industry that is the real threat.

With proper data collection it can be proven that growers are excellent business operators and that many of the industry's problems lie beyond the farm gate. It is AUSVEG's role to guide the industry in overcoming these difficulties and provide a strategic direction forward. This data provides the bedrock for this action.

Data is needed to understand industry developments, such as the importance of losing potato processing contracts to New Zealand or the increase of frozen vegetable imports from China.

A more comprehensive Agricultural Survey is recommended as another area the vegetable industry should invest funds in. AUSVEG believes that such data is a key plank of the improved information that the vegetable industry requires.

The bottom line:

- The vegetable industry suffers from a critical lack of data collection, which hampers its development and the profitability of growers' businesses.
- The government needs statistics to appreciate the current state of the vegetable industry and understand how the industry can be protected and strengthened.
- Data collection can be expensive.

Table 1: **Number of Australian vegetable growers**

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Farms where earnings from vegetables produced for consumption provide substantial income	5,484	5,048	4,915	6,732
Farms where earnings from vegetables produced for seed provide substantial income	644	556	592	819
Farms where earnings from vegetables produced for consumption provide the major source of income	4,391	4,297	4,090	5,700 (est.)

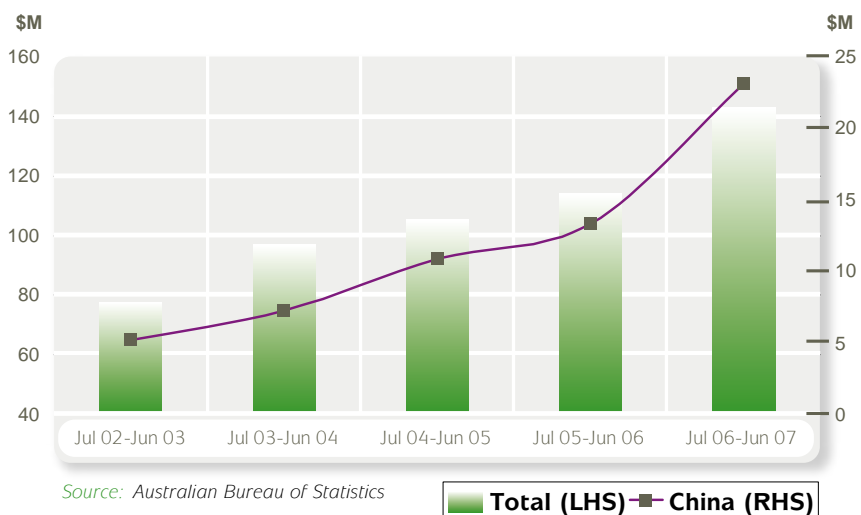
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

Table 2: **Rate of return on equity—2005/06**

Farm enterprise	Rate of return excluding capital appreciation (%)	Rate of return including capital appreciation (%)
Vegetables	4.3	13.2
Wheat and other crops	3.2	5.5
Dairy	2.3	7.0
Mixed livestock/crops	1.0	5.4
Beef	1.0	10.8
Beef/sheep	0.5	7.6
Sheep	0.4	4.8

Source: Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics

Frozen vegetable imports



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

■ Total (LHS) ■ China (RHS)

Share market volatility—a cause for concern?

Tighter credit checks and more stringent risk analysis are the expected outcomes from the recent activity on the global economy, says Ian James, Chief Economist AUSVEG.

A number of growers have expressed interest in a simple explanation of the recent fluctuations in the Australian share market, so here it is. The share market has little real economic impact, although it does reflect how investors perceive the Australian economy. Until August, a booming economy, strong profit performance and a resources boom fueled by strong world growth dominated investor sentiment. This sentiment remains but there is some concern about the consequences of lax lending practices by financial institutions, particularly those in the United States.

Australian financial institutions will tighten their credit criteria and raise interest rates to cover the increase in risk premiums. The volatility in the share market will remain until the extent of poor lending practices has been identified.

Much of the problem extends from trade imbalances. Many Asian nations, most notably China, have been exporting much more than they import, which has led to the accumulation of large quantities of foreign currency reserves. Rather than keep this money, they have mostly invested it into the United States. This has increased the

availability of money for loans, and fuelled lending for equity buyouts and customers with poor credit records.

Easy come, easy go

The influx of money has led to fierce competition with fringe financial institutions forcing a cut in margins in the financial sector. Running a financial institution is quite simple: pay interest on the money you take in and charge higher interest on the money you lend out. The skill is correctly assessing the risk of those who borrow defaulting on their loans. If one borrower defaults and the security the bank holds, such as a house, does not cover the original loan, this one default can wipe out the profits made from 100 successful loans.

This is happening in the United States. As a result, there is now a demand for a premium on-risk. Similarly, credit criteria are being tightened.

In the past it has been fairly easy to work out which financial institutions were at risk—namely those making poor lending decisions. However, the development of new financial products has enabled the original lender to offload some of the risk to other financial institutions, which is where the problems start. Nobody knows how far the problems experienced in the US sub-prime credit market have spread through the world financial system.

Relevance to Australia

The Australian financial sector is not overly exposed to the potential fallout, although some individual households may be at risk. Nevertheless, financial institutions here will tighten their credit criteria and raise interest rates to cover the new worldwide increase in risk premiums. The volatility in the share market will remain until the extent of poor lending practices has been identified.

Inevitably there will be some casualties but hopefully central banks such as the Reserve Bank of Australia have the skills to manage an orderly transition to tighter credit conditions without too much damage to the economy.

So, at this stage there is no great cause for alarm, but be aware that the economic landscape is changing. Enjoy the sunshine but take an umbrella in case it rains. ☀️

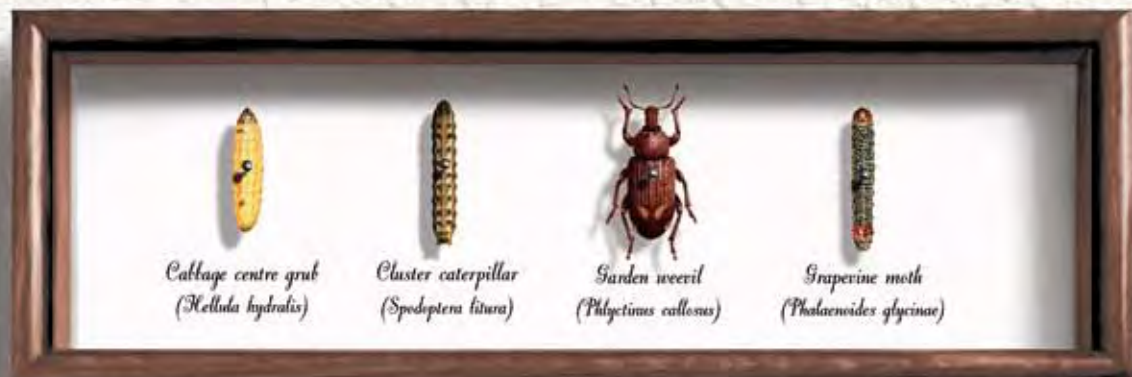
The bottom line:

- In the US, there has been an increase of borrowers defaulting on their loans, which has put pressure on larger financial institutions.
- It will take some months before the full extent of this plays out in the global market.
- Australia is not overly exposed to the economic fallout, but growers are advised to proceed with caution in regards to financial matters.

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Vegetables are front-page news, but when it comes to issues affecting the industry, what message are your consumers getting? Here are five headlines from the past two months.

“Green light for GM farming”

The Sunday Age
Sunday 12 August, page 1.

Australian growers should be allowed to plant genetically modified crops so they can compete with the rest of the world, according to a confidential Federal Government report.

The report claimed that GM crops pose no danger to human health or the environment and should be given the green light. The path to growing GM foods is supported by Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Peter McGauran.

The commercial planting of GM crops is banned in all states except Queensland, although the bans in NSW and Victoria and due to expire next year. Growers and CSIRO support the lifting of these bans.

“World War II food scare”

Geelong Advertiser
Wednesday 25 July, page 1.

Vegetable prices have skyrocketed due to unusual weather conditions and Geelong residents are facing a vegetable shortage not seen since World War II. Greengrocers and supermarkets have increased prices as floods, drought and frost have resulted in produce losses.

Potatoes, broccoli, cauliflower and zucchini prices have doubled, and more shortages are expected across the traditional winter harvests range.

“We haven’t seen the worst of it yet,” AUSVEG’s Michael Badcock warned. “This shortage could go on for quite a long time.”

“‘Home grown’ drive on food”

Sunday Brisbane Mail
Sunday 12 August, page 37.

Australian growers are fighting back against cheap food imports they fear will swamp the market. Growers, who have been hit by drought and a flood of imports, are calling on consumers to get behind a new push to buy local.

The Australian Grown campaign will expand the Australian-Made kangaroo logo to food items. Although voluntary, the scheme will give consumers a clearer guide than existing country-of-origin labelling laws.

Australian Grown Chief Executive Ian Harrison said that for local produce to be supported, the pressure has to come from consumers.

“Savings in hi-tech irrigation for growers”

West Australian
Friday 10 August, page 11.

South-west WA vegetable growers are expected to save up to eight billion litres of water per year thanks to a new weather-monitoring system that is aimed at improving irrigation accuracy.

The web-based modelling program and daily text messaging weather service allows growers to calculate precisely the amount of water they should be using daily. Water Resources Minister John Kobelke said that the system could cut water use for some growers by up to 25 per cent.

Vegetables WA president David Anderson said he received a text message every morning with the evaporation rate and temperature for his area, which he used to determine irrigation levels for that day.

“Cabbages priced for a king”

Herald Sun
Thursday 26 July, page 7.

Dwindling vegetable supplies due to drought, floods and frosts are pushing the cost of fresh produce out of reach of average income earners, especially those struggling with increased petrol and rental costs.

Many winter staples have almost tripled in wholesale price, while some leafy greens are simply not available.

“The main ones affected at the current time are the leafy vegetables that require a bit more water and don’t store—cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage, lettuce, Asian vegetables,” said Michael Badcock, chairman of peak grower body AUSVEG.

“As a community, we need to find a way of keeping those fruit and vegetables on plates,” said Cath Smith, CEO of the Victorian Council of Social Service.

Strong attendance for environmental conference

Healthy debate and fantastic concepts were on the agenda at the 5th Keep It Real Conference, writes Helena Whitman, Environmental Manager AUSVEG.


The Keep It Real Conference was held over four days in Hobart and combined the 5th EMS (Environmental Management Systems) in Agriculture and the 5th National On Farm Food Safety and Quality Assurance Conferences. It was well attended with a good representation from all sectors of the industry—growers, government agencies, retailers and consultants.

The key messages from the Keep It Real Conference were:

- Inaction by producers can be very costly once the regulators get involved.
- Changing practices to implement EMS can cost you money; however, it will save you more through better farming practices.
- There are too many systems in the market, which leads to confusion and reluctance by producers to get involved.
- Although there are no current drivers for the uptake of EMS, all industries should be prepared.

- Consumer pressure in Europe is driving the change, especially with respect to tolerance of continued chemical use and residues.
- The concept of food miles is appealing, but will consumers pay the additional cost?

AUSVEG was represented by Jeff McSpedden, Eddie Galea and Jason Huggins, all members of the National Environmental Committee; and Helena Whitman, Environmental Manager, as well as several of the Industry Development Officers—Alison Anderson, Craig Feutrill and Stephen Welsh.

There was considerable interest shown by other industry groups in the EnviroVeg program. We have a program that is ahead of many other industries in assisting growers to identify and implement good environmental practices on-farm. We need to capitalise on this and continue to work with all sectors to ensure that the industry leads the regulation. 

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Bundaberg Fruit & Vegetable Growers and AUSVEG sign MOU

Collaboration between organisations increases benefits for growers.

BFVG Chair David DePaoli (seated left) and AUSVEG Chair Mike Badcock (seated right) signed the MOU. CEO AUSVEG John Roach (standing left) and Executive Officer BFVG Matt Dagan witnessed the occasion.



A large number of growers from across Northern Queensland attended a ceremony for the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between AUSVEG and Bundaberg Fruit & Vegetable Growers (BFVG) on 16 August 2007.

The ceremony was conducted by Mike Badcock, AUSVEG Chair, and David DePaoli, BFVG Chair, and was witnessed officially by John Roach, CEO AUSVEG, and Matt Dagan, Executive Officer BFVG.

"It is a great advantage to all growers to work cooperatively together and this MOU is a formal acknowledgement of this goodwill," Mike said.

"It is a great advantage to all growers to work cooperatively together and the MOU between AUSVEG and BFVG is a formal acknowledgement of this goodwill."

The MOU is an agreement between the two organisations that will improve their mutual understanding and relationship. It also creates formal lines of communication for better gathering and dissemination of information to growers.

"This is a major step forward for the industry in improving collaboration, which is one of the primary objectives of Vegvision 2020—the vegetable industry strategic plan," Mike said.

Earlier that day growers discussed a range of issues affecting their businesses including the need for better representation, communication and alignment of National Vegetable Levy outcomes to industry needs.

"AUSVEG looks forward to forming similar working relationships with like-minded organisations for the betterment of the industry," said Mike.

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The agriculture industry is the major consumer of water in the Australian economy, according to new data released by the ABS.

Agriculture accounted for 65% of all water consumed in Australia in 2004/05, according to data released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Preliminary data has also been released for water use the following financial year. In 2005/06, Australian agricultural establishments used 11,905 gigalitres of water for agricultural production. Of this, 10,845 gigalitres (91.1%) was

used for the irrigation of pastures and crops, and 1,060 gigalitres (8.9%) was used for other agricultural purposes, such as stock watering and the cleaning of dairies and piggeries.

In all states and territories, irrigation was the major use of water by the agricultural sector. In New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, irrigation accounted for 94.0%,

91.9% and 89.7% of agricultural water use respectively.

In a breakdown of water use according to crops, vegetables for human consumption used 450,567 megalitres of water with an application rate of 3.2 megalitres per hectare. Vegetables for seed used 14,812 ML of water with an application rate of 3.0 ML/ha. *Continues on next page*

Pastures and crops irrigated, Australia 2005/06

	Agricultural establishments (No.)	Agricultural establishments irrigating (No.)	Area of agricultural holding (⁰⁰⁰ ha)	Area irrigated (⁰⁰⁰ ha)	Volume applied (ML)	Application rate (ML/ha)
Pasture for grazing	117,989	14,248	389,225	811	2,871,388	3.5
Pasture for seed production	NA	728	NA	44	154,137	3.5
Pasture for hay and silage	NA	6,399	NA	211,777	330	3.7
Cereal crops cut for hay	NA	1,334	NA	62,149	953	2.4
Cereal crops for grain or seed ^(a)	38,629	2,113	19,648	291,697	468	2.4
Cereal crops not for grain or seed	11,865	1,078	946	28	60,518	2.2
Rice	1,035	1,035	100	100	1,230,379	12.3
Sugarcane	4,712	2,256	503	222	1,103,802	5.0
Cotton	846	725	336	277	1,746,386	6.3
Other broadacre crops ^(b)	16,650	901	3,022	56	162,707	2.9
Fruit trees, nut trees, plantation or berry fruits ^(c)	12,247	7,733	197	140	675,265	4.8
Vegetables for human consumption	6,732	6,072	135	121	450,567	3.7
Vegetables for seed	819	469	7	5	14,812	3.0
Nurseries, cutflowers or cultivated turf	3,990	3,673	19	17	91,645	5.4
Grapevines	9,358	8,337	199	180	625,655	3.5

(a) Excludes rice

(b) Excludes sugar cane and cotton

(c) Excludes grapevines

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

Statistics shed light on water use (continued)



Agricultural water use by state 2005/06

	Agricultural establishments (No.)	Water use		
		Irrigation (ML)	Other agricultural uses (ML)	Total (ML)
NSW ^(a)	48,550	4,472,617	284,166	4,756,784
Vic	36,993	2,470,542	217,874	2,688,415
Qld	32,871	2,435,215	279,654	2,714,868
SA	16,457	927,264	93,342	1,020,606
WA	14,816	317,703	144,860	462,563
Tas	4,716	201,822	26,643	228,465
NT	648	19,546	13,621	33,167
Aust	155,052	10,844,708	1,060,161	11,904,869

(a) Includes ACT

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

The crop that used the most water was pasture for grazing, using 2,871 gigalitres with an average application rate of 3.5 ML/ha. This was followed by cotton (1,746 gigalitres at an application rate of 6.3 ML/ha) and rice (1,230 gigalitres at an application rate of 12.3 ML/ha). Pasture for grazing accounted for 26.5% of all irrigation water use nationally, followed by cotton (16.1%) and rice (11.3%).

Irrigation levels

At the Australian level, 45,130 (29.1%) of agricultural establishments reported using water for irrigation purposes.

At the state/territory level, the Northern Territory reported the highest proportion of farms irrigating (54.3%), followed by Tasmania (40.6%) and South Australia (38.4%). Western Australia reported the smallest percentage of farms irrigating (21.9%).

New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland continued to be the major users of water for irrigation, accounting for 86.5% of all water used for irrigation purposes nationally. New South Wales used 4,473 gigalitres (41.2% of all water used

for irrigation purposes nationally) followed by Victoria with 2,471 gigalitres (22.8%) and Queensland with 2,435 gigalitres (22.5%). Across Australia, 2,583,000 hectares of agricultural land was irrigated at an average application rate of 4.2 ML/ha. This application rate was unchanged from the previous year.

Vegetables for human consumption used 450,567 ML of water with an application rate of 3.2 ML/ha. The major crop by volume was pasture for grazing, using 2,871 gigalitres with an average application rate of 3.5 ML/ha.

Water sources

Across most of Australia, surface water remained the major source of water for agricultural purposes, totalling 9,074 gigalitres or 76.2% of all water used for agricultural purposes.

In South Australia and the Northern Territory, groundwater remained a more

significant source of water, accounting for 47.3% of water used for agricultural purposes in South Australia and 69.5% in the Northern Territory. Across Australia, groundwater totalled 2,524 gigalitres (21.2%) of all water used for agricultural purposes.

Recycled or re-used water from off-farm sources accounted for less than 1% of water used by agriculture.

The bottom line:

- In 2005/06, Australian agricultural establishments used 11,905 gigalitres of water for agricultural production.
- Of this, 10,845 gigalitres (91.1%) was used for the irrigation of pastures and crops.
- Vegetables for human consumption used 450,567 ML of water with an application rate of 3.2 ML/ha. Vegetables for seed used 14,812 ML of water with an application rate of 3.0 ML/ha.

Retail industry supports Wesfarmers takeover of Coles Group



Wesfarmers' takeover of Coles Group is a positive development for Australian retailing according to two thirds of the respondents in a survey conducted by Inside Retailing Online.

While stock market fluctuation in early-August saw Wesfarmers' share-price fall, a successful takeover of Coles Group was still supported by the majority of Australian retail personnel who responded to the online survey.

In the survey, 67 per cent of respondents agreed that the takeover of Coles Group businesses was a positive development for the retail industry while 17 per cent thought it was a negative step. Seventeen per cent of respondents were undecided whether the Wesfarmers bid was good or bad for the retail industry.

Regardless of whether the bid is successful, Jeff McSpedden, AUSVEG board member, said it is unlikely growers will be affected.

"It'll just be status quo for growers. If the takeover is successful, I expect Coles Group will be run as it currently has been. Wesfarmers may rationalise some aspects of the group, but fruit and veggies are a real earner for Coles, so I doubt they'd make any changes," he said.

Respondents were evenly divided on whether the takeover should be re-shaped by requiring Wesfarmers to divest any of the individual Coles businesses, a question being examined by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission.

Timeframe for improvements

Asked how long it was likely to take Wesfarmers to achieve a significant and

sustainable improvement in the trading performance of the Coles Group businesses, 43 per cent of the industry respondents forecast a three-year turnaround period. Twenty-five per cent thought Wesfarmers could achieve improvements in two years, seven per cent said within a year, 14 per cent expected the turnaround would take five years and 11 per cent predicted a sustainable recovery would take more than five years.

At the time of writing, Wesfarmers had altered its proposal to Coles Group shareholders, allowing "mix and match" options, including a base offer, maximum scrip (for future dividends) or maximum cash. These changes were in addition to proposal arrangement Wesfarmers announced on 2 July.

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Mediate for a successful outcome

Dispute resolution through mediation is an important element of the Horticulture Code of Conduct.

The code introduces mediation as a quick, confidential and cost-effective alternative to legal action.

Mediation services under the code are managed by the Office of the Horticulture Mediation Adviser. Mediation is a process where an independent party, the mediator, helps the disputing parties reach an agreement.

Most Horticulture Code of Conduct mediations result in a successful agreement. "If both parties approach the mediation with goodwill it is a very effective method of resolving disputes."

The role of the Office of the Horticulture Mediation Adviser is to help resolve disputes in the first instance and, if requested, appoint a mediator.

David Newton from the Office of the Horticulture Mediation Adviser said his team can assist growers and traders to continue their trading relationships and, where possible, resolve issues quickly before mediation is necessary.

"In a typical case we might receive a call from a grower or trader. We then try to establish the facts and consult with both parties," David said.

"If we are unable to achieve a resolution, we can refer the issue to one of the specialist mediators from the panel if requested by the complainant. Each mediator works differently, but typically a mediator would first speak to each party individually. They would then call a meeting where both parties puts their case forward and, importantly, listens to the other party. From there, the mediator will help the parties reach a mutually agreed resolution."

David said that most mediations result in a successful agreement. "If both parties approach the mediation with goodwill it is a very effective method of resolving disputes."



For further information on the Horticulture Code of Conduct, visit www.daff.gov.au/hortcode or www.hortcodema.com.au. The Office of the Horticulture Mediation Adviser can be contacted by telephone on 1800 206 385 or email at info@hortcodema.com.au

David Newton and Blanca Keys from the Office of the Horticulture Mediation Adviser.



Assessment is crucial

An innovation in the Horticulture Code of Conduct is the provision of horticulture assessors to help resolve disputes. Assessors can provide an independent report on any trade matter related to the code.

For example, when assessing a dispute, assessors will review whether the produce was rejected in accordance with the code and the relevant agreement or if the price paid was calculated in accordance with the code and agreement.

The code requires that all parties to an agreement comply with reasonable requests from an assessor in the course of an investigation. If a request relates to inspecting produce, a reasonable request may be immediate inspection. If the request is to inspect an agent's records, a reasonable time is between two and seven days.

In an agent transaction, an assessor can inspect a trader's financial and other records, including the purchaser's name and address details. However, an assessor cannot pass information to growers that the grower is not entitled to obtain under the agreement or code.

Assessors are independent and not required to report to the Federal Government.

Information on how to contact assessors is available on the Office of the Mediation Adviser's website, www.hortcodema.com.au.

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Amended regulations for chemical use in Victoria



Russell McMurray, DPI Acting Manager Chemical Standards Branch, said that the revised regulations for chemical use in Victoria seek to minimise risks and maximise benefits associated with the use of agricultural chemicals.

The Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Regulations 2007 came into force on 24 July 2007. The revised regulations provide a framework for monitoring agricultural and veterinary chemical use in Victoria and support the administration of the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act 1992.

The Department of Primary Industries Acting Manager Chemical Standards Branch, Russell McMurray, said that the revised regulations seek to minimise risks and maximise benefits associated with the use of agricultural chemicals.

The most significant change affecting agriculture is in regards to record-keeping requirements. Records must now be made and kept for all agricultural chemical products used, excluding household or home garden products, within 48 hours of use.

Details to be recorded include, but are not limited to, the trade name of the product, the rate of application and the crop on which it is used. For products being sprayed outdoors, other than by means of a hand-held appliance, the wind speed and direction at the time the product was used must also be recorded.

Say before you spray

There are new notification requirements for landholders and spray contractors who intend to conduct agricultural chemical spraying within 200 metres of schools, hospitals, aged-care services or children's services, including kindergartens and day-care centres.

"The new requirements will help protect these sensitive areas by ensuring school principals and facility managers are better informed and have an opportunity to manage any potential risks that may arise," said Russell.

Records must now be made and kept for all agricultural chemical products used, excluding household or home garden products, within 48 hours of use.

The new requirements state that:

(1) Land occupiers who employ or contract people to spray an agricultural chemical product by means of an aircraft or mister must advise the sprayer in writing whether there is a school, children's service, hospital or premises from which an aged-care service is provided within 200 metres of the designated spraying area. Location details for these sites must be supplied, if applicable.

(2) The employee or contract workers who are spraying the product must supply the land occupier with the name of the product that is to be sprayed and the proposed time, date and duration of spraying. This information must be provided not less than 24 hours before spraying is carried out.

(3) Land occupiers must make every reasonable effort to inform the principal of a school, the site manager of a hospital or premises from which an aged-care service is provided, or the manager of a children's service, which is within 200 metres of the land to be sprayed, of the following information at least 12 hours before spraying is carried out: the name of the product to be sprayed, and the location, time, date and duration of the proposed spraying.

The bottom line:

- New regulations for chemical use have been introduced in Victoria.
- Record-keeping requirements have been revised, and records must be made within 48 hours of chemical use.
- Reasonable efforts must have been made to inform schools, hospitals, child-services and aged-care sites within 200 metres of the proposed spraying location that chemical sprayings will take place.



For more information visit the Department of Primary Industries website at www.dpi.vic.gov.au/chemicalstandards or phone 136 186

AUSVEG - CEO Message



The vegetable industry stood proud this month, exhibiting at the largest event for the restaurant professional and food service industry—restaurant 07.

This key event attracts more than 4,500 visitors and the vegetable produce display was fresh, diverse and a crowd stopper. This sector is the fastest growing market in food purchase in Australia and important to capture.

In other news, the industry has been working on a significant change that will greatly assist its realisation of VegVision 2020. Through consultant Selwyn Heilbron, AUSVEG and HAL have discussed with industry how to align industry development capacity to the strategic pillars outlined in the strategy. With correct strategic alignment, the industry will make a substantial difference to its growth and profitability.

Consultations about three options for progressing the industry development program were presented to growers around the country during the past month. Thank you to all growers who participated, your input has been immensely valuable.

Outcomes from these meetings will be presented to the Industry Advisory Committee (IAC) in mid-September when an option will be chosen. This option will be forwarded to HAL for final endorsement before being implemented. A full report will be available in the next issue of *Vegetables Australia*.

The Prime Minister's and Cabinet Chemicals of Security Concern process holds its next meeting mid-September with a view to drafting the final consultation paper that will be distributed across industry for comments in late-2007.

The AUSVEG Board will sign off its election platform shortly and this will be widely distributed to industry. The platform is likely to be similar to our federal budget wish-list in May. See breakout box.

Finally in sadder news, AUSVEG would like to farewell a wonderful person who helped our organisation immensely over the past year. Kathleen Clothier, who passed away in late August, worked closely with the board providing invaluable advice and assistance in areas of constitution and corporate governance.



John Roach
Chief Executive Officer
AUSVEG Ltd

In memory of

Kathleen Clothier
a woman of substance



Kathleen Clothier, who provided significant advice and guidance to the vegetable industry, sadly passed away in August 2007. She fought a long and courageous battle with breast cancer.

Our thoughts are with Joe, her husband, and their two children, Kitty and Jack.

—AUSVEG Board.

AUSVEG Budget Platform—May 2007

- **Maintenance of a fiscally responsible budget that doesn't fuel inflation and add pressure to already strained resources.**
- **Spending initiatives undertaken should concentrate on relieving bottlenecks and focus on long-term infrastructure projects.**
- **Proceed with water initiatives to secure the long-term viability of vegetable production and increase funding to improve dilapidated road and rail networks.**
- **Introduce policies to tackle the labour shortage in rural areas including increased funding for skills training.**
- **A review of agriculture education to encourage more young people to work in agriculture.**
- **Further support for R&D and measures to retain and provide long-term career structure for researchers in the industry.**
- **Funding to enable more stringent testing of imported vegetables to prevent the outbreak of exotic pest incursions in Australia.**
- **Further initiatives for rural health including the provision of para-medical services to help combat depression and social isolation.**



Around the States

New South Wales

Valley water allocations slashed by more than half

There has been a substantial cut back in groundwater allocations in another of the Murray-Darling Basin's river valleys. This time, irrigators in the lower Lachlan Valley in New South Wales have been told they will lose more than 50 per cent of their groundwater to make the system sustainable.

Growers in the area believe they should not lose the water because the New South Wales Government figures are not accurate.

Growers say that current water usage isn't having a disastrous affect on the aquifer. They maintain that only 120-thousand megalitres of this water is used within a year, though one of the previous drought years did see 140-thousand megalitres extracted from the aquifer. The rest of the allocation has never been used, being in sleeper and dozer licences.

Chairman of Lachlan Valley Water, Dennis Moxey says the decision is disappointing because the state government failed to take into account studies that show the sustainable extraction yield to be around 120-thousand megalitres a year.

Federal Government responds to MDB crisis

Minister for Human Services Chris Ellison visited Griffith recently to oversee the start of the Federal Government's assistance package, which will help Murray-Darling Basin farming communities through one of the worst droughts on record.

The \$13 million initiative, announced in the 2007-08 Federal Budget, includes a Griffith-based Centrelink service delivery coordination unit, a Murray-Darling Basin drought bus; a dedicated hotline; and 23 additional Rural Services Officers, psychologists and social workers assigned to the region. The Centrelink unit will coordinate these services, create links with other agencies and focus assistance efforts to those affected.

The drought is placing a great strain on water resources and irrigation. Affected producers, irrigators and farm-dependent small businesses should be aware there is assistance available. The Murray-Darling Basin drought bus will travel exclusively through the region during the next two

years. The Centrelink rural experts on-board will provide a range of drought assistance information, including income support, professional advice and planning grants, and other Centrelink family payments.

Producers and farm-based small businesses can talk with the bus staff, or contact the Murray-Darling Basin Assistance and Referral Line on 1800 050 015 for information on drought assistance and other useful contacts.

Luke Jewell
Senior Policy Analyst
NSW Farmers Association



Address: Level 10, Elizabeth St
Sydney NSW 2000

Tel: 02 8251 1885
Fax: 02 8251 1752

Queensland

The vegetable industry in Queensland, Northern Territory and Northern New South Wales has welcomed the new appointment of IDO Simon Powell, who has been busy investigating the issues facing the northern growing regions.

Like all grower industries, the vegetable industry has been heavily focused on the successful adoption of the Horticultural Code of Conduct. Growers recognise the advantages of transparent terms of trade, the clear definition of traders acting as agents or merchants, and payment from goods traded received on a regulated bases.

Growcom has strengthened its support to growers with the launch of its Farm Management System (FMS), which allows growers to assess pressures placed on operational procedures. The system enables growers to pinpoint areas where they can improve their business, allowing them to generate strategic plans to achieve goals. The initial FMS module focuses on water-use efficiencies, with future modules will include soil nutrition, pest management, and workplace health and safety. Early adopters of the system praise how it can be used to recognise areas for increasing efficiency and boosting production.

Queensland's unusual cold weather and increased winter rainfall has slowed

production in regions such as the Burdekin, Bowen, and Lockyer-Fassifern districts. The cold snap will result in reduced production in some lines of zucchini, tomatoes, broccoli, and beans.

Jan Davis
CEO
Growcom



Address: Floor 1, 385 St Pauls Terrace
Fortitude Valley QLD 4006

Phone: 07 3620 3844
Fax: 07 3620 3880

South Australia

The big issue for some South Australian growers is still water supply and security. Prospects for River Murray growers have not improved and like all growers in the Murray-Darling Basin they still await heavy rainfall in the catchment. Similarly, competition for land and water from other industries is making it difficult for growers contemplating expansion or relocating.

SA growers have not had to endure the extreme weather of some of our interstate colleagues but colder than usual conditions prevented some growers taking advantage of the stronger demand for many lines.

John Mundy
Chair Horticulture Committee
SAFF



Address: 3rd floor, 122 Frome St
Adelaide SA 5000

Phone: 08 8232 5555
Fax: 06 8232 1311

Tasmania

The next few months will hold some exciting changes for TFGA vegetable growers. A new Vegetables and Agriculture IDO will be appointed shortly to replace former Executive Officer Denis Leonard. This position will be a challenging role for the successful applicant, with Tasmania's new Vegetable Marketing Plan soon to be released, supported by comprehensive marketing

and promotions activities to boost sales of Tasmanian produce.

Our National Vegetable Levy funded IDO, Stephen Welsh, has accepted a new position with agricultural consultancy company Serve-Ag. This role will see him assisting Serve-Ag's analytical services area and delivering NRM programs to farmer groups.

Stephen worked with TFGA for almost five years. During this time he significantly raised the profile of industry-funded research and development programs and played a leading role in numerous industry groups and activities.

TFGA and the Tasmanian vegetable industry thank Stephen for his help and dedication to the IDO role, and we wish him all the best with his new position.

Kaye Preece
Executive Assistant
TFGA



Address: Cnr Cimitiere & Charles streets
Launceston TAS 7250

Phone: 03 6332 1800

Fax: 03 6331 4344

Victoria

When will governments respond responsibly and understand growers' frustration that vegetables will not grow without water? We have experienced a drought period with no positive actions by government agencies to provide storage facilities and allow growers to construct turkey-nest dams on their properties or pump excess storm water into storage when available under licence.

Water allocations have resulted in many growers planting only a small section of land to maintain some form of crop income. Governments must act quickly and utilise taxpayer's money to resolve the water storage issue.

Industry gatherings

The outcome of the 2007 National Vegetable Expo was excellent, with increased attendances and tremendous support from industry. Despite the restricted water conditions, the seed plots provided an outstanding display of vegetable varieties.

Rijk Zwaan received the award for the best seed plot and Boomaroo Nurseries received the award for the best static display. The response has encouraged the organising committee to commence preparation for the 2009 Expo to be held at the Gordon Institute of TAFE Production Horticultural Campus, Werribee.

President Luis Gazzola and I visited Christchurch, New Zealand, at the end of July to attend the HortNZ annual conference. Topics included seasonal labour, family grower succession planning, McDonald's changing image and meeting consumer needs for fresh produce. This was a great opportunity to catch up with vegetable growers and be part of the three-day conference.

VegFed honoured Russell Jordan who retired as President after a 10-year stint. Russell, accompanied by Ron Gall, has been involved in a number of successful trans-Tasman ventures.

In July, VGA said farewell to Patrick Ulloa, after nine years in the role of Victorian IDO. Patrick was an integral part of the research and development of the vegetable industry in Victoria during that period. VGA wish Patrick every success in his new position with the Coles Fresh Produce Group.

The VGA 2007 Annual General Meeting will be held Friday 5 October 2007 in the Bridge Room, Crowne Plaza Hotel, Spencer Street, Melbourne, commencing at 4.00pm. A buffet dinner will be available at the close of the business session.

Notice of meeting and nominations for office bearers and executive committee will be circulated next month. All members and interested vegetable growers are encouraged to attend and make a contribution to their industry association.

Tony Imeson
Executive Officer
VGA



Address: Mail Box 111,
Melbourne Markets 542 Footscray Rd,
West Melbourne VIC 3003

Phone: 03 9687 4707

Fax: 03 9687 4723

Western Australia

The Efficient Irrigation Expert System was launched on Wednesday 9 August by John Kobelke, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Community Safety, Water Resources, Sports and Recreation.

The system has three main components. First is the revamped Vegetables WA website, with a sub-site devoted to best practice for water irrigation and efficiency. Growers can access more information about irrigation structure and management, and advice about improved scheduling of irrigation. The Vegetables WA website is supported by live information from across the state, gathered by the Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia.

The second component is a daily SMS service, in which information about evaporation, rainfall and weather forecast will be sent to each farmer, specific to their location, at their time of choosing. There will be a small fee for this service. If growers are interested in joining the SMS list, they can do so by contacting the Vegetables WA office.

Finally there is the complete web-based irrigation system. Growers need enter their details only once to receive daily information about irrigation, climate and local information. This website is currently under development and is expected to be finished by Christmas.

For more information visit www.vegetableswa.com.au and follow the irrigation link.

In separate news, the Annual General Meeting for the WA Vegetable Growers Association was held on Thursday 16 August. The major issues covered were irrigation and water use, and industry development. For further information about the AGM, contact the Vegetables WA office.

Jim Turley
Executive Officer
Vegetables WA



vegetablesWA

Address: Horticulture House
103 Outram St, West Perth WA 6005

Tel: 08 9481 0834

Fax: 08 9481 0024

Calendar of events

September 2007

19 September

National Vegetable Levy Advisory Group meetings

Sydney, NSW

For more information:

Phone AUSVEG on 03 9544 8098

20 September

National Vegetable Levy IAC meeting

Sydney, NSW

For more information:

Phone AUSVEG on 03 9544 8098

25-27 September

Soil Awareness Workshops

25 September

Stanthorpe, QLD

26 September

Darwin, NT

27 September

Katherine, NT

For more information:

Phone: Helena Whitman, Environmental Manager AUSVEG, on 0409 535 051

October 2007

5 October

VGA Annual General Meeting

The Bridge Room, Crowne Plaza Hotel,
Spencer Street

Melbourne, Vic

All vegetable growers invited. Please confirm attendance and registration with Tony Imeson at VGA Office before Monday 1 October 2007.

Meeting will commence at 4.00pm with buffet dinner from 6.30pm.

For more information:

Phone: 03 9687 4707

12-15 October

PMA Fresh Summit International Convention & Expo

Houston, USA

At Fresh Summit more than 17,000 participants throughout the global fresh produce and floral supply chains come together as a community to learn, network, build relationships, and do business.

You will gain new ideas to increase consumption through the Fresh Ideas Marketplace, reduce costs and grow revenues with product and service solutions from more than 800 Fresh Summit exhibitors, see the latest market trends by participating in a tour to local produce and floral operations, and network with leaders from throughout the supply chain to exchange information about the key issues you face.

For more information:

Website: www.pma.com/freshsummit

21-27 October

Safe Work Australia Week

National

Safe Work Australia Week is a national week to focus attention on workplace safety issues around Australia. It aims to encourage all working Australians to get involved in, and concentrate on, safety in their workplace to reduce death, injury and disease.

For more information:

Website: www.ascc.gov.au

November 2007

21 November

HAL Awards Dinner

Sydney, NSW

For more information:

Website: www.horticulture.com.au

22 November

HAL Annual General Meeting

Sydney, NSW

For more information:

Website: www.horticulture.com.au

December 2007

7-9 December

Australian Lifestyle Expo 2007

Guangzhou, Guangdong, China

China's mass grocery retail sales are forecast to grow by 70 per cent to 2011, coinciding with the phenomenon of hypermarkets (combined supermarkets and department stores) driving demand for a piece of the Australian lifestyle, including food and beverages, according to Austrade.

There will be a vast array of Australian products and services sought by the Chinese at the Expo, including food and beverages.

For more information:

Website:

www.austrade.gov.au/lifestyle07

Phone: Austrade on 12 28 78

May 2008

Restaurant Melbourne 08

26-27 May

Melbourne Exhibition Centre, Melbourne, Vic

Following from the success of restaurant 07 in Sydney, a separate event is being launched in Melbourne. A fantastic meeting point for industry, restaurant Melbourne 08 will attract restaurateurs, chefs, restaurant managers and students.

For more information:

Website:

www.restaurant06.com.au/default.asp

Phone: 02 9331 7507

31 May

West Australian Vegetable Growers Association 60th Birthday Anniversary Dinner

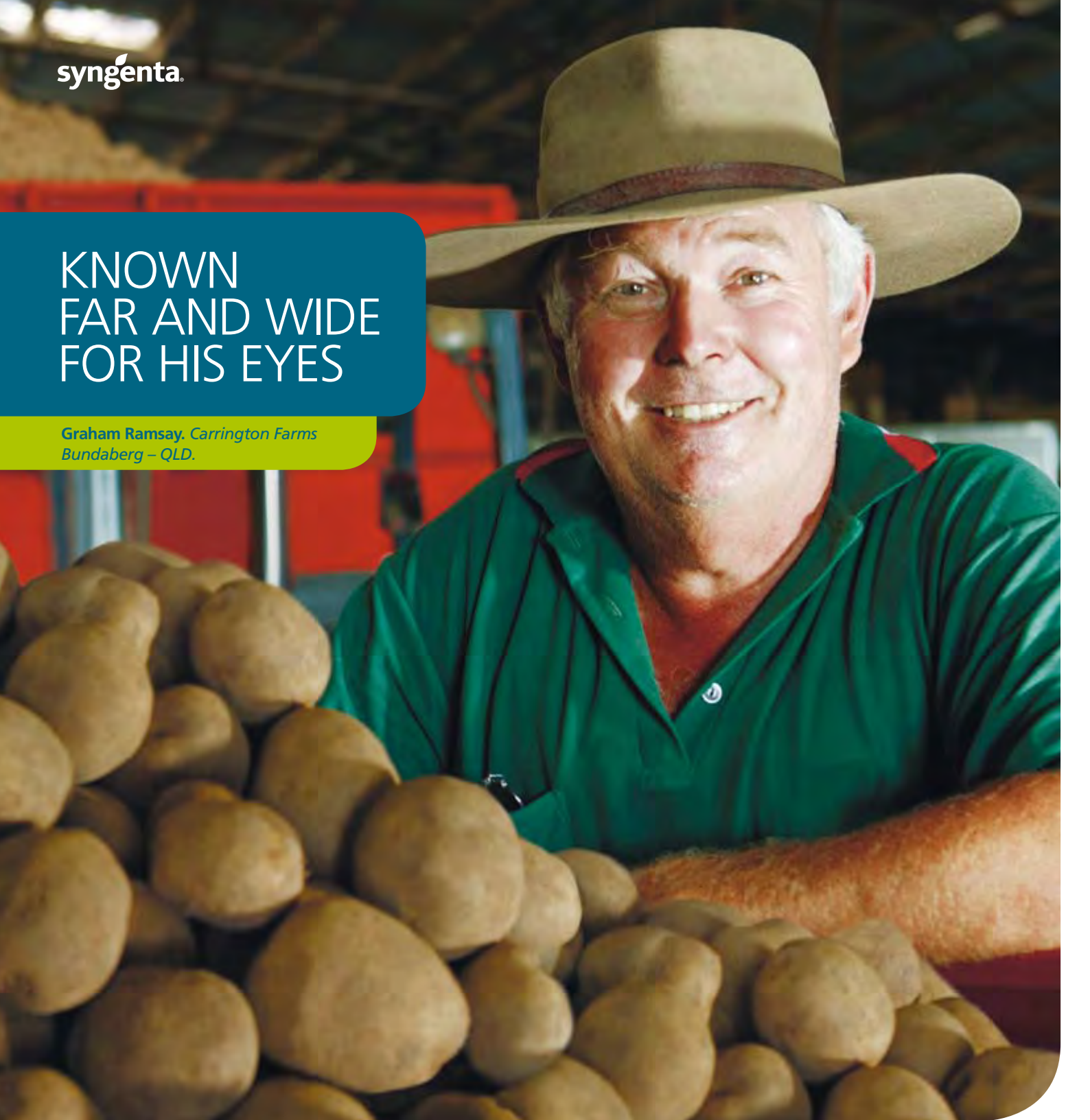
Perth, WA

For more information:

Phone: Jim Turley at Vegetables WA on 08 9481 0834

KNOWN FAR AND WIDE FOR HIS EYES

Graham Ramsay, Carrington Farms
Bundaberg – QLD.



With fifteen years of supplying to the biggest names in crisping potatoes, Graham knows his spuds have to make the grade, or as he says, “no smaller than 35mm, no greater than 85mm, and they don’t like deep eyes.”

That’s why Graham chooses AMISTAR® to control the effects of Target Spot or Early Blight. “We get a better product out of spraying the crop with it...”

Maintaining his reputation of reliable, quality yields comes down to good disease management. He applies AMISTAR three times in the growing

season, which keeps his bushes healthy. “To fill out quantity you need good bushes, this is where AMISTAR comes into its own...”

Apart from the odd game of golf, Graham loves nothing more than harvesting a truly saleable item. And this shows, as he has won the National and Northern Grower for Smiths Snack Food Company two years running.

For more information please visit www.syngenta.com.au or call the Syngenta Technical Product Advice line on 1800 067 108.

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